

Towards a More Equal City

The *World Resources Report: Towards a More Equal City* is a new roadmap for cities that prioritizes equitable access to core urban services. We find that closing the “urban services divide” can improve billions of lives, reduce environmental damage and generate economic prosperity that outpaces the investment required. Cities increasingly hold the key to addressing human development and climate challenges. But cities today and in the future can only be successful if we focus on ending inequality and invigorating livelihoods.

The world’s urban population is expected to increase by 2.5 billion people by 2050, and more than two out of three people will live in cities. But already, one in three city dwellers — over 1.2 billion people — do not have reliable, safe or affordable access to basic everyday services like running water and sanitation, electricity, decent housing and transport to work and school. This “urban services divide” and the self-provision required to make up for it leads to a massive drain on time, productivity, health and opportunity, with destructive side effects. It holds back entire economies and imperils development and climate goals.

The *Towards a More Equal City* series offers solutions to help cities change course, particularly in the global south, where urban growth is most rapid. Based on six years of deep dives into the experiences of cities around the world and assessing what works in our current urban context, we highlight priority actions to create cascading and compounding benefits that transform cities. They provide the largest returns on investment and savings in economic costs, with citywide benefits. These transformations will avoid locking in poverty and poor health for the billions of under-served and their future generations while reducing environmental damage and improving life for all urban residents.

Cascading Benefits of Closing the Urban Services Divide

1 AVOIDED ECONOMIC COSTS

Unsafe sanitation imposes US\$223 billion/year in costs globally in health, lost productivity, wages

2 BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

Benefits from time savings, better health, productivity of US\$4–34 from each US\$1 invested in water and sanitation

3 CITYWIDE TRANSFORMATION

In **Kampala**, pro-poor innovations in sanitation involving new partnerships across government, communities, and small businesses shifted government practices with improvements in other sectors

7 Transformations for More Equitable and Sustainable Cities

Traditional, sector-specific approaches are not enough to change course. The synthesis report of the *Towards a More Equal City* series offers seven cross-sectoral transformations that focus on three key ideas: reimagine urban service provision, include the excluded and create the right enabling conditions for real change. Cities are diverse with varying local contexts. They may not be starting from scratch in implementing these changes. But wherever they begin, prioritizing these transformations will help bridge the urban services gap, sparking greater equity, prosperity and sustainability that benefits everyone.



INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN & DELIVERY

Prioritizing the Vulnerable

Municipal infrastructure must be designed and delivered to prioritize neglected populations, address backlogs, minimize carbon lock-in and anticipate future risks. Public infrastructure for housing, water, sanitation, transport and energy needs to meet the needs of the majority of urban populations in the struggling and emerging cities of the global south. Cities have a huge opportunity to build this infrastructure differently, to not only improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable but also respond to threats that are exacerbating inequalities, such as climate change.



SERVICE PROVISION MODELS

Partnering with Alternative Service Providers

Informal, semiformal or community-run alternative services are a fact of life in cities across the global south, and populations without affordable access to municipal water, sanitation, energy and transport rely on them. Supportive regulations and policies to partner with and integrate alternative service providers can make these services more affordable and reliable in the short and medium term, expanding access for more people.



DATA COLLECTION PRACTICES

Improving Local Data Through Community Engagement

Credible, open local data creates an opportunity to ensure sound policies and investments, better understand their impacts on vulnerable communities and improve governance processes. The lack of disaggregated local data in cities that could help diagnose problems is a huge handicap for decision-makers. Good data need not be expensive to collect and cities should transform data collection practices to gather more granular local data with community participation. This can improve both decision-making and accountability.



INFORMAL URBAN EMPLOYMENT

Recognizing and Supporting Informal Workers

Informal economic activities not only provide livelihoods for the working poor but also supply goods and services that keep the city's formal economy running. Transforming urban employment policies to recognize the hidden value of informal employment and support informal workers can increase their well-being and boost the economic resilience of cities.



FINANCING AND SUBSIDIES

Increasing Investment and Targeting Funds Innovatively

Cities, countries and investors need to substantially increase investment and target it innovatively to fill the gap in affordable urban services. National government support is essential, especially in the global south, where it can build an enabling ecosystem by using the power of the purse, regulations and control of financing institutions. Developing innovative financing instruments and engaging local communities can get money to where it is needed most.



URBAN LAND MANAGEMENT

Promoting Transparency and Integrated Spatial Planning

In rapidly growing cities, the scarcity of well-serviced land and weak planning have exacerbated spatial inequities. Through better regulations, innovative incentives, provision of secure tenure and integrated planning, many cities have made land markets more transparent and inclusive and have enabled equitable service provision.



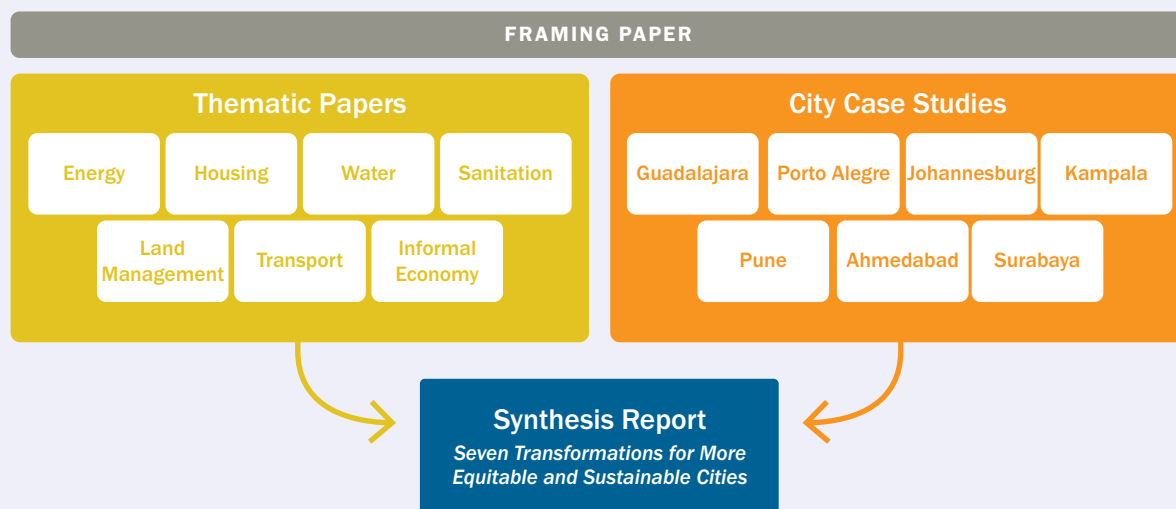
GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONS

Creating Diverse Coalitions and Alignment

Cities need to transform governance to work for, with and by the people. Diverse coalitions of public, private, grassroots and civil society organizations can galvanize political action around a shared vision. These coalitions can go further and achieve lasting change when policies across national, regional and local levels are well aligned and coordinated.

About the Series

The World Resources Report is the flagship publication of World Resources Institute. Each edition focuses on one aspect of the Institute's work and represents the state of global knowledge on a specific topic. *Towards a More Equal City* is a six-year research project launched at Habitat III in Quito in 2016. It is composed of a framing paper; seven thematic working papers diving deep into how cities can prioritize equitable access to core services while improving the environment and economy overall; seven city case studies exploring how transformative change happens; and a culminating synthesis report. All 16 knowledge products in the *Towards a More Equal City* series are publicly available.



Ready to Build a More Equal City?

WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities is World Resources Institute's program dedicated to shaping a future where cities work better for everyone. Our network of 370+ local and global experts in Brazil, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Turkey, the United States and more works with partners every day to make cities around the world better places to live.

Learn more at citiesforall.org or contact us:

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About World Resources Institute

WRI develops practical solutions that improve people's lives and protect nature. Our more than 1,200 staff have deep expertise in policy, research, data analysis, economics, political dynamics and more. We work with partners in more than 50 countries and currently have offices in 12 countries.

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