

Hixon Center for Urban Ecology

Student Research Fellows

Continuum of Tenure and Services Fundamental Consideration for MDG Implementation in Mexican Cities

Problem Investigated:

Sustainable urbanization is one of the most pressing challenges facing the global community in the 21st century. Over half of the world's population currently lives in cities, and this proportion will continue to grow to two-thirds, or 6 billion people, by 2050 (UN Habitat 2006). Rapid urbanization trends in Mexico make this country an important case study for examining changes in urban environments and for developing sustainable and inclusive cities. According to 2001 estimates, the urban population of Mexico is approximately 75% of the total population and is estimated to increase to 85% within 25 years (UNHS 2001). These data also indicate that 10% of the urban population lacks potable water, 25% lack sewerage and 60% lack proper stormwater drainage systems. Many of these households exist in the periphery areas of cities, as migrants establish homes through informal acquisition where land is accessible but largely un-serviced. This research investigates the state of land tenure policy in place in Mexico for addressing the global mandate to "achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020" as stipulated by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UN 2000).



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Discussion:

The Millennium Development Goals hold national and local level governments throughout the world responsible for executing the development objectives, theoretically resulting in more realistic policies. In the case of Mexico, achieving the goal of improving the lives of slum dwellers as stipulated by MDG 7 is intractably linked to the laws that govern discourse and land tenure policy. The time-consuming process of gaining property titles limits social service and infrastructure provision in informal communities, which are municipal investments only accessible to legal communities. Thus, low-income citizens living in informal communities lack many basic services that are fundamental components of inclusive, sustainable cities. Despite these limitations, this research identified a continuum of land tenure and service provision which reflects a complex reality of on-the-ground rights, service acquisition and ongoing needs. This critique is important to develop feasible policy proposals that can address improving the lives of slum dwellers in the peri-urban interface of expanding cities in Mexico.

Approach:

The medium-sized city of Xalapa, Veracruz was chosen to evaluate informal community settlements, service provision initiatives by the local, state and federal governments, and how these initiatives may or may not coincide with the aims of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals represent a global partnership to "uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level" and setting out a series of time-bound goals (UN 2000). The global mandate that specifically aims to improve the lives of slum dwellers by 2020 falls under MDG 7, which calls to "ensure environmental sustainability." The methodologies used for this research include targeted interviews with government officials and academics on local, state and national levels, and spatial analysis of a case study community. The analysis outlines the main arguments within the academic literature regarding tenure security and then examines the ways in which this debate is reflected in policy decisions and local actions in Xalapa, Mexico.

