

Social Movements and Inclusive Participation in Cities

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Background

The lack of access to economic, social and cultural rights, the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and the depletion of natural resources that are crucial for an adequate standard of living are increasingly at the heart of social movements and protests seen in cities and territories worldwide. People are speaking out on issues such as the lack of job and education opportunities as well as corruption, which diverts public revenues for basic services. Other key topics relate to competition over natural resources that are required for food production, such as land and water as well as social, political and economic inequalities.

The discontent with representative institutions fuels mistrust, populism, misinformation and hate speech. This scenario calls for a thorough democratic dialogue. However, limited civic space for meaningful and safe participation of local communities often heighten existing grievances. Social movements have potential to achieve positive changes through changing laws and policies or challenging and shifting cultural norms. Their capability in achieving change depends on the support they receive from the public and the degree to which the public authorities are vested in maintaining the status quo.

As the closest level of government to their inhabitants, local governments play a role in shaping civic space within which people can express their views, assemble, associate and engage in dialogue with local governments about issues that affect their lives. Local governments are also key in establishing structures and participatory democracy mechanisms through which individuals and groups can contribute to policymaking and decision-making; and in recognising the potential of social movements in sustaining impactful changes. All people, including the marginalized and disadvantaged individuals and groups, should be able to meaningfully participate in the planning, budgeting and decision-making processes of the city. An active and functioning civil society is



essential for monitoring and evaluating the human rights situation at the local level and ensuring transparency and accountability; while rebuilding trust between inhabitants and institutions.

Local participatory processes require mechanisms that allow effective access to information, fair policy and regulation that facilitate the work of the civil society, and an open and safe environment that facilitates public debate, co-creation of public policies and access to public services for all. This implies enhancing dialogues - both online and offline - by leveraging open governance and civic technology to foster collective intelligence and enhance civic engagement to improve people's informed understanding of local public action.

Objectives

1. Discuss how local governments can support social movements and ensure that all people, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as minorities, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, persons with disabilities, children, older persons, homeless persons and persons living in poverty can meaningfully and safely participate in the decision-making processes at the local level.
2. Representatives of local governments and other stakeholders share promising practices, challenges and innovative solutions for creating inclusive participatory processes and decision-making at the local level.

