Towards housing justice

Building community-led pathways for equitable and sustainable urban development through housing policy, practice and mobilisation
In brief

Globally, 1.8 billion people lack access to adequate housing, with over 1 billion living in informal settlements. This worldwide crisis is interlinked with systemic challenges, acting to deepen inequalities, worsen the climate crisis, and limit progress towards achieving and localising the Sustainable Development Goals. Most housing policies and practices ignore the pervasive and persistent nature of housing discrimination, which systematically excludes particular groups from secure and suitable housing. Over 2023, IIED is developing a programme of work that seeks to advance a housing justice agenda that addresses the twin challenges of growing inequalities and climate change. This will encompass research, capacity development, policy advisory and advocacy, based on local and global partnerships.

Why now?

In the cities of the global South, housing deprivation is deepening urban poverty while also locking those cities into unsustainable and inequitable development pathways. Most responses to this crisis treat housing as a commodity rather than a human right: housing policies neither recognise local needs and aspirations, nor provide alternatives to carbon-intensive construction and urbanisation models.

Adequate housing is key in supporting people to flourish and enabling sustainable development, but that requires re-imagining what housing policy is, where it happens and who takes part in the decisions that shape it. It also requires mechanisms that protect residents against housing rights violations, discrimination and evictions; promote non-speculative and community-led housing and informal settlement upgrading; and enable a circular approach to the construction sector, among others.

IIED is part of a growing network of international and local actors pushing to reimagine housing futures by shaping a housing justice agenda.

Our approach

Adequate housing, as defined by the UN, includes seven inseparable components: security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; location; habitability; accessibility; and cultural adequacy. IIED has many years of experience partnering with housing rights movements and networks advocating for more community-centred housing responses. Designing new work around housing justice builds on and feeds into those struggles, allowing us to:

• Recognise historical legacies of discrimination; engage with politics of reparation that advance social and climate justice

• Approach housing as a means for a flourishing life; engage with housing as a driver of more sustainable and equal urban development models

• Re-imagine housing futures through knowledge co-production that recognises the voices of those who have been systematically excluded from housing policy.

In turn, this programme of work allows us to enhance grassroots capacities, influence governance systems and policies, and forge global networks and agendas.
Towards housing justice: our theory of change

This programme of work is organised into three key themes. Under each theme, we have identified the barriers that shape current challenges, recognised the key assumptions underpinning our work and named specific strategies to pursue with partners (see below).

Problem

In the cities of the global South, housing deprivation is deepening urban poverty while also locking those cities into unsustainable and inequitable development pathways.

CAPABILITIES AND MOBILISATION

Barrier: Grassroots groups face challenges in developing capacities to influence the housing landscape.

Assumption: Housing justice is advanced when grassroots groups are more able to influence decisionmaking.

 Strategies: Working with local partners to build grassroots capacity to contest housing injustice.

POLICY AND PRACTICE

Barrier: Policies and practices are driven by narrow, market-led rationale.

Assumption: By promoting governance structures that recognise multiple stakeholders, policies can advance housing justice.

 Strategies: Working with local partners to influence governance systems.

ALLIANCES AND ADVOCACY

Barrier: International housing sector deepens injustices in the global South.

Assumption: When working collectively, housing networks can shift global frameworks towards housing justice.

 Strategies: Co-producing and disseminating knowledge in ways that build global alliances and frameworks for housing justice.

Goal

Groups of people who have been systematically excluded from housing rights have a secure and adequate place to live.
Priorities for action

Our priorities are informed by the three themes in our theory of change:

First, we are implementing projects that focus on enhancing the **capabilities and mobilisation** of grassroots groups. Working with local partners, we help develop organised communities’ abilities to contest housing injustice, enhance their role in decision making and lead solutions in their local housing landscape.

Second, we are carrying out projects that seek to influence **policy and practice**, as well as the wider governance systems and enabling environments that support the realisation of housing rights. We do this by working with local partners to promote governance structures and methodologies that recognise multiple stakeholders, marginalised voices and the role of housing in reproducing and challenging inequalities and climate change.

Finally, we are forging **alliances and advocacy** strategies for housing justice, seeking to consolidate and strengthen the collective efforts of our wider networks to co-produce and disseminate knowledge. When working collectively, housing networks can shift global frameworks and narratives. We support local partners to share and exchange experiences, enabling collaborative learning and enhancing their capacity to influence local processes.

Together, these themes seek to influence a shift towards housing systems that allow those who have been systematically excluded to have a secure, sustainable and adequate place to live.
Ongoing projects

Our work on housing justice is sustained and nurtured by both longstanding and new partnerships, with networks and organisations such as Slum Dwellers International, Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, Habitat International Coalition, the Global Platform for the Right to the City, Habitat for Humanity International, World Habitat, urbaMonde, Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Architecture Sans Frontières UK, União dos Movimentos de Moradia (Brazil), Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre, Justice & Empowerment Initiatives (Nigeria), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and UN-Habitat, as well as a range of academic institutions.

We are currently working with our partners to:

• **Explore how civic media practices are advancing housing rights in São Paulo and Lagos**, through participatory action research. We aim to strengthen civic media practices, such as the use of social media and digital technologies, to denounce rights violations, build social movements’ capacity to mobilise, transform discourses and advance housing rights. This project works with organisations from São Paulo (União dos Movimentos de Moradia; Universidade Federal do ABC) and Lagos (Justice & Empowerment Initiatives; University of Ibadan).

• **Generate knowledge about different forms of housing planning, design and delivery across seven cities in Africa.** We are co-leading the Housing Domain initiatives of the African Cities Research Consortium, in partnership with researchers in Accra, Addis Ababa, Dar es Salaam, Freetown, Lagos, Lilongwe and Nairobi. Our research aims to contribute to current urban policy development as it affects future housing planning in these cities.

• **Generate evidence to assess how equitable access to adequate housing in informal settlements impacts human development.** We are working with Habitat for Humanity International to produce a report that will inform their next global advocacy campaign.

• **Collaborate with local and regional governments and networks on research and advocacy activities**, through the umbrella organisation UCLG. We were part of the Steering Committee for UCLG’s sixth Global Report on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD VI, October 2022), which explored pathways to urban equality. We continue to work with UCLG, particularly supporting their community of practice on housing.

• **Document and analyse the role of local and regional governments in progressing Sustainable Development Goal target 11.1**, focused on adequate housing, basic services and upgrading informal settlements. We are producing a report for the 2023 High-Level Political Forum, commissioned by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments and coordinated by The Bartlett Development Planning Unit of University College London.
Get involved

We are constantly seeking new spaces for action and collaboration on housing justice. Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like to get in touch.

Contact our team
Alexandre Apsan Frediani: alexandre.frediani@iied.org
Camila Cociña: camila.cocina@iied.org

Find out more
iied.org/collection/housing-justice

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.

@iied

www.facebook.com/thelIIED

www.linkedin.com/company/iied

www.youtube.com/IIEDclips

Download publications at iied.org/publications

Funded by:

IIED publications may be shared and republished in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). Get more information via www.iied.org/about-publications

Imagery:
Cover: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Credit: Camila Cociña
Page 3 graphic credit: Ottavia Pasta
Page 4: Banjarmasin, Indonesia. Credit: Alexandre Apsan Frediani