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**CONTINUUM OF TENURE AND SERVICES:  
Fundamental consideration for MDG implementation in Mexican cities**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

As towns and cities grow at unprecedented rates setting the social, political, cultural and environmental trends of the world, sustainable urbanization is one of the most pressing challenges facing the global community in the 21st century. In 1950, one-third of the world's people lived in cities. Just 50 years later, this proportion has risen to one-half and will continue to grow to two-thirds, or 6 billion people, by 2050 (UN Habitat 2006). They are the hub for much national production and consumption as well as economic and social processes that generate wealth and opportunity, but they also create disease, crime, pollution and poverty. In many cities in developing countries slum dwellers number more than 50 percent of the population with little or no access to shelter, water, and sanitation (Hoffman 1996).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the implementation of a global initiative intended to improve the living conditions in low-income settlements and encourage sustainable urban development. The paper is a result of a ten week research endeavor in the city of Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico, sponsored by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) Mexico City office, to investigate the state of land tenure procedures in place for addressing the global mandate to "achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020" (UN 2000). Primarily based on targeted interviews with government officials and academics on local, state and national levels, the paper describes 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.

The UN Habitat Programme employs a comprehensive concept of tenure security as a means of fostering inclusive cities around the world<sup>1</sup>. Global mandates articulated within the UN Millennium Development Goals require translation into national initiatives through participatory coordination with local governments in order to achieve contextual tools and sustainable results. Currently, there exists a disconnect between government policy advocating formal individual property titles as the cornerstone of urban development and the on-the-ground reality and needs of informal communities in growing cities in Mexico. In an attempt to reconcile these discrepancies, the paper identifies a new manifestation of tenure in which a "continuum of tenure and services" in Mexico can be understood as a baseline situation within these low-income communities upon which to conceptualize future policies consistent with global mandates.

## **II. MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, the largest gathering of world leaders in history adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a renewed 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). With a deadline of 2015 - 2020, these targets have become known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The aforementioned global mandate to improve the lives of slum dwellers falls under MDG 7, which calls to “ensure environmental sustainability.” Implicit in MDG discourse is a foundation of global citizenship wherein the costs and opportunities of globalization can be more equitably and inclusively shared. The translation of this global mandate into effective local initiatives is an important and complicated task with a number of potential obstacles to consider.

Within academic discussion, there is an increasingly recognized need to address the MDGs, the assumptions upon which they were founded and ultimately their expected and actual success. Questions directed at Target 11 include Satterthwaite’s (2003; 2005) argument for greater recognition of economic valuation of urban poverty indicators to adequately implement the MDGs. In order to do this, he suggests that more attention needs to be given to safety nets, asset bases and protection of civil and political rights within the urban context if the MDG targets are to be successfully realized. Additionally, the role of the local government is key to build sustainable relationships with recipient communities to ensure viable service delivery. Applicable to the overall strategy of the MDGs, Payne (2005) questions the value of

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<sup>1</sup> An Inclusive City promotes growth with equity. It is a place where everyone, regardless of their economic means, gender, race, ethnicity or religion, is enabled and empowered to fully participate in the social, economic and political opportunities that cities have to offer. At the heart of the “Inclusive City” are three inter-related ideas that contribute to the realization of full citizenship: respect for human rights, good urban governance and equitable growth (UN Habitat 2003).

using the Goals as realistic targets for development initiatives. For example, some evidence suggests that even if MDG Target 11 is achieved, only 11 percent of existing needs will be met, and only 7 percent of future estimated needs, by 2020. In addition, recent initiatives within the UN-Habitat have facilitated a timely discussion of tenure provision as it relates to Target 11, inconsistent implementation at the different localities, and potential pathways toward achieving these goals. As evidenced in the following section, the myriad ways that tenure is defined for policy application to address urban poverty demands much-needed flexibility as well as presents a fundamental challenge to successful achievement of MDG 7.

### **III. TENURE DEBATE**

Secure tenure is cited within the UN Habitat's Global Campaign for Secure Tenure as a fundamental component for addressing Millennium Development Goal 7 (UN 2005). However, the array of definitions of tenure form the basis of contentious debate regarding the value of prioritizing this factor as a fundamental step towards achieving these goals within both urban and peri-urban environments. There exists an array of ten different tenure categories as components of a global "tenure continuum" that represent situations of no existing security to full legal property rights and serviced land (Payne 2000). These indicators range from pavement dweller at one end of the continuum to squatter "owner" to leaseholder to freeholder which occupies the opposite end of the continuum. Overall, responses to tenure insecurity vary according to local contexts, types and diversity of irregular settlements, governments' political orientations, and pressures from civil society and from local voters. Broadly, however, there are two fundamental approaches: the first emphasizes formal tenure regularization of land and housing in informal settlements based on individual freehold titles. This tends to be more difficult legally and in particular, time consuming. The second approach emphasizes security of tenure (Durand-Lasserve 2006). It does not require the provision of freehold individual title, and provides protective administrative or legal measures against forced evictions and for effective inclusion in service provision including the provision of titles that can be upgraded, if required, with the provision of basic services. This is an incremental process of tenure upgrading that eventually leads to formal tenure regularization.

#### **A. Support for Individual Freehold Titles**

Significant academic attention has been devoted to discussing individual freehold titling as a necessary precursor for development goals within low-income communities in the urban periphery consistent with the first approach mentioned above. Inherent in this view is the ultimate goal of tenure regularization and formal market integration of previously invisible, informal communities. This discussion has its historical roots in property rights discourse spearheaded by Turner (1968) that draws connections between

legalization of land rights and housing improvements. Similar arguments have been set forth by Hernando De Soto, famous for his global quest to "formalize the informal." De Soto (2000) advocates property ownership as a means to protect assets, use as collateral for loans, and risk sharing for investment, all of which contribute to economic growth.

More recent research has focused on three main justifications for this form of household-level property rights provision as the groundwork for further development in the urban periphery: equalization of land prices in formal and informal markets, establishing effective cadastral systems for tax collection, and as a foundation for investment in these low-income communities. First, legalization is often viewed as a means to equalize land prices in urban areas by reducing inflationary trends that lead to increases in prices of both legal and illegal land due to the rapid pace of urbanization and urban development (CORETT, pers. comm.). Studies indicate that spatial marginalization in peri-urban areas whereby the poorest sector of the population is forced onto marginal lands can be adequately combated through equalization of land prices and legalization of private property (Thirkel 1996). Additionally, a successful cadastral system on a municipal level is seen as essential for active and sustainable land markets that reduce price fluctuations attributed to speculation because more standardized and reliable land records allow for more regulated purchase, sale and mortgage of land (Williamson 1997). Taxes assessed and collected as a result of legalization can then be reinvested in urban development projects. More broadly speaking, legal tenure has been proposed as a way for households and communities to achieve social legitimacy within the larger urban landscape contributing to the hope of more inclusive sustainable urban development (Durand-Lasserve 2006).

Research continues to reflect emphasis on issuance of individual property titles by international financial institutions as well as governments as a foundation for investment and in turn, economic development. For many projects, land essentially represents collateral for loans and other financial involvement in low-income areas. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) often requires legal tenure as a prerequisite for credit acquisition for both low-income households to invest in small-scale projects and local governments requesting funds for municipality-wide investments (Armstrong 2002). Additionally, Siembieda and Lopez (1997) draw links between international financing mechanisms based upon goals to achieve improved housing and urban development that prioritize efficiency of land markets. Similarly, Jones and Ward (1994) highlight the centrality of legalization of land titles within World Bank discourse and project funding.

## **B. Criticism of Individual Freehold Titles**

On the other side of the debate, there are those who criticize the conventional belief that legal regularization and individual property rights are a necessary foundation for urban development. Evidence shows that in some places the legalization process, instead of improving the lives of existing slum residents, has actually spurred the creation of more slum settlements, as many of the existing residents could not afford the costs involved with regularization and the formal land market, including service upgrading, heightened construction regulations and taxation (UNCHS 1987). Often, as land becomes regularized and in turn, more valuable, it becomes a target of "raiding" by individuals of higher income classes which continually forces the poor out of newly legalized lands and onto less desirable illegal land (including floodplains, hill sides, and other risk-prone land) and/or illegal land further away from the city (Burgess 1982 in Varley 2002). Furthermore, De Souza (1999; 2001) argues that legalization of informal settlements also reduces the available land stock in illegal land market, and therefore, limits the accessibility of even illegal land to the low-income sector.

Additional limitations to granting full property rights to informal settlements stem from a lack of resources within local governments responsible for such processes. Because of time and cost required, formal legalization cannot respond effectively to the considerable scale of the problem, particularly in peri-urban areas where migration tends to be more rapid than regularization (Vargas, pers. comm.). In turn, these conventional uses of tenure regularization that inevitably occur piecemeal, due in part to administrative constraints, can break down community cohesion, social links and ability for residents to participate in community development initiatives (Durand-Lasserve 2006).

A powerful criticism is offered by Varley (1999) regarding the use of land tenure legalization processes as a political tool, utilized by the elite for a variety of ends. Most notably, legalization can be used to coerce voters to support the party in power, therefore providing necessary security and power structures established within the status quo. The prioritization of legal tenure provision for investments by the government also maintains a necessary binary between "legal" and "illegal" (Varley 2002). More recently, Durand-Lasserve (2006) underscores the impact of the discourse of "informality" and "illegality" that explicitly reinforce repressive connotations and socially marginalizes communities considered illegal within this framework.

This criticism is echoed by Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan (2002) in describing new, dynamic conceptualizations of property rights that correspond to a global reality of legal pluralism. This work suggests that policy that relies principally on statutory law to develop rigid and so-called "efficient"

property rights do not recognize multiple claims for property rights and varying strategies by which people achieve access and control over resources.

### **C. Options for Tenure Security**

Consistent with the second, more flexible approach to providing tenure security, innovative case studies from around the world have attempted to offer alternative approaches to addressing urban poverty and development goals, without relying solely on regularization and individual titling as the foundation for the initiative. Case studies highlighting the successes of community land trusts, city-wide infrastructure upgrading and targeted housing subsidies, just to name a few, all provide valuable insight on alternatives to formal land tenure provision based principally on individual titles. Research by Durand-Lasserve (1998) also highlights the prioritization of urban needs, suggesting that basic service and infrastructure provision are more urgent action areas than tenure. This is reiterated by several authors who advocate improvement of basic services and increasing "rights" without major changes to tenure status within urban landscapes (de Souza 2001; Payne 2000). Other studies have shown the importance of geographic proximity to work opportunities and fiscal policy mechanisms for serviced-land acquisition as future key elements of urban development (Payne 2000; Iracheta 2000).

Recent work has pushed the envelope regarding the definition of tenure security, rejecting the existing binary between legal and illegal that governments often maintain. The heterogeneity of tenure claims and rights among urban dwellers is beginning to be examined; at times local recognition of land rights confers enough security so as to make state recognition unnecessary (Nuijten 2003). In this sense, tenure is best conceptualized as a "continuum of tenure" on many simultaneous vertical and horizontal scales. Mentioned earlier as a theoretical model, varying conceptualizations of tenure and security are being explored in practical policies around the world. Indeed, in many case studies, *de facto* tenure has provided enough security of land rights and potential housing improvements that legal titles become obsolete (Varley 2002). These approaches recognize a range of meanings and applications of tenure, rather than assuming that legalization is necessary or even a positive component of urban development initiatives.

From a multinational standpoint, the UN-Habitat has begun to recognize "legal pluralism" of tenure situations throughout the world, in an attempt to promote economic and social development, simultaneously accepting that myriad legal options exist throughout the world to grant people tenure security (Durand-Lasserve 2006). Indeed, a flexible definition of tenure security, couched within a directive to promote inclusive cities, corresponds to efforts by the UN-Habitat to promote global goals through established national and local policy mandates (*ibid.*, Rodriguez pers. comm.). In order to

evaluate the potential application of MDG initiatives in Mexico, specific conceptualizations of tenure security employed by policy-makers as well as the on-the-ground reality in Mexican cities needs to be analyzed and compared as a step toward recognizing the opportunities and challenges that exist at the local level for governments responsible for addressing urban poverty alleviation.

#### **IV. CASE STUDY: URBANIZATION AND THE PHENOMENON OF *EJIDOS* IN MEXICO**

Rapid urbanization trends in Mexico make this country an important case study to examine changes in urban environments and potential options to develop 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. Over the last 20 years, the informal sector has produced more than 60% of housing in major Mexican cities (Lemus 1994 in Siembieda and Lopez 1997).

The peri-urban interface in Mexican cities is a complex geographical zone of often overlapping and contested land rights. Much of informal land market trends are couched within a long history of land rights in Mexico, principally stemming from land reforms enacted after the Mexican Revolution in 1917. Originally surrounding many urban settlements, communally run *ejido* properties were, in part, intended to serve the agrarian community as a way to protect their livelihood and sustain agricultural production in Mexico. This reform established the *ejido* tenure form, communal land which confers use rights for cultivation yet remains property of the nation. Under the 1992 Agrarian Law reform, *ejido* members were given rights to vote to change tenure regime, granting them the power to sell, rent, sharecrop, or mortgage the land (Appendini 2001). Since the bureaucratic process of transferring land-use designations and ownership rights for these properties is time-consuming and legally cumbersome however, the legal right to sell the land is often surpassed for faster, technically illegal, methods of subdividing, selling and distributing land use rights. The urban footprint of many Mexican cities, including Mexico City, Monterrey and Guadalajara has grown into, through, and sometimes beyond the *ejido* lands that originally functioned as the boundary of the city. These settlements are often qualified as “slums” due to the lack of legal property titles, little or no basic service provision and the ad-hoc nature of construction and development. Increasingly, urban expansion and accompanying property demand have increased land values in *ejidos* near urban areas often making it more profitable for ejiditarios in urban or peri-urban areas to subdivide and sell their land than to engage in agriculture (CORETT pers. comm.).

Some of the dominant trends of peri-urban *ejido* land sales include: ejiditarios sell land with no use titles, sell the same piece of land several times, illegally subdivide parcels and sell land on ecological risky lands. There is also significant attention drawn to the presence of land speculators, or "leaders," who exist outside of the law and make a living continually relocating poor households to new informal settlements only long enough to gain a profit on property increases once services are provided. There is little existing research that documents the scale of this trend. Additionally, research has shown that the cycle of informal settlement and subsequent titling has resulted in a process that is institutionalized and a culturally-accepted means for attaining low-cost land in urban and peri-urban areas of Mexico (Iracheta 2000).

Several trends are also apparent among residents that have established homes in this peri-urban zone. Oftentimes these residents will pay disproportionately high prices for land with no accompanying services or titles. Conflict and/or dangerous living conditions can be common if single properties are clandestinely sold to multiple people or if upon arrival, new owners discover their properties exist on steep hillsides, or too close to rivers or underground gas pipelines. Additionally, without intervention from city planners in the subdivision and development of these settlements, community layouts can result streets that are too narrow for emergency vehicles to pass, unsafe residential construction, and inadequate or no spatial provision for vital social services such health clinics, education or green spaces. In these cases the services must be negotiated retroactively, if possible, and at a greater financial cost to the provider(s). These potential downfalls are further promoted by the fact that, historically, tenure and service provision have been dealt with separately in Mexico (Azuela and Duhau 1998). Even though urban plans recognize that most future growth will occur on *ejido* lands within the peri-urban interface, there are few clear policies to formalize this to attend to existing irregular settlements and reduce the tendency for irregular settlement formation (Iracheta 2000). Overall, UN Habitat notes dramatic inconsistencies in laws concerning tenure, noting in particular that possession rights are ambiguous and rarely recognized (UN HABITAT 2005).

Recent policy initiatives have begun to open a forum for discussion regarding tenure in the context of Mexican cities. In May 2007 the Mexican Federal Government presented the Felipe Calderón Administration's first five year National Development Plan. Strategy 3.1, Objective 3 of Axis 3 articulates the goal to "promote regional planning, legal land tenure and public security in marginal zones of cities." Within the plan are ambitious platforms for granting tenure to those illegally living on property they do not own, paired with ambiguous references to service provision as "easier to provide...once



already regulated.” With this objective currently positioned at the national level of recognition and debate, it is timely and expedient to examine tenure security in the country and its potential use as a tool of equity and justice for Mexican citizens.

## **V. CASE STUDY: XALAPA, VERACRUZ**

The medium-sized city of Xalapa, Veracruz was chosen to evaluate the on-the-ground reality of informal 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 MDGs. Research shows that aggressive urbanization trends, a major contributor to the creation and growth of informal settlements, are currently greatest in medium-sized cities making Xalapa a good candidate for this research (Martinez pers. comm.). As of 2005, the urban population of Xalapa was 413,136 including illegal settlements in the city’s periphery that lack many basic services such as electricity, water and drainage, among others. Population growth is expected to yield a population of anywhere between 456,076 to 474,465 by 2020 (INEGI 2005; COPLADEVer). Xalapa was also chosen as the research site because of the UN’s ongoing professional ties to the area resulting from a six year collaborative effort to foster strategic management and urban planning in local government projects (UN Habitat 2006).

Currently, the processes of government-sponsored tenure regularization and service provision in Xalapa function sequentially in a timeframe that takes anywhere from 2 – 10+ years from the time of the initiation of the regularization process to the installation of basic services, including water, electricity, sanitation, transportation and education services, among others. The overarching order of formal tenure legalization is determined by existing policy in the federal government. Currently this order is: expropriation of *ejido* lands to the government, regularization and provision of land titles to current residents, municipal incorporation and update of cadastral systems and finally, basic service provision as scarce resources are divided throughout city projects. This sequential order is predicated upon granting formal individual property titles to informal households.

Legally, there is a certain portion of federal funds distributed to municipalities for use in any location of the city including illegal settlements as part of the "Ramo 33" municipal development funding, specifically distributed for use in wide-ranging "municipal strengthening" projects (Hernández pers. comm.). However, existing municipal, state and even national government discourse stipulates that legal tenure in the form of individual titles is necessary prior to public investment in household and neighborhood-specific service provision. This prioritization of legal tenure provision over all other types of investment in periphery informal communities was reiterated by representatives of the Commission for

Regularization of Land Tenure (CORETT), Secretary of Social Development (SEDESOL) Habitat Program, the municipal development office, the Veracruz state urban planning office and the Veracruz State Institute for Housing and Regional Planning. Rationalization of these priorities echo the arguments outlined by property rights promoters worldwide. One predominant justification was that legality reduced land speculation in periphery lands, principally in *ejido* lands that currently are being subdivided and sold to migrants coming into the city. These representatives often extended this issue, however, claiming that legality was the only means by which local and state planning representatives and government officials can retain some degree of control over future urban expansion. Legalization of these lands was justified as a way of giving government more control over urban growth, which repeatedly was claimed to be in competition with large land speculators who intend to make money off of illegal purchases of land in peri-urban areas throughout Mexico. Almost all representatives with whom we spoke not only justified but adamantly declared that legalization of these communities was the only means by which development could occur and land speculation kept under control.

Throughout the course of interviews with various stakeholders, it became clear that there are also secondary reasons for which legalization through individual property titles is deemed a necessary precursor to service provision and other types of investment. These included: legality as a means for residents to embody a sense of community or identification with their property and legality as a prerequisite for tax collection necessary for municipal investment. The underlying assumption within these claims is that residents of these communities do not feel a sense of attachment or accountability to the land where they have established homes. Finally, urban planners within the state and municipal governments consistently cite legal property rights as a precursor to upgrading. The definition of upgrading varied significantly, ranging from provision of basic services to current informal communities upon legalization to modifications of zoning that would be consistent with long-range plans developed by the agencies themselves.

Within these processes, several trends are apparent: First and foremost is careful observance of the federal directive that prohibits investment of most federal monies in property that is being illegally occupied. The paradox of planners relying on titles as a precursor, however, is that this inevitably leads to a situation in which informal settlement occurs first without regard to plans and only subsequently are government officials, in particular planners, allowed to engage with concrete actions in these areas. Only following settlement and legal recognition are city officials allowed to enter these areas. This means that although plans in the form of maps do exist, planning does not occur and implementation programs enacted by the government occur after legalization in a retroactive manner.

The on-the-ground reality in Xalapa, however, reveals a markedly different picture than a simplistic model of legal and illegal definitions for areas across the urban landscape. Despite these apparent trends promulgated by government agents based on legal property rights provision, throughout the course of the study, inconsistencies in landholding, investment, legal tenure and service provision were continually apparent. Although the government relies heavily on a discourse rooted in legality, our interviews indicate a continuum of tenure with regard to land given the fact that residents are actively settling and investing in landholdings, before legal formal property titles are granted.

In contrast to the administrative and bureaucratic environments of Xalapa, the reality on-the-ground within informal settlements in the periphery of Xalapa reflect a markedly different landscape than the transient, predatory populations discussed within government circles. There appears to be little risk of eviction from these peri-urban zones within the study area, even though individual property titles had not been issued. This confirms findings by a UN Habitat Programme case study report that indicates that forced evictions are uncommon in practice in Mexico and that the more serious issue resulting from informality is the denial of basic service provision by local governments (UN HABITAT 2005). The vast majority of residents within the study area had established a home made of cement, had access to some basic services such as electricity and water and the children were attending school in the area. Moreover, we identified a "continuum of tenure and services" whereby certain services such as water and electricity enter into informal communities prior to legalization, whereas others are only accessible to legal residents of a city. Several residents articulated that they were impatiently awaiting titles in order to request additional services, as they could not access drainage or trash pick-up without such titles and/or greater access to personal or private funding. As in many informal communities in the urban periphery, the two principal services of electricity and water tend to be established prior to legalization, through a variety of mechanisms including private investment by the national electric company (CFE) and water company (CNA), community mobilization for services and/or local politicians investing in water and electricity as a means of procuring political support (CORETT pers. comm.).

In the end, the stark reality in this peri-urban zone is one in which additional basic services are unattainable to periphery residents prior to legalization, given existing government models for investment projects. Even though water and electricity might be facilitated prior to legalization, other services depend more heavily on legalization. These remaining services include drainage systems, sanitation, trash disposal and improved social services such as education and health services. Currently, existing government programs to address urban poverty and development in growing cities in Mexico do not acknowledge

these subtle yet fundamental relationships between legal land tenure and the issues of citizenship and human rights involved with basic service provision at the local level.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS**

The Millennium Development Goals defer implementation power of globally advocated development objectives to national and local level governments throughout the world, theoretically allowing the process to be adaptable and participatory, thus leading to more realistic policies. In the case of Mexico, this implementation of MDG 7 becomes intractably linked to the legal/illegal binary which is at the core of discussions of tenure and urban development. This analysis highlights the existing binary between "legal" and "illegal" within government discourse in Mexico and the limitations it might present to externally-conceived development initiatives. This binary, which stems from a property rights school of thought, results in a situation in which low-income citizens lack the necessary resources to be able to obtain basic services which, according to government officials, are not accessible unless property titles exist. Despite these limitations, within informal communities, this paper contends that there is a continuum of land tenure and service provision in periphery areas of cities in Mexico. This critique is important to evaluate the existing situation in order to develop feasible policy proposals that can address improving the lives of slum dwellers in the peri-urban interface of Xalapa.

Ultimately, the UN-Habitat Programme provides the overarching framework within which global MDG goals can be discussed, yet significant power is granted to existing national policies regarding land, property rights and basic services. Currently, the discrepancies between the UN MDG agenda, national government policy and local reality, specifically with regard to tenure security, underscore the problem facing urban development initiatives in Mexico. Not only are the citizenship rights associated with the MDGs and UN agenda essentially ignored and left unachieved, but government policies simultaneously do not take into account local reality to inform necessary public investment for impoverished urban areas. In Xalapa, the question of what form of tenure is desirable and associated efficient investment in development efforts remains unanswered. Particularly in periphery areas where a continuum of tenure and services exists, it is possible that many households obtain sufficient services and achieve enough tenure security so as to shift the discussion of tenure away from individual property titles exclusively to include myriad other service and infrastructure-oriented development goals. In this case, it is unclear to what extent the global mandate for secure tenure as a comprehensive conceptualization outlined by MDG might become more closely aligned with the reality on-the-ground in Mexico, resulting in more feasible, efficient and effective poverty alleviation strategies on a national and local level.

This case study draws attention to the existing limitations to achieving successful implementation of both the UN Millennium Development Goals as well as the National Development Plan for Mexico (2007-2012). These discrepancies between discourse and reality result in municipal urban planning practice that operates retroactively rather than proactively to accommodate urban growth and augment development and living conditions in expanding cities. The implication for global urban mandates is clear: dramatic inconsistencies between global development goals, government policy and local reality should be further explored and evaluated in the future if appropriate strategies for sustainable urban development are to be successful.

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