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Trajectory, Mission and Vision

The Development Planning Unit (DPU) is an international centre in University College London (UCL), with over 65 years of experience in academic teaching, research, policy advice and institutional capacity building in the field of urban and regional development policy, planning, and management in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean.

We have a long-term commitment to fostering urban policy, strengthening local government, and community engagement in the policy process of international development. The DPU vision is “*a just world in which men and women are equally able to choose, plan and manage their own lives and communities, and to influence local, national and global development in ways that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable*”. The DPU mission “*is to strengthen the professional and institutional capacity of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to design and implement innovative, sustainable and inclusive strategies*”, giving emphasis to social and environmental justice, poverty reduction and participatory local governance.

Over several decades, DPU has conducted world-leading research and postgraduate teaching that helps to build the capacity of national governments, local authorities, NGOs, aid agencies and businesses working towards socially just and sustainable development in the global south. The DPU has a strong international reputation in both academic (research and teaching) and practice-based activities (capacity building and advisory services) in cities of the Global South (see Programmes, Research and Partnerships at <http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu>). As the vision implies, a key focus of those activities is supporting community-led processes at scale, either directly through work with CBOs and NGOs, or through strengthening the capacities of local government to interact with communities in an inclusive and transparent manner. This practice-based and research-oriented unit brings together four fields of involvement:

❖ Site of internationally renowned research on urban development

Research of excellence is pivotal for DPU teaching, capacity building and advisory work. According to the Research Excellence Framework 2014 the Bartlett has the best world-leading environment research in the UK. The research at the DPU gravitates around four clusters: a) Environmental justice, urbanisation and resilience; b) Urban transformations; c) Diversity, social complexity and planned intervention; and, d) State and Market: governance and policy for development.

Most recent / current urban research includes: the GCRF project on *Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW)*, which aims to deliver transformative research and capacity-building in planning and policy for urban equality in 12 cities across Latin America, Asia and Africa; UK DFID funded project on “*Urbanisation Research Nigeria*”, for which the DPU led the research theme on Well-being of Urban Citizens, through which we are engaging with a range of issues related to the Right to the City, including, for example, research projects on: Transport, Poverty and Well-being; Urban Infrastructure Projects and Displacement, and; Pathways Out of Water Poverty. In the ESRC/ DFID funded project “*Local Governance, Urban Mobility and Poverty Reduction: Lessons from Medellín, Colombia*”, the DPU led a critical examination of the experience of Medellín in seeking to reduce poverty and integrate large marginalised areas, marked by years of severe poverty and violence, into the urban fabric. It focused particularly on the impact of two aerial cable-car lines connecting high-density hilly neighbourhoods with the rest of the city, and an associated urban upgrading programme.

The DPU has also been involved in a number of important research programmes related to urban risk and climate change, including: the UK DFID funded *Future Proofing Cities*, the ESRC funded project on *Breaking Cycles of Risk Accumulation in Urban Sub-Saharan Africa* (Urban ARK), and a number of projects funded by CDKN (Climate and Development Knowledge Network) on the impact of climate change on urban risk. In addition, DPU belongs to the *European Network of Global Urbanism* and is one of the convenors of the *Development Studies Association - Urbanisation & Development Study Group*, actively engaged in shaping emerging policy priorities at the Habitat III summit in 2016.

❖ **Socially Oriented Training and Advisory Services (TAS)**

Training and Advisory Services (TAS) are as much a part of our institutional identity as our teaching and research activities, having begun in the 1970s. In many ways, these constitute a significant part of the 'non-academic' side of our work, which is fully embedded in development practice. The DPU advisory work covers a range of different inputs related to needs assessment; policy and strategy development and design; organisational and institutional development; and monitoring and evaluation/impact assessment. TAS work at DPU is, by no means, independent of our other activities. It relates closely to the way we produce and share knowledge through our four research clusters - and it is the academic rigour that we bring to our Training and Advisory Services that makes it both unique and exemplary (<https://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/partnerships/tas>). For example, DPU have work with the Cities Alliance program funded by the World Bank in the project "*Colombia: Land and Housing for the urban poor*" for setting the housing policy guidelines of the Colombian government in 2005. DPU has a longstanding trajectory as a contributor to global campaigns and UN-Habitat World Cities Reports.

❖ **Platform for Transnational and Trans-local Collective Action**

We are proud to have a long history of working with institutions whose values and concerns resonate with our own vision and mission. Collaborations of different kinds are central to our core teaching, research and TAS activities, and frequently cross over between them. We take a long-view when establishing partnerships of equivalence with different institutions and organisations. We have built strong relationships through collaborations with centres of innovation, pioneering new approaches to development practice around the world. Our partners include: African Centre for Cities, Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), Sierra Leone Urban Research Center (SLURC), Community Architects Network, Architects sans Frontieres, Bloomsbury Gender Network, Centre for Community Initiatives (Tanzania), Foro Ciudades para la Vida, CENCA and CIDAP (Peru), Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS), Practical Action, Camden Citizens Chapter and the Habitat International Coalition, among others. These partnerships help to develop the DPU's understanding of the city through engagement with the everyday practices of 'poor' urban citizens, giving privilege to voices that are often marginalized in urban development and planning.

❖ **Place of Diversity and Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

The DPU is a highly interdisciplinary department that brings together over 40 full time academics and research associates from five continents who are actively engaged in comparative, case study based, and deep ethnographic research on urban poverty, inequality and vulnerability, and approaches to overcome these social ills, across the globe. Moreover, DPU's Gender Policy and Planning Programme has been pioneering in bringing diversity to academic institutions. Since its inception 30 years ago, our Gender Programme has advanced knowledge and expertise for a critical approach to mainstreaming a gender perspective in development policy, planning and research, as well as exploring gender relations in democratic governance.

❖ **Ethos: Right to the city and Cities for All**

The *ethos* of the DPU is attuned to the ideas that underline the Right to the City and Cities for All. Our approach to the Right to the City focuses on an understanding of collective agency for planning. We focus on community-led processes in partnership with public and private sector actors. The local and central state remain key actors of urban development planning and one of our areas of concern is to explore ways of 'moving the state'. We also explore the conditions under which planning can engage with the market to achieve more social and spatially just outcomes for the city. Furthermore, we emphasize a recognition of inequality, difference and diversity. We set out to explore the implications

for active citizenship, engagement with governance structures and planning, as well as access to and control over resources and the 'use' of the city.