Creating safe and inclusive cities that leave no one behind

Socio-political contestation is inherent to urban living and can be managed peacefully through a range of policies, programmes or governance arrangements. But when these arrangements break down, situations can escalate into large-scale, chronic violence and instability. In contexts where this has happened, there is a deepening crisis of trust between civilians and the institutions that provide essential services like housing, water and security. This impacts most heavily on groups that are already marginalised because of their gender, socio-political identity or economic status, particularly when government actions exert the rule of law through coercive measures.

IDS research and analysis of best practices highlights the key terms of inclusion needed to create safe cities that adhere to the principles of the New Urban Agenda. These are:

1. **Foster urban safety through inclusive policies and practices** – Prioritise the voices of those who are most marginalised. Support them to articulate their needs, building on their own capacities to create safe and secure spaces, both independently and through collective action, and place these at the core of an urban safety 'roadmap'. Support community champions, local thought leaders and social workers to continue to innovate local solutions to prevent violence.
2. **Use innovative measures to accurately understand people's vulnerabilities** – Participatory approaches provide insights into the experiences of violence among marginalised groups at a level of granularity required to understand the gender, age, identity, and space dimensions of vulnerability, as well as the risks associated with 'small' incidents, such as fires, mudslides, local flooding or waste exposure. Field-tested methodologies, ranging from 'Participatory Urban Appraisals' to 'Wellbeing', provide a workable set of principles to guide efforts. These methodologies can be integrated with community driven self-monitoring practices to provide marginalised communities with critical real-time data to meet their own advocacy needs.
3. **Support evidence gathering from small and medium sized towns alongside the larger cities; and analyse safe and resilient urban spaces alongside the more fragile ones** – Real-time evidence is critical to the design and delivery of effective interventions. Evidence gathering efforts should therefore be focussed on small and medium sized urban areas, as well as those experiencing humanitarian conditions.
4. **Prioritise securing, not securitising, urban spaces** - Militaristic responses to situations of urban violence have had limited success, and are prone to creating long-term instability. A strong and articulate stand in opposition to such strategies is required. Viewing urban violence and insecurity as public health issues, and promoting preventative frameworks that support a sense of shared ownership over public spaces can lead to sustainable gains. Revitalizing neighbourhoods 'lost' to violence and neglect can be achieved by increasing the visibility, validity and voice of, for example, street traders, to inform legal, design, and planning frameworks to co-produce safe and secure work spaces in the city.
5. **Think inclusive when it comes to infrastructure** - Infrastructure investment is critical to growing urban centres. The experiences of urban transformation for children and families highlight the importance of material and social connections between diverse urban spaces, crucial for social and economic prosperity, belonging, cohesion, safety and inclusion. Urban spaces should be visioned, designed and built considering the everyday lives, needs and desires of children, young people and their families.
6. **Reform policing** - Police reform remains a key intervention route for national and city governments as well as aid agencies. It is clear that urban security provision can no longer simply be reactionary in its application of force, and that it is an integrated challenge that involves more actors than the police. Successful intervention strategies need to support building long-term credibility and legitimacy of police functioning, and promote community-police collaborations.
7. **Ensure displaced people and other migrants are welcomed** - Part of the challenge is coordinating and supporting inclusive policies so that the cities or countries that agree to become more inclusive do not thereby attract a disproportionate share of migrants, or subsidise those who migrate to cities over those who, in the case of rural-urban migration, remain in rural areas. This is a big challenge, but not nearly as big as dealing with the divisions and conflicts that can otherwise result.