

Learning to Build Inclusive Cities with the joint-effort of community, city government and higher education

More than half the population of the world is now living in urban habitats. Asia is the fastest growing region in urbanization with inequalities, poverty, insecurity and exclusion amidst abundance and prosperity. In the past decade, nearly half a billion Asians have moved to urban habitations, and the trend continues. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have historically been recognised to serve public goods, with unique social responsibilities in producing knowledge for societal development. Cities and towns are centres of economic activity; they produce opportunities for livelihoods; they are educational and artistic hubs; they create cosmopolitan living spaces. Cities are also exclusionary; urban poverty is the fastest growing phenomenon, even in small and medium towns; youth with limited skills are finding themselves under-employed in competitive cities; access to basic services of water, sanitation and housing for all the city-dwellers is far from reality.

It is in this milieu that institutions of education (especially higher education) can support a process of making cities inclusive for all. Municipalities, local governments, mayors and councillors are in search of ideas and capacities for creating better cities. What and how can we realise this dream of inclusive cities? What contributions can educational institutions make? How can the enormous resources of HEIs be mobilised towards this vision of inclusive cities?

These questions frame the content that we want to focus on for the ***5th Global Dialogue on Community-University Engagement***, what has become known as the **'Big Tent' statements**.

Recognising:

- More than half of the world's population is now living in urban areas
- Asia-pacific is rapidly urbanizing region
- Cities and towns have become engines of economic development
- People living in cities and towns enjoy exceptional educational, cultural and livelihood opportunities
- Millions migrate to cities and towns in search of a better life
- Global Dialogues on Cities are Raising Important Issues

- The sixth World Urban Forum was held in Naples Italy in 2012
- Its theme 'Urban Future' focused on making cities welcome to all
- It pioneered the theme that 'all city-dwellers have a right to city'
- It recommended land rights and security of tenures for all city-dwellers
- It focused attention on sustainable urban development
- It recommended that public spaces in urban areas be treated as common public good

Realities of urban spaces are complex and multi-dimensional:

- The life in the city is exciting, and strenuous
- Well-being in small and medium towns is qualitatively different from metros
- For many city-dwellers, cities offer enormous educational, cultural and livelihood opportunities
- For the urban poor, cities can exclude them on account of lack of identity, livelihood, shelter and knowledge
- Migrants to cities feel harassed and insecure
- However, urban poor also contribute to making the cities liveable

Educational Focus of Cities is Weak:

- World Urban Forum discussions and recommendations do not touch upon education
- Most policy-makers and urban planners do not view cities as spaces for life-long learning for all
- Mayors and councillors pay attention to schools and colleges
- Many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are located in cities, but do not necessary 'belong' to them
- Learning to be Inclusive Cities is yet to be taken seriously

Therefore, we recommend that efforts should be made:

1. To promote greater engagement of HEIs in undertaking research on issues of exclusion in cities where they are located;
2. To facilitate student participation in ways that make cities more liveable for all city-dwellers by undertaking research, service learning and practical problem-solving;

3. To develop long-term partnerships with municipalities and other urban local bodies to put life-long learning on the agenda of their administration for all city-dwellers;
4. To promote educational programmes for young students and working professionals such that their expertise can be utilized in urban governance matters in all round and inclusive development of cities;
5. To encourage closer partnerships between HEIs and community-based organisations in the various neighbourhoods of cities such that specific urban development challenges—housing, livelihood, access to water and sanitation, safety and security, transportation and cultural institutions;
6. To prepare curriculum in various educational programmes of HEIs which is based specifically on the realities and requirements of local city-dwellers;
7. To foster a network of partnerships amongst HEIs, city governments and the private sector in order to enhance inclusivity in city life.