CHAPTER 2.
Addressing systemic poverty and inequality in cities

Recommendations

Water, sanitation and waste management

- **Ensure emergency coverage through decentralized water and sanitation services for all neighbourhoods** including every slum and deprived neighbourhood.

- **Connect and upgrade slums and under-served settlements** in the long run for universal coverage of basic services through a mix of centralized and decentralized water and sanitation systems to cater for the different needs.

- **Introduce progressive taxation principles in urban finance:** Cities should set standards on a minimum level of land and resources available and affordable for everybody. Beyond this, principles of progressive taxation should be applied on land and scarce urban resources so that the major consumers and polluters pay in proportion to the externalities.

- **Maintain affordability for a minimum level of basic services:** A key thing in addressing COVID-19 is to support calls to keep water access free by **ensuring financial support for water utilities.**

- **Establish stronger labour and health protection for waste workers** to ensure the continuation of safe waste collection, treatment and disposal**.**

Housing

- **Support a citywide upgrading strategy for slums and informal settlements.** To achieve this, cities need a variety of measures: equitable land management, the regulation of property markets and progressive land-based finance and value capture instruments.

- **Plan for mixed use, socially diverse communities:** an inclusive approach to planning can help avoid the creation of segregated spaces and communities, such as migrant worker complexes or enclaves of discriminated groups in public housing.

- **Legislate to protect against evictions and forced evictions as a basis for re-building a system of effective protection.** Since both groups have been affected by COVID-19, cities must consider the needs of landlords as well as home renters in their social protection measures.

- **Ensure the long-term affordability of housing** by establishing housing price caps, rent vouchers and subsidies requires institutionalization of these measures in a broader affordable housing policy.

- **Increase public investment in equitable, inclusive social housing programmes.** While short-term measures to house vulnerable groups in the early stages of the pandemic were welcome, cities should repurpose buildings and under-utilized urban spaces for social housing to complement market-led responses for affordable housing.

Without bold action, poverty could become an endemic feature of urban areas

Mobility and digital connectivity

- **Ensure citywide connectivity and affordable transport options, particularly for low-income neighbourhoods:** Cities should utilize the momentum of COVID-19 and implement measures to increase non-motorised transport.

- **Cities cannot afford to turn back to the private car in a post-pandemic world.** In the short-term, cities should ensure the **continuation of transport services** by keeping public transport services open, safe and affordable and **restoring trust in public transport** after confinement.

- **Invest in robust, inclusive digital infrastructure:** Ensure universal coverage of broadband internet and other digital services, focusing on under-served areas.

Employment and social protection

- **Provide sustained support for at-risk workers, enterprises, jobs and incomes:** Governments and cities should invest in tailored strategies to support those in vulnerable sectors to resume their livelihoods.

- **Strengthen social security and safety nets:** More equitable benefits can better insulate people from the effects of future health, economic and climate crises – which will lower the individual and social costs of such crises.

- **Tailor strategies that can respond to different forms of vulnerability:** Social protection measures should be nuanced to ensure the different risks associated with gender, age, ethnicity, migratory status etc. are addressed in urban welfare programmes.

Rights-based recovery

- **Invest in communities** by actively engaging them in data collection and decision-making processes through community-led initiatives.

- **Empower marginalized and minority groups:** Support persons of African descent, indigenous peoples, minorities and LGBTQ+ groups by increasing space for their voices in inclusionary planning processes.

- **Enable new collective action models and social businesses:** When building back better, cities need to rethink social cohesion mechanisms, building on trust and borderless solidarity towards a revolution of empathy and consensus in favour of more equitable distribution of urban resources. This is important since **the state and institutions will not change if there is no societal change.**

Deep-rooted inequalities in both developed and developing country cities have heavily influenced the degree and nature of COVID-19 impacts