



# **Inclusive and Healthy Urban Environment in the Global South: Definition, Characteristics and Benefits**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The power that develops when communities define their urban planning agendas is now becoming more and more evident, and community-led development may offer long-lasting upgrades to metropolitan areas. A city's social and physical environment can either enable or hinder its residents' well-being and ability to become independent whereas there are still wide gaps between understanding the inclusive urban environment and a healthy environment. There remains an overwhelming reality of alienation of the users from their environment. The term inclusive cities are widely used to refer to the inclusion of marginalized communities – slum dwellers, migrants, minority groups, women or young people – in urban processes. This paper aimed at defining an inclusive and healthy urban environment in the global south, its benefits, and its characteristics to redefine the community. An empirical article review was conducted to establish the concepts. Findings from the reviews show different indicators of urban environment exclusion and drivers of

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inclusivity concepts. It is therefore concluded that for urban sustainability, each community should be given priority for an inclusive healthy urban environment. Stakeholders of the global south should therefore provide policies and implement programs for total inclusiveness.

*Keywords: Environment; Inclusive urban environment; Global South; healthy environment.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The urban environment is scattered with various degrees of segregation and discrimination as a result of several factors mitigating urban development [1]. These factors determine the characteristics of the urban forms and what meaning is derived from the urban environment. It is therefore required to examine the various characteristics and engage in proper planning for an inclusive urban environment. A report by Asian Development Bank, [2] defines inclusive urban development as an integrated strategic approach that addresses issues affecting the urban poor and vulnerable groups by improving their access to urban services and infrastructure through targeted investments. Various researchers have identified rapid urbanization as a major influencing factor that leads to an increase in slum residents, and insufficient and overcrowded infrastructure and services thereby causing an increase in pollution and unplanned expansion [3]. Challenges in waste management, water and sanitation system, and road networks attract global attention [4]. Despite these challenges, urbanization is expanding the world economy and increasing inequality and exclusion within cities, which could impede growth. In light of this, the global community has realized how crucial it is to build more inclusive cities and make sure that urbanization benefits everyone. Estimates showed that 50% of the world's population will reside in urban areas by 2030 the year 2050, and this percentage is expected to reach 70% (The World Bank, 2022). Today, cities account for around 80% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Hence the need for inclusive and healthy planning should be considered when planning for urban cities in the global south. Studies showed that one in three people still reside in slums with subpar amenities in developing countries. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the majority of urban growth would take place in Asia and Africa, which are home to some of the world's poorest nations [5].

Urban sustainability and inclusion may not have a single top-down solution, but many bottom-up options can be used in their place. Cities in both

wealthy and poorer nations benefit from their residents' initiative and creativity. Critical thinking, non-market solutions, and active involvement from all stakeholders are needed to seize this opportunity with a proper understanding that the concept of inclusive cities involves a complicated web of various geographical, social, and economic variables which is capable of providing possibilities and better living conditions for everyone. Given this, this study aimed at defining the concept of the inclusive and healthy urban environment with its attending benefits with a view that communities within the global south can maximize its potential. The following objectives shall be considered; defining the concept of an inclusive and healthy urban environment, highlighting the benefits of a healthy urban environment and identifying whether healthy urban development is beneficial to communities in the global south.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Inclusive Environment and Urbanization Influences

Inclusive cities are defined by UN-Habitat as cities that promote equitable growth. It is defined as a place where everyone, regardless of economic opportunity, gender, race, ethnicity or religion, is empowered and can fully participate in the social, economic and political opportunities that the city offers [2]. Inclusivity and its defining factors have significant benefits in advancing development through urbanization. To achieve the inclusivity needs against the prevailing context of weak local government planning capacities, limited financial capacities, and particularly for Sub-Saharan African countries, the urban environment should be considered. Cities Alliance, (2022) opined that the lack of capacity building has the potential of limiting the effectiveness of consultative planning processes unless it is addressed and this view is supported by (United Cities and Local Government) UCLG Afrique, (2015).

Inclusivity of urbanization can be achieved through a variety of means, most notably

improving access to formal urban services and expanding service provision to include marginalized communities, also through improving access to the economic services of the city, and addressing deficits in rights as citizens (Muchadenyika, 2015). Inclusive urban infrastructure development is sustainable and resilient to the challenges faced by the urban poor and vulnerable groups by improving access to urban services and infrastructure through targeted investments. It is defined as an integrated approach that includes accessible and affordable solutions [2]. The changes in approach to urbanization have to be inclusive of the urban poor and offer useful opportunities in inclusive urban development. Urban poor in cities live in a severe state of disenfranchisement, with the constant threat of demolition and evictions, as evidenced by wide-scale demolition engaged in by public authorities in many cities of the global south. The development of urban poor communities can be strengthened significantly through initiatives to formalize urban services and provide opportunities for development for informal settlement inhabitants in cities.

The primary aim of inclusivity is to provide capacity-building assistance and technical support to ministries, departments and agencies. An important feature of inclusivity is to strengthen the relationship between civil society and the government, this relationship could tag as non – existence, however, inclusivity is aimed at strengthening the relationship between the urban poor and the municipal planners ensuring a working relationship and participatory planning processes encouraging collaboration. Also, this will engender the building of capacities to deal with increasing informalities in the cities. Inclusiveness can also mean direct partnerships between international organizations and national institutions such as local governments and national development agencies. Inclusiveness and sound urban planning create a dialogue between informal settlement residents and formal urban governance structures [6]. This consensus-building process between residents of informal settlements and other stakeholders fosters more security for those living in informal settlements.

## 2.2 Healthy Environment

The concept of a healthy environment is to improve the quality of life of every human being when they move to a city as the major concern. It is defined by global health organizations as an

environment that supports safe and healthy living and is free of hazards. Conversely, an unhealthy environment contains elements deemed unsafe for human health and quality of life, such as air or water pollutants or roads lacking appropriate pedestrian and cycling infrastructure to prevent injury when people are moving around [7]. This can be evaluated through the nature of employment and the type of accommodation which varies from city to city, it is the responsibility of the city managers to make rules and regulations for the proper distribution of land, public spaces, and infrastructures. A proper urban environment is designed to accommodate increasing density in nearby cities and create several attractive points of interest in the city as cities occupy only 2% of the earth's surface, but are home to more than half of the world's population [8].

Safety was one aspect that made the environment feel healthier. Environments that positively impacted participants' mental health and well-being were perceived as healthy, and equal access to public spaces is a key feature of a healthy environment [9]. Health and well-being are central, and multiple environmental determinants of health, improving health and closing the health equity gap, is a development goal in itself and the goal of many others. The environmental determinants of health are directly or indirectly related to all SDGs (OMS, 2018). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals also reflect a shared understanding that a healthy environment is an integral part of the full enjoyment of fundamental human rights [9]. Globally, 23% of all deaths could be prevented by a healthier environment (พวงพกา มะเสนา และประภนต์ นันทิยะกุล, 2557). The growth of the community is been supervised by several organizations and authorities and is subjected to certain parameters to ensure a safe and healthy lifestyle for everyone.

## 2.3 Urban Environmental Threat

Urban communities are moderated by certain factors which constitute threats to both man and the environment, various studies have highlighted some of these factors as discussed below;

### 2.3.1 Overcrowding and unemployment

As urbanization progresses overcrowding is inevitable and this puts stress on the urban

space thereby creating a threat to the existing community or neighbourhood. People prefer living in urban areas to improve their quality of life as they want to be at the centre of economic activity with access to job opportunities and other social and economic benefits. But city life comes with many challenges [10,11]. Overcrowding, traffic pollution and noise, and industrial emissions are just a few of the issues that need to be constantly monitored and addressed to achieve a high quality of life without high environmental costs. But it also has benefits beyond city limits [8]. Residents battle for scarce and limited resources including electricity, water, transportation, and, most crucially, jobs when a city's capacity is reached or exceeded.

Several studies have shown that rural-to-urban migration is responsible for high urban unemployment. This is an aversion to the poor socioeconomic conditions that prevail in rural areas [12]. Unemployment challenges are a threat to an urban environment. What's remarkable is that many unemployed young adults come from affluent, highly educated families. Although there are more job opportunities and higher incomes in urban areas, it is getting harder and harder to find and hold onto a job as the population increases. The social decline is caused by both external and internal factors, including competition, new technology and physical advantage, and internal factors such as resource depletion. It manifests itself in the form of the crime of unemployment, mechanization and the environment including desertification and civil war [13].

### 2.3.2 Housing problems

The urban population exceeded 50% of the world population in 2006 and is estimated to reach 60% by 2020 [13]. Housing issues develop when people relocate to cities and crowd them. If cities are not fully prepared for the influx of people, housing becomes more and more scarce. People who move to cities but cannot find employment or who remain there as immigrants find it much harder to integrate. For the majority of countries, access to affordable land and housing is a key contemporary challenge. While the details of the challenges vary by country and region, it is generally clear that the majority of urban dwellers are finding it increasingly difficult to acquire and retain suitable and affordable land and housing [14]. Some of these people are not even able to pay rent, much less construct their own homes.

The increasing urbanization of populations in developing countries, along with growing concerns about their ability to meet human needs, is a concerning environmental and health situation. The urban poor bear the brunt of the problem, hampering the current development momentum [15]. Large segments of the population of many cities in the global South do not have access to adequate housing, basic infrastructure, and services. This increases vulnerability to both environmental and socio-economic hazards [12].

### 2.3.3 Health hazards

People who live in crowded urban areas confront several risks. Air pollution is the world's greatest environmental health risk. Around 7 million people die each year worldwide from daily exposure to poor air quality. In low- and middle-income countries, lack of access to clean water and sanitation causes 58% of diarrhoea cases. Dirty water, inadequate sanitation or poor sanitation kill 3.5 million people worldwide and account for 25% of deaths in children under 14. The 50 largest active landfills affect the daily lives of 64 million people. About 107,000 people die each year from asbestos exposure, and in 2010, 654,000 died from exposure to lead. In 2012, 12.6 million environmentally related deaths occurred. The air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink and the ecosystems that sustain us are responsible for an estimated 23% of all deaths worldwide [16]. Flooding is another major challenge, Hudson et al. [17] opined that future threats are likely to increase as climate change impacts alter flood patterns and rapid urbanization can put more people at risk.

The negative pressures of rapid population growth are exacerbated when cities are poorly planned for expansion and city governments are unfair or ineffective. When city governments respond to migration fears by making them less welcoming to low-income immigrants, the results are usually counterproductive. urbanizing too fast [12]. At the societal level, rapid urbanization has raised concerns about declining health conditions. Maternal and child health is generally better in urban areas than in rural areas, but maybe worse in urban slums and other urban slums than in rural areas [18]. The shift from communicable, parasitic and nutritional diseases to non-communicable diseases is clear. From a geographic perspective the highest environment-related mortality rates relative to total deaths are in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific (28%

and 27% of the total burden, respectively). Sub-Saharan Africa (23% of deaths attributed to the environment) is the only region with a higher burden of communicable, parasitic and nutritional diseases than that of non-communicable diseases, although non-communicable diseases, these countries represent the Global South [16].

### 2.3.4 Transportation problems

Many people commute, which frequently causes traffic jams and congestion, between their places of employment and their homes. The number of people who own cars rises every year, especially in urban areas where public transportation is notoriously difficult to use. The state of traffic congestion worsens as more cars are added to the road. In addition to causing traffic congestion, this also raises the possibility of traffic accidents and contributes to urban air pollution.

## 2.4 Global South

Nations with underdeveloped economies that deal with difficulties including low per capita income, significant unemployment, and a lack of valuable capital are referred to as being in the "Global South." However, few socioeconomic ideas are more vehemently debated, potentially contentious, or frequently misinterpreted. The Global South (GS) comprises Asia's developing countries, including the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, and Asia. Poor or economically underdeveloped countries have traditionally been referred to as being part of the "Global South." Nations with underdeveloped economies that deal with difficulties including low per capita income, significant unemployment, and a lack of valuable capital are referred to as being in the "Global South". However, few socioeconomic ideas are more vehemently debated, potentially contentious, or frequently misinterpreted. The term "Global South" is often misused and misinterpreted. Because "South" is included, many users mistakenly assume the term is supposed to be geographical. In no way. The term "Global South" is solely economic, even though the majority of the countries in this region are in the tropics or the Southern Hemisphere (hence the fact that Australia is "down under" but not part of the Global South).

## 2.5 Inclusive Planning in Developing Cities

Several factors had been used to define inclusiveness and its influence on people, a

study by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index was adopted based on three factors: economic status, access to and state of education, and access to and status of health, this is often used to determine with life expectancy as a metric. The summation of these elements is seen as essential for living a full and happy life. However, it has its shortcoming because the factors do not include the intricacies of modern life; increase migration and transitory populations. No consideration for gender disparities that exist in many developing cities with women, children and the elderly. To address urban planning decisions that would relieve these inequities, a unified, comprehensive approach is required, accounting for the inequalities that exist in urban environments in all realms. These methods must account for the wide range of conditions that exist within a city's population, and ensure that planned interventions are tailored to the needs of people who would benefit from them.

Interventions in urban planning to increase inclusion can be planned in a variety of ways.

1. Existing urban planning regimes and policies that remove exclusivity can have a big impact. This can involve changing processes to make it easier for residents to obtain formalized land rights and increase the spatial mobility of groups that previously did not have access to the formal economy due to location. This can also involve better health and social care services to ensure that current informal care duties do not prevent people from working.
2. Improving the flow of information and expertise between disadvantaged communities and urban planners is vital to ensure that development benefits everyone, not just the wealthy. Stakeholder engagement is becoming more prevalent in municipal planning processes, but it must be done with the best interests of marginalized or excluded groups in mind. To achieve maximum growth for the groups concerned, inclusive urbanization does not immediately arise from engaging all groups in urban planning debates, with actions resulting from the participation process.
3. The aspects that may be evaluated and addressed in these procedures can be summed up in terms of accessibility. A basic concept of sustainable urbanization

is that all inhabitants have access to city services on a formal, consistent basis. Other key aspects are access to markets and capital, which gives all residents of a city equal access to labour markets and income, as well as economic services like commerce. Access to places is also crucial since it provides citizens of a city, regardless of their position, with a secure and official place to stay.

## 2.6 Benefits of Inclusive and Healthy Urban Planning

The real estate business has long recognized the value of diversity and inclusion in the establishment of successful, sustainable cities. Diversity is a crucial aspect of Urban Planning. This entails inclusionary cities' spatial, social, and economic elements while gaining understanding from community cohesion and minority participation without creating difficulties among socially inclusive cities. It is noteworthy that mutual benefits accrue to both parties when there is inclusive and healthy urban planning few of them are highlighted below:

### 1. Participation in the Community

Engagement with the local community in urban planning procedures is an important aspect of this. Cities are rapidly expanding, and we must:

- Engage with the local community and individuals to have a better understanding.
- Solve the basic needs of small-scale communities.
- Investing in multi-levelled economic scales is a good idea.

### 2. Incorporation of Low-Cost Housing

Creating inexpensive homes does not imply that architects must utilize low-cost materials or adhere to rigorous design guidelines. Creating affordable housing necessitates a comprehensive approach to community planning that includes:

- Communities benefit from high-quality public places.
- Mixed-income housing, which helps to maintain good economic growth, and lowering building costs via innovation

### 3. Helps the cities to grow

Due to more work opportunities, better education facilities, and many other reasons, the population in developing countries cities is increasing. To accommodate a large population, there have to be some early plans. Utilizing the resources through urban planning, the city would have a strategy to develop its economy as well as livability conditions. Not only the expansion of residential areas, but urban planning also ensures good transportation, health care, and judicial system. Thus, the city will grow rapidly without having negative impacts on its economy and citizens.

### 4. Improves quality of life

Quality of life is the major concern of every human being when they move to a city. The other two issues are employment and accommodation. Though the cost of living is higher, the opportunities are also great. To make it easier, the city manager must have rules and regulations for the proper distribution of land, public spaces, and infrastructures. Due to increasing density in nearby cities, city management is creating several attractive points of interest in the city. The authorities are also regularly updating the traffic regulations due to the constant increase in the number of vehicles. All these measures are ultimately improving the quality of life of the people.

### 5. Safe and Healthy Lifestyle for Everyone

By constantly following the advice provided by the World Health Organization, urban planners ensure that citizens live safe and healthy life. They suggest the inhabitants pay attention to their lifestyle. Authorities create a better environment and provide sufficient areas in the public park for senior citizens to exercise and have leisure time. They keep machines to collect garbage and unwanted materials to keep the city clean and healthy for the citizens.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study is a review of related publications, journal articles, and other online resource

materials. It is a descriptive research design which facilitates answers to the questions of what, where, who, when and how associated with a particular problem. It was used to obtain facts, data and materials concerning the current condition and state of the concept and term; Global south and to describe "what exists?" about adaptable, alterable conditions and descriptions of the global south.

#### 4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Cities are referred to as inclusive if each individual's needs and contributions are valued and taken into consideration equally. Given the equal opportunity to benefit from economic advancement within the urban city. The idea is that "inclusive cities" are places where everyone has a say, especially urban working-class people, in decision-making, planning, and budgeting processes [19].

Urban planning is considered to be healthy and inclusive when:

- The city is neither congested nor overpopulated.
- There is no housing shortage in that city.
- The city's residents have access to modern medical facilities at reasonable costs.
- Access to economical and simple transportation.
- Everyone who lives in the city has a means of livelihood.

##### 4.1 Data Interpretation

We concluded from the researcher's results and responses to the research questions that inclusive and healthy urban planning can be achieved under specific conditions, such as:

- Good housing and accommodation planning.
- Low to no unemployment
- Good and economical health care system.
- There are no instances of overcrowding or overpopulation;
- There is a good transit system.

The following information was deduced from the researcher's results and responses to the questions that were posed that inclusive and

healthy urban planning is possible when certain standards are met such as:

- . Good planning for housing and lodging
- Low to zero unemployment rates.
- Optimal and reasonably priced health care.
- No instances of overpopulation or crowded conditions.
- Good transportation and road systems.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

By ensuring that all participants have equal chances, inclusive urbanization attempts to address issues such as access to urban services and the equitability of the urban socio-economic structure. This means the same degree of opportunities and services should occur most of the time and manifest itself through ensuring that the rights of marginalized people are protected.

Pro-poor inclusive norms and plans are needed in cities all over the world so that innovative local solutions can be implemented. A city will benefit everyone if it provides great services to its most vulnerable residents, such as children, the elderly, new immigrants, and those with disabilities. Urban sustainability requires that integration and inclusiveness be prioritized. This study, therefore, proposes the following solutions:

- The grassroots of every nation's sustainable development must be democratic.
- Currently used public involvement strategies, such as participatory budgeting, should be used in every community, with the most pertinent resources and urgent issues being chosen locally.
- Cities should initiate multiply and apply new approaches to inclusion. That would safeguard an inclusive and healthy urban environment through holistic urban planning.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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