

## **IHS-CORDAID ALLIANCE**

### ***A world-wide partnership towards civil society participation and poverty reduction within the framework of urban management***

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In 2002 IHS and CORDAID came to the conclusion that their international development mission were complementary and decided to settle a strategic alliance to match their comparative advantages into concrete initiatives. Historically IHS has been involved in the development or strengthening of local capacities and institution building processes with the belief that this could bring about changes in housing and urban development policies that are beneficial to the urban poor. Through this work IHS strives for cities to become economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially just. Thus the focus of work of IHS has evolved from central governments towards city governments and their local partners including NGO's. As a result of a global wave of decentralisation during the last decade IHS has increased its direct involvement in policy and institutional changes within local governments bringing along participatory approaches in planning, urban management, housing policies, urban environmental management and local economic development.

CORDAID supports projects and programmes of NGO's in various parts of the globe that focuses on the empowerment of people and their indigenous capacity to reverse their situation of poverty and social exclusion. Gender, sustainable development and social cohesion are important pillars of CORDAID policies. But one of the basic characteristics of CORDAID approach is the support to processes at the grassroots level that can influence local development policies and the attitude of other stakeholders. Urban livability is one of the central themes of CORDAID that closely associates itself with IHS. For CORDAID urban livability is a set of conditions, activities and interactions within the urban context that creates opportunities to improve the quality of life of the urban poor, disadvantaged and socially excluded groups of society. Thus their ability to participate and articulate their needs in the decision making process is central CORDAID's support to NGO's, community-based organisations and other urban actors. The security of tenure, social cohesion and diversity, a healthy and clean environment and local economic development are some of the key areas of CORDAID's development assistance.

For those who are not familiar with CORDAID it stands for Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development. It is a Netherlands based non-governmental organisation that resulted from the merge of Bilance, Memisa Medicus Mundi, Caritas Netherlands, Vastenactie Netherlands Bishops and Cebemo. CORDAID is active in more than 30 countries working with more than 1,000 local partner organisations.

IHS-CORDAID partnership comes into effect in moment that the international community meets to assess what has been accomplished so far with the Habitat

Agenda and the Agenda 21. It is disappointing to see that despite decades of development assistance the world has seen an increase in poverty and social exclusion around the globe. Cities are becoming spatially and socially divided and neither local governments nor civil society organisations have the capacity to tackle the problem on their own. Still the partnership and cooperation among various stakeholders is exception, while political processes often neglect the demands and needs of the poor. Community-based organisations and NGO's are truly vehicles to articulate their demands but often lack the instruments, the capacity and the means to work out a pro-poor partnership with local governments and private actors. Here is where the strength of both IHS and CORDAID meet. The challenge is to create a synergy between bottom-up participatory approaches with traditionally top-down policy directions that can help to improve the quality of the processes and the effectiveness of policies and public investments.

There is an urgent need to tackle inequality and forge processes that can improve urban environments that are actually earmarked by impoverishment, inadequate living conditions, social tensions, urban violence, criminality and a general feeling of insecurity and fear. The largest Latin American cities such as Lima, Bogota, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Mexico as well as cities like Lagos, Maputo and Nairobi – just to mention a few – keep on reminding us that social exclusion and poverty lead unequivocally to social unrest that will impact society dramatically. The future sustainability of cities is a function of poverty reduction in all its different dimensions!

IHS-CORDAID will join forces in this direction. There is no ambition to resolve problems, but rather to initially make a situation auditing and facilitate local processes in cities where CORDAID is already providing financial support to NGO's and networks of social actors. IHS-CORDAID will critically assess the quality and quantity of the outputs produced by local partner organisations in some selected cities and provide technical advice that may improve efficacy and efficiency of the development assistance to NGO's and other urban actors. Process mapping and institutional and stakeholders' analysis will help to unveil practical and empirical evidences of the successes and failures of particular policies and approaches. The findings and results of the situation auditing are powerful devices in bringing out the necessity for change but it is not enough to put it into practice.

There is currently little doubt about the need for institutional change and policy reforms that can result into concrete measures beneficial to poor families. These reforms are politically motivated and therefore dependent on the balance of power at the national and/or local level where the poor may or may not exercise pressure. However there is a need to raise awareness of policy makers and civil society organisations (and the poor residents and their grassroots organisations) about positive experiences and results achieved by pro-poor policies and measures across the world. Therefore CORDAID and IHS will disseminate

lessons learned and processes from different cities through smart publications, local and regional partner consultations and tailor-made courses that will help to instrumentalise those directly involved with local development processes.