HEABITAT III NATIONAL REPORTING PROCESSES: LOCATING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
This research aims to provide an examination of some key national reporting processes leading up to the UN-Habitat III conference in 2016. It analyses both the content of 4 different reports on a framework based on the Right to the City, as well as the processes behind the production of national reports unfolding in 8 countries, measuring the extent to which civil society groups are involved. The analysis also includes a particular consideration of the cross-cutting issues of social diversity, territorial linkages as well as legal, policy and planning instruments necessary to operationalize the Right to the City principles. This research emerged from a Habitat International Coalition (HIC) working group created to further understand the Habitat III process and how civil society might engage in it. It has been carried out by the Development Planning Unit (DPU) in collaboration with Habitat International Coalition (HIC).

PROCESS
Countries under investigation: Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Indonesia, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru and South Africa

1. PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL REPORTING PROCESS
How civil society groups are involved in report production, whether there is a participatory space that respects diverse voices and marginalised groups, whether there is the possibility for civil society to have a meaningful impact on the national report and in decisions related to Habitat III.

FINDINGS: Ranged from completely closed, to government-led consultative meetings, to open formats, sometimes combined by an online platform. In civil society-led alternative report processes. However, most governments were consultative, compromising the opportunity for wider stakeholders to influence decision-making.

RECOMMENDATIONS
1. CLEARER MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK FOR HABITAT II AND HABITAT III
Generate guidelines and criteria for participatory production of the Habitat Agenda and monitoring strategy, through which relevant actors may be held accountable for past and future commitments.

2. A COMMITMENT TO A COHERENT VISION TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE AND URBAN SUSTAINABILITY
If Habitat III is to be a basis for transformative commitments, it is necessary to collaboratively build criteria for an explicit engagement with the vision of social justice and urban sustainability. Civil society initiatives focused on the Right to the City present an opportunity that could be built upon.

3. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT
Whether a record is made of meetings and events, whether relevant documents are made easily accessible, and whether the process is accountable to those involved and commitments are followed through.

FINDINGS: Most government-led processes were not very transparent and civil society groups had to pressure governments for information. Some reports and information were easily accessible online. The most transparent example was Brazil with two substantial forums held as an online platform to document the process.

4. CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT ON CURRENT PARTICIPATION PROCESSES
Whether decisions are in places that facilitate meaningful participation of civil society groups, and if there is a willingness to learn and continually improve on current participation practices.

FINDINGS: Many governments have effectively adopted participation jargon but, apart from the Brazil experience, they use this more as a way to legitimise the existing reporting process. Still, there are civil society-led initiatives that are expanding participatory processes, that intend to inform the Habitat III agenda and also spark national and international discussions on the Right to the City.

5. RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT AND TO EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
a. Reduction of risk (including environmental and physical risks/safety)
   b. Protection of the commons, including valuable natural areas and historic/cultural heritages
   c. Equitable management of environmental commons/resources

FINDINGS: Reports express the need for environmental protection and reflect an understanding of the threat of climate change as well as natural disasters. Through these reports, the main goal is to protect natural resources and other systems that support human development. There is a clear focus on urban development, especially in terms of environmental commons and resources, as well as an explicit aim to transform towards a sustainable model of urban development.

6. SPATIAL JUSTICE
a. Equitable distribution of environmental goods, e.g. good quality services and public spaces and equitable participation of socially marginalised groups
b. Right to inclusive public transport and urban mobility
c. Confronting socio-spatial segregation

FINDINGS: While there is general recognition of the need for equal access to services and some recognition of persisting socio-spatial segregation, there are not many concrete suggestions elaborated as to how to address these issues.

FINDINGS – CONTENT
The reports often display an understanding and content of recognition of certain Right to the City principles, however, concrete methods to address associated problems of uneven clear principles that might be suggested for a “new urban agenda” are not clearly laid out. Some points of the reports also seem to be contradictory, especially between stated needs for more equitable and participatory processes on one hand and the market-driven approach to urban development on the other. In some sense, the reports do not present a coherent vision of a more just and sustainable development and are not building substantively on Habitat II commitments.
Habitat International Coalition (HIC) is the global network for rights related to habitat. Through solidarity, networking and support for social movements and organizations, HIC struggles for social justice, gender equality and environmental sustainability, and works in the defence, promotion and realization of human rights related to housing and land in both rural and urban areas. For more information, see website: http://www.hic-net.org

This project was coordinated by Alexandre Apsan Frediani with Rafaella Simas Lima from the Development Planning Unit, in collaboration with the HIC Habitat III Working Group with the support of DPU staff members.

To access outputs from this project and other initiatives by HIC Habitat III Working Group, see website: https://habitat3hic.wordpress.com

To know more about DPU’s engagement with Habitat III, visit website http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/habitat-iii

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REPORT SUMMARY
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