



# Access to Urban Services for Inclusive Development in Asia

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## In our research, we identified two categories of exclusions present in many Asian cities:

- Institutional inequality including housing, land and basic services, and structural inequality including barriers to participation of women in economic, social and political activities.
- Inadequate opportunities for migrant, minorities, youth and elderly to lead a decent lifestyle.

## About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organization is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments.

## Introduction

Rapid urban growth has not benefited all residents equally, leading to an “urban divide”. The poor are left to bear most of the burdens and shortcomings particularly in terms of access to services. Despite its contribution to economic development, urbanization has led to an increasing incidence of urban poverty and inequity, deteriorating quality of the urban environment, unplanned growth of peri-urban areas and deficiencies in access to basic urban services, including water supply and sanitation, urban shelter, waste management, energy, transport and health. Urban poverty is mired in crime and violence, congestion, and exposure to pollution, and often a lack of familiar social and community networks. Rapid urban growth has not benefited all residents equally, leading to an “urban divide”. A typical slum household suffers from several deprivations including lack of access to improved water and sanitation, insecure land tenure, unreliable power supply and intermittent water availability, insufficient treatment of wastewater, poor drainage and flooding, and uncollected garbage.

This Policy Brief presents how processes of democratic local governance affect access to urban services in Asian cities, especially for marginalized groups. It is based on research in nine cities in five Asian countries (India, Indonesia, China, Vietnam and Pakistan) undertaken by a group of national research and training institutions and regional dialogues hosted and facilitated by East-West Center with the support of the Swedish International Center for Local Democracy (ICLD). Governance process variables used to examine access to urban services were local government resources and capacity; mechanisms for local participation, accountability and coordination; use of ICT; good practices and their replication; and peri-urbanization. The methodology used for the studies was multi-pronged: institutional analysis, interviews with key informants including local leaders, and household surveys in slums and squatter settlements, findings of country level studies and surveys are included in the five country monographs.

A number of policy issues can be identified to promote access to urban services for inclusive development in Asian cities and towns. This brief presents 4 policy issues to achieve more inclusive service delivery.



**Local participatory mechanisms including elected local governments and engagement of civil society are essential to get local stakeholders fully engaged in service delivery and access.**

## 1. Increase the Role of Local Governments

As cities grow in population and wealth, the burden on service delivery increases and ensuring adequate access becomes increasingly important. Local governments and municipal service providers can be ill equipped to work with residents and civil society organizations to meet this growing demand.



### More resources for local governments

The first is through democratization and decentralization within national government, so urban governments get more power and resources and structures that are more accountable and transparent – for instance as mayors and city councils are elected. This is most evident in India’s 73rd and 74th amendment that specified roles to be played by community based organizations and women and, thus, created local constituency for change vis-à-vis access to services.

### Including grassroots organizations

The second path is from changes in local governments (and governance) driven by the organizations formed by urban poor groups. These include very specific local examples such as a group of waste pickers and recyclers negotiating a contract with the local government and a savings group formed by homeless women who negotiate a plot of land on which they design and build homes.

### Government provision

The third path is the government-led provision of basic urban services. In Vietnam, for example, public services are provided by “public service companies” and “state non-business organizations”, which are established under state agencies such as the government Ministries, Departments, and People’s Committees. Similar pattern is followed in China.



Local transparency and accountability mechanisms are needed to promote effective service delivery and access.

## 2. Transparency and accountability for effective service delivery



In some cases, exclusion is related to the fact that the residents of informal urban settlements may not be entitled to be on the electoral roll, as they might lack a legal address or the required documentation.

Local government accountability should not be viewed in isolation, but as part of the broader issue of local governance and public management. What can be done to better achieve these outcomes? One mode of reform is targeting more equitable distribution of services in cities through developing collaborative approaches between citizens and municipal governments. The poor and marginalized citizens should be directly engaged in planning processes to better understand their needs and identifying the most appropriate delivery mechanisms for providing essential services. Often, local organizations have joined together to form city-wide and national federations or networks to share experience, expertise and good practices.

Clientelist relations between politicians and local communities are commonplace. Such relations may deliver some public investments or services that partly address needs – for instance communal water taps and concrete pathways, but such investments are likely to be captured by the local elite. The outcomes of these relations do not provide long-term comprehensive investment to meet urban service deficits.

**There are a number of instruments of accountability and transparency that can facilitate access to urban services. These include:**

- Local leadership commitment to accountability and transparency
- Effective anti-corruption bodies
- Transparent and accountable system of public procurement
- Participatory budgeting and auditing
- Engagement of civil society in local decision-making
- Right to information legislation, and the promotion of ethics and integrity among local public officials.



One of the core issues in access to services is addressing challenges faced by marginalized groups including migrants, women and minorities.

### 3. Active Participation of Migrants, Women and Minorities

Promoting political and social inclusion requires the full engagement of marginalized communities including urban migrants, women, youth, and ethnic minorities in the structures and processes of local democracy. This can be accomplished through inclusive urban policies and programs that fill gaps between urban planning and urban realities.

- Policies must accommodate marginalized groups in urban governance by promoting greater community participation in urban decision-making and holistic management of city regions that is integrated across jurisdictions and sectors.
- Policies should also facilitate access to urban land and housing through revised land use regulations, coordination among government agencies controlling land, effective land density and mixed use projects, and housing finance and land titles reforms.
- Enable the genuine participation migrants, women and minorities in processes of service delivery and access; urban planning that reflects ground realities in cities; the evaluation of public policies and decision-making.
- Strengthening local level organizations of marginalized groups.



Migrant workers constituting the majority of China’s floating migrant population are low-income residents. Because they do not enjoy access to urban minimum living allowances as a result of their unique legal status, their situation is more dire than is the case for a city’s local low-income residents. These urban poor are at the bottom of the society, left behind in the accelerating achievements since the Chinese opening reforms of the late 1970s. The household registration system in Vietnam, which was used as a tool for social control in the pre-1986 period, proves to be one of the major barriers that discriminates migrants from non-migrant population. The general social exclusion and isolation of migrants from rural areas is evident in several ways: difficulties in finding employment, low and unstable income, poor living arrangements, home sickness, poor healthcare and labor exploitation.



Widowed, separated and unmarried single household women in urban India are economically poorer and live in precarious conditions. Level of asset ownership among women is either absent or negligible. Most women in these categories who participate in economic activities draw income from informal sector work characterised by job insecurity, low and irregular wages and poor working conditions.

The way forward must include strengthening local governance mechanisms to develop methods for citizen dialogue, handling complaints and securing the participation of women and vulnerable groups. Community mapping and participatory budgeting result in more informed and appropriate budget allocations.





**Peri-urbanization is a burgeoning issue in access to services as urban boundaries need to include not just what is currently developed but where there will be future development.**

### Key Issues for Inclusive Service Delivery

1. Role of Local Governments
2. Transparency and accountability for effective service delivery
3. Participation of Migrants, Women and Minorities
4. Planning for Peri-urban areas

## 4. Inclusive Planning for Peri-urban areas

Peri-urban areas occupy large portions of the national landscape in Asia and are home to hundreds of millions of people. Residents of peri-urbanization face enormous deficits in access to services because their jurisdictions are sometimes undefined, resulting in institutional fragmentation, low capacity to cope with social service delivery and weak mechanisms for citizen engagement. Furthermore, ecological footprints of cities such as urban waste often spill-over into the peripheries which lead to health risks. Planners have several opportunities to utilize the potential of peri-urbanization for national development and to ensure access to urban services.

### They need to focus on:

- The formulation of city development strategies to provide a holistic perspective.
- Inter-local cooperation in the face of the emergence of city-regions or multi-modal metropolitan areas.
- Change administrative boundaries and jurisdiction to formalize peri-urban areas as units of government and administration through which planning and service delivery can be undertaken;
- Strengthen financial, administrative and technical capacity of local governments in peri-urban areas.
- Identify mechanisms for inter-regional coordination and inter-sectoral integration to cope with pressures on peri-urban areas.
- Promote the process of citizen engagement in local level planning and management.
- Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning and focusing on equitable policy-making and ultimately access to services.

Cities in Asia have been laboratories of experimentation, innovations and good practices to improve service delivery and access. Recent surveys have highlighted a number of innovations and good practices in cities in terms of their content, rationale and impact on urban residents. Our research suggests the need of further partnerships to increase city to city learning on service delivery innovations.

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