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# The role of research and knowledge generation in collective action and urban governance: How can researchers act as catalysts? <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

There is a need to combine different ways of producing knowledge, ranging from scientific knowledge, practice-based knowledge and local citizens' knowledge, to enable different actors to work together in improving urban governance and collective action to tackle poverty issues in cities. Yet this approach to urban governance is a potentially divisive process. Broadening the types of actors participating in local policy formulation and giving legitimacy to knowledge other than 'expert knowledge' overturns the current patterns through which urban development is channelled and existing power relations in cities.

However, the main argument of this paper is that scientific research can play a more integral role if it is carried out as part and parcel of the urban governance process. This requires a more participatory process of research agenda setting with local citizens, a research practice that recognizes and makes explicit the

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<sup>☆</sup>This paper draws on the discussions and outcomes of an expert group meeting convened by the Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council (RAWOO). The expert group meeting took place in Cairo in April 2002. Whenever we make direct use of the statements developed in the Cairo workshop we indicate this by referencing it as 'Cairo workshop 2002'. Wherever possible reference is made to the individual participants in the meeting. A full list of names of the participants is provided in the acknowledgements.

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value of localized types of knowledge, and a changed role for researchers themselves from external experts into resource persons in the urban governance process.

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## Introduction

‘Knowledge tends to remain where it is produced’, stated one of the participants of a RAWOO-expert group meeting on ‘The role of research and knowledge production in urban governance and urban poverty alleviation’ held in Cairo in April 2002.<sup>1</sup> She underscored the common experience

- a) that knowledge often is most valuable and useful for the person or team that produced it; remaining limited for those whose interests it is supposed to serve, and
- b) that transfer of knowledge is complicated and requires a concerted action on the part of those producing it to gain acceptance from and use by the policy making and implementing organizations for which many researchers produce reports.

These remarks raise two important issues that are addressed in this paper. The first concerns the inherent power relations in urban governance processes, in which certain types and sources of knowledge are prioritized above others; often excluding both the knowledge and priorities of poor urban households, for whom programmes addressing urban poverty are meant. The second concerns the issue of how knowledge generation can be changed from an external input into an integral part of urban governance processes, reflecting the priorities of poor urban households. Examples from cases presented at the Cairo workshop organized by the RAWOO will be used to illustrate such processes.

It is important from the outset to differentiate between ‘information’ and ‘knowledge’. Information is tangible; it consists of hard numbers and facts. It is independent of context and is easily transferable by means of recording, recitation and graphic representations. Information can be gathered, compiled and disseminated. To build knowledge from information, one has to add context. The context affects the meaning and value of knowledge, and can be seldom easily ‘reproduced’ or ‘transferred through dissemination’ because knowledge is filtered according to the perspective of individuals or organizations, reflecting their context and internal understanding (Hjorth, 2003). This implies that research needs to reflect the variety of knowledge existing among the actors involved in urban governance, and the conflicts in interpretation and valuation of knowledge sources (McGee & Brock, 2001; Miranda Sara, 2002). This paper focuses on knowledge. It takes into account—as Hjorth (2003) phrases it—that ‘there is a need to combine different ways of knowing and learning to enable different actors to work in concert, even in the face of much uncertainty and limited information’.

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<sup>1</sup>Liliana Miranda Sara, Cities for Life Forum, Lima (Peru) at the Cairo workshop 2002.

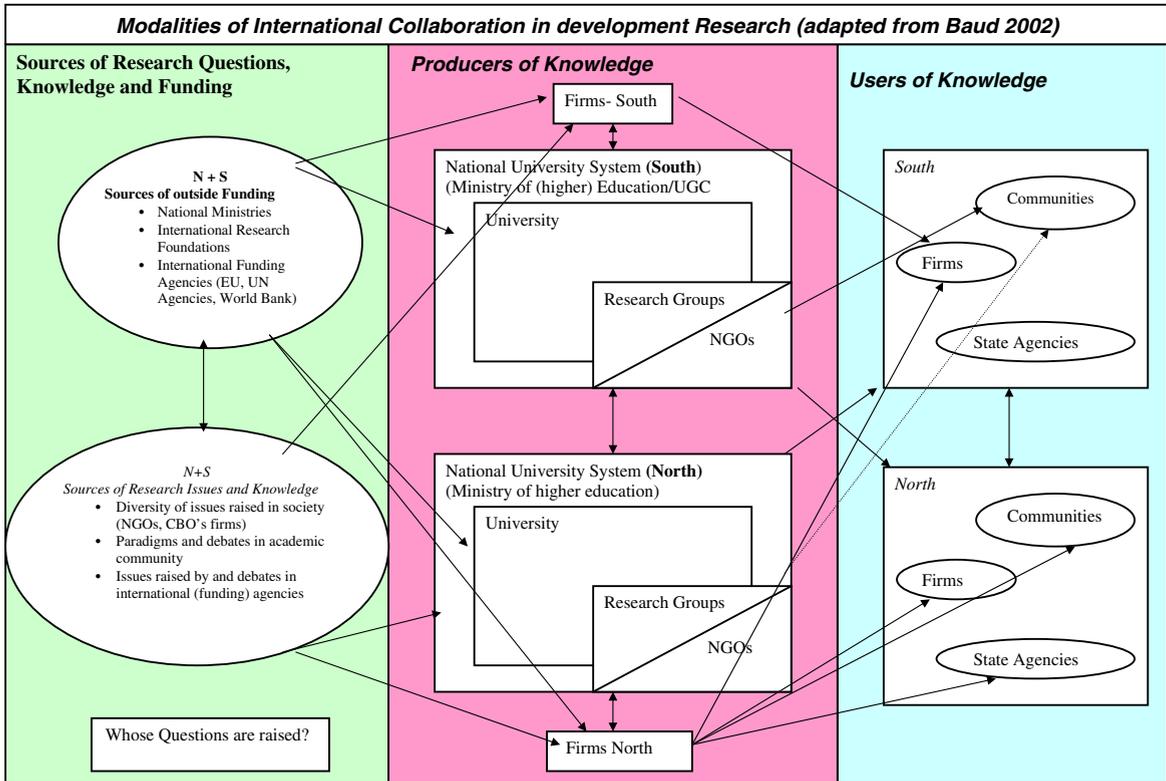


Fig. 1. Modalities of international collaboration in development research (adapted from Baud (2002)).

Baud (2002) has distinguished three types of knowledge and the ways they are produced, mediated through the institutions that structure knowledge collection and dissemination (see Fig. 1). Three modes of knowledge production are:

- (1) the exchange/circulation of knowledge from local practices, which helps define research problems;
- (2) the ‘embedded knowledge’ exchange, which becomes more encoded and generally used within networks of practising professionals (engineers and technicians, entrepreneurs), and
- (3) the ‘generalized’ knowledge produced in ‘controlled settings’ (laboratories, experimental).<sup>2</sup>

By recognizing the institutional context in which information and knowledge is produced, levels of inequality in type of knowledge and access to it can be recognized and addressed.

Access to knowledge and channels of knowledge generation can be a tool for empowerment in itself. In the World Bank study, ‘Voices of the Poor’, an important conclusion was that people

<sup>2</sup>The three modes of knowledge production are adapted to the context of the social sciences, starting from Rip, who talks about the ‘exchange/circulation of local practices’, the ‘natural history’ setting, and the ‘controlled lab setting’ in the natural sciences (Rip, 2001).

wanted access to knowledge instead of charity to overcome poverty (Narayan, 2000). Enabling access to knowledge generation can be a strategy that helps people move out of poverty in a fairly direct manner (cf. Krishna, 2003). However, this does not yet address the issue of different perspectives on what is considered valid knowledge, as a result of the outcome of different power structures prevailing in the arenas where knowledge is generated and policies are negotiated.

In this paper we will first discuss existing barriers impeding the use of research and knowledge in urban governance and urban poverty alleviation efforts, and discuss the relation between policy spaces, power and meaning. Secondly we will analyse the diversity of knowledge needs of the different actors that play a role in urban governance. In a concluding paragraph we will discuss a different approach to knowledge generation and research that has the potential to meet the needs of different actors and can overcome existing barriers and inequalities in power.

### **Barriers to using research and knowledge in urban governance**

There are many reasons why research and knowledge play a limited role in urban governance.

The first is that—as stated earlier—knowledge tends to remain where it is generated. Quite often research results remain in universities, NGOs and/or the agencies that funded the research. It sometimes does not even reach the desk of local government officials, let alone the people from whom the primary data were collected. Availability and access to research results in physical terms is often limited, with libraries and recent literature remaining concentrated in capital cities, where research and knowledge generation are concentrated (Box, 2000). This inequality remains even now, as electronic databases and banks become widespread, as the equipment and access needed to obtain knowledge from such channels remains outside the reach of many universities and NGOs in countries of the South.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that research and knowledge does not reach its target groups can also be a result of ignorance among the target group about existing research and its relevance (Sutrisno, 2002). This implies that the channels between researchers and policy makers, politicians, and NGOs or CBOs, have to be reconstructed in such a fashion that research results are passed along, and that such knowledge is given importance in urban governance processes. The difficulties inherent in doing this, are well illustrated by Stone, Maxwell, and Keating (2001), who show that government officials tend to listen to the researchers they fund as consultants much more than others, and that the knowledge passed on has to be viewed as ‘expert knowledge’ rather than knowledge filtered through the experiences of local residents.

Secondly, there is a tendency to focus on information rather than on knowledge. Much of the information gathered in the public domain has been developed and organized on a sectoral basis (e.g. WB Reports, UNCHS Reports, databases). While this might be sufficient to satisfy basic information needs, it does not provide knowledge on the institutional context that local governments require to fulfil the complex tasks they fulfil nowadays, based on a more holistic

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<sup>3</sup>In India, where universities and research institutions are widespread and have a regional function, the universities are currently negotiating for collective access to digital international journals, because of the high costs involved (personal communication to I. Baud).

understanding of the interrelations between different sectors, actors and policies (Schilderman, 2002).

Finally, researchers have limited understanding of policy requirements, and consequently do not structure their research results to accommodate the needs of policy makers or local CBOs. If researchers are not sensitive to the political cycle of local governments and the need for direct and concrete outcomes and suggestions, policy makers are less interested in their products, since both policy makers and the poor aim at concrete and visible results (cf. Stone et al., 2001; Baud, 2002). If the role research and knowledge generation can play in producing such concrete results is not convincingly communicated, other stakeholders lose their interest in research outcomes. Research only becomes relevant for them if it contributes to improved implementation of projects within the relevant timeframe. As local governments have a short political lifecycle, research results have to feed into their system in early stages of their mandate, to enable them to use it.<sup>4</sup>

This set of problems is related to the processes by which research agendas are set and designed in countries of the South. Research agendas are habitually set at the national government level, often significantly influenced by Northern funding agencies. This holds true, despite recent attempts to change such processes into partnerships on the basis of greater equality and interactive agenda-setting processes (Saad & Sawdie, 2002; Opschoor, 2002; Hall et al., 2003).

### **Knowledge, power and empowerment**

Within a positivist scientific paradigm, scientific knowledge is considered to be objective and value-free. It is the role of the researcher to provide ‘neutral’ knowledge; it is the role of the policy makers to take policy decisions supported by this knowledge. The researcher in turn can measure objectively whether the policy objectives have been met (Max Lock Centre, 2001). A positivist paradigm often goes hand in hand with a technocratic view on policy making. Policy making is seen as consisting of series of steps that flow in a logical sequence: from information and identification to implementation and evaluation (Brock, Cornwall, & Gaventa, 2001). Traditional ‘knowledge-based rhetoric’ can even reinforce the expert and technocratic culture, reinforcing technocratic and elitist approaches (Hjorth, 2003).

On the other hand, critical theory posits that knowledge is always there ‘for someone and for some purpose’. There is a connection between fact and value, between knowledge and practice, and between the knower and the known. In this paradigm knowledge is not considered to be ‘neutral’, but value-laden and constitutive of interests.

Similarly, the process of policy making itself is not as linear as often assumed. Rather than being fixed, static and well-structured the process is fluid and malleable, often without a clear-cut group of decision-makers or a particular event that can be pinpointed. Rather than a decisive move towards a new agenda, policy making frequently involves marginal adjustments to existing options (Brock et al., 2001; Stone et al., 2001). ‘Over time, congeries of small acts can set the direction and the limits of government policy. Only in retrospect do people become aware of that policy was made’ (Weiss, 1986, cited in Brock et al., 2001).

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<sup>4</sup>Klink J, Municipality of Santo André, Brazil, at the Cairo Workshop 2002.

It is also difficult to pinpoint *where* policy decisions take place. There are many policy arenas, and with ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ rapidly gaining popularity over the last two decades, the form and number of policy spaces for invited participation<sup>5</sup> are increasing. In mainstream documents as *Voices of the Poor* the domain of ‘empowerment’ is defined as the institutional interface of state–citizen relations, best suited to a context of decentralized government. Yet the divide between ‘citizens’ and ‘the state’ is simplistic. Different interest groups within the state as well within ‘civil society’ may take up different positions, and represent a constellation of competing interests. They do so in different policy networks and alliances, in which the process of negotiating support and gaining hold of areas of consensus takes an incremental form instead of the theoretically assumed linear sequence of steps (Biekart, 1999). Thus the policy process involves a complex configuration of interests between a range of differently positioned actors. These actors position themselves in formal institutional and informal policy spaces (Fung & Wright, 2003; Cornwall, 2002). Although they have a degree of agency, it is obviously shaped by existing power relations. Too much emphasis on the intentions and interests of actors can obscure the extent to which existing institutions condition policy practices, as well as the extent to which what is considered knowledge and what is not is itself an outcome of prevailing power structures (Brock et al., 2001; Baud, 2004).

Some authors suggest that we have reached a point where common sense, more than expert knowledge, can make a difference between good and bad policy making (Torres, 2001, cited in Hjorth, 2003). This bold statement refers to the existing gap between those who consider themselves as ‘those who know’ (academics) and ‘those who do’ (local government officials, development practitioners, urban poor). The powerful can buttress their opinions by making use of ‘expert’ knowledge and being dismissive about practice-based knowledge built up from experience and common sense. By excluding certain forms of knowledge—such as practical experience and traditional knowledge—more powerful actors can also exclude the interests of the less powerful: invalidating an argument by contesting the source of knowledge and the legitimacy of the claim.

A very clear example is the contestation over numbers. This is an easy example of ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ information. Poor communities often contest the outcomes of surveys vis-à-vis local government. In the case of slum upgrading, service provision or resettlement schemes the exact number of people living in a certain community becomes a political fact and factor. Government censuses tend to underestimate the number of people living in a settlement for various reasons. They may exclude people illegally housed, they may overlook tenants living in backyards, they may overlook household members not officially registered or they may simply not be able to keep up with rapid population growth and work with outdated information. In negotiations on service delivery, resettlement or slum-upgrading it becomes of decisive importance whether the estimates of the community about how many they are taken seriously, or are refuted in the negotiation process (Patel, 2001).

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<sup>5</sup>Brock et al. (2001) distinguish between ‘invited spaces’ for participation—spaces created from above by powerful institutions—and ‘autonomous spaces’ created ‘from below’ through more independent forms social action. For this paper this distinction is less relevant. We focus on the bargaining and negotiation processes where not only policies are negotiated that are more or less responsive to the needs of hitherto excluded groups, but intertwined with this process of policy formulation it is contested what is considered valid knowledge and what not.

Empowering people whose voices are normally excluded from the policy arena to build their own knowledge bases that are recognized externally—e.g. poor people or civil society representatives—can help address power inequalities (Fung & Wright, 2003). Urban governance and urban management are inherently processes including both cooperation and conflict. A genuine process of empowerment inevitably changes the status quo.<sup>6</sup> Yet before entering a discussion how research and knowledge generation can play a role in this process, it is crucial to analyse the information and knowledge needs of the different actors in the urban policy arena.

### **Knowledge needs and knowledge generation of the different actors**

Baud (2002) summarizes the range of actors and the different possible modalities of collaboration in development research (see Fig. 1). This figure differentiates between those habitually setting the research agenda—those who provide funding as well as the actors influencing the (academic) debate; those who generate knowledge and those who are the supposed users of knowledge. Especially if we apply the concept of ‘users of knowledge’ to the local setting it becomes clear how distant the people in need of knowledge can be from those who set the agenda. The complexity of the possible cooperative or conflictive relations as expressed in Fig. 1 is also present at the local level. The local setting is seen as the most conducive for effective participation, since local government is the government level closest to the people. In theory, it can therefore be more responsive, transparent and accountable to its constituencies (Rondinelli & Iacono, 1993). Yet at the local government level, ‘governance’ implies careful balancing of a variety of interests among different stakeholders having unequal weights in the different local policy arenas. The range of actors most often mentioned as being relevant at the local government level are: central government, local agencies of central government, municipal government, utility companies, formal and informal sector businesses, NGOs, CBOs, households and individuals. In the following section, we will discuss the knowledge needs of these different local actors. Given their very different positions in policy arenas, the actors also differ considerably in their degree of information and access to channels of knowledge.

#### *National government entities*

National government entities are supposed to set the regular and institutional frameworks that enable local governments to fulfil their role, and to formulate the overarching sectoral policies and programs for economic, social and political development. These more top-down oriented models of policy making place a strong emphasis on technical expertise and the production of generalized, universal statements (McGee & Brock, 2001). For their policy formulation, national governments need up to date demographic and socio-economic data that allow monitoring and evaluation over

<sup>6</sup>Brock et al. (2001) correctly argue that despite the strong emphasis and reliance on ‘empowerment’ in ‘Voices of the Poor’ little can be found in the report that suggests a strategy for the operationalisation and implementation of the empowerment agenda. The report hardly touches the fact that there are strong interests vested maintaining the status quo and sustaining certain kinds of poverty. Voices of the poor ‘is presented within a model of harmony that is seducing in all its good will and buzzwords of partnership, sharing of social, equality and acceptance’ (Øyen, 2000, in Brock et al., 2001).

a longer period of time. National governments thus basically need quantitative data aggregated at the national and regional level. For their form of policy formulation they are more interested in information than in knowledge. Their requirements for policy making imply that complex phenomena have to be reduced to measurable variables that allow comparisons between different localities and different moments in time (Schilderman, 2002). National governments tend to be less interested in ‘local’ or ‘people’s knowledge’. The grass roots experience and testimony is routinely excluded from policy processes because it cannot be generalized or form the basis of extrapolation.

### *Local governments*

Local governments can play a crucial role in addressing urban poverty and inequity. The role of local government has been characterized as coordinating, steering and integrating activities, interests and processes (UNCHS, 2001; Mitlin, 2004). To be able to adequately perform these complex tasks local governments have a wide variety of knowledge needs.

First of all local governments need information: they need good quality up to date disaggregated demographic, social, economic and environmental data that enable the analysis of intra-urban differentials. Similar to national governments they need these data to develop their policies, adequately target specific groups or areas in and around the city, legitimize their policies, monitor and evaluate. This kind of data is seldom available. In many cases national level data cannot be disaggregated to the local level. If local data are available they often do not match the area under jurisdiction of local government, and part of the population might be excluded from the official databases, such as people living in informal settlements or in peri-urban areas. Local governments often have to rely on data collected by other actors in the city, who collect them for their own purposes. The result is a highly fragmented and dispersed set of local level data. Yet, with the increasing emphasis on good governance, transparency and accountability local governments increasingly need skills to gather and process data and to communicate these to very different constituencies.

The role of local government has also been described as coordinating and mediating between competing interests of different actors in the city. Therefore they need contextualized qualitative knowledge on the interplay of interests and power structures within the city and on linkages with institutions and regions outside the city. For effective poverty alleviation policies local governments need knowledge on how the urban poor in the specific context of their city try to cope and secure their livelihoods. Although often excluded from the policy arena, ‘local’ or ‘people’s’ knowledge is a relevant source of information for local governments on what intervention instruments can be strategically used (see footnote 4).

### *Utility companies and other providers of basic urban services*

The providers of basic urban services can range from public utilities, large and medium enterprises to small-scale enterprises. Their information needs are the demographic and socio-economic data that inform them of the demand for the services they provide, technical data such as data on existing infrastructure, data of land-registers, etc. They also need adequate knowledge

on legal and regulatory frameworks. Another knowledge need relates to technical knowledge and skills on how to improve service delivery and management.

For large-scale private enterprises access to knowledge is often not a problem, as they can afford to produce the knowledge they need and access wider knowledge networks. The quality of information and knowledge the public utilities possess is often as limited as the data and knowledge locally available at local governments and NGOs. For small-scale enterprises access to knowledge is often very limited if not absent, and they have to utilize the information and insights they obtain through their own local networks. The operation of services of all three categories of providers could be improved through better communication links with both local government and local communities (Benjamin, 2000).

### *NGOs*

NGOs can fulfil a wide variety of roles in the urban arena. They can play an advocacy role to voice the needs of their constituencies or lobby for a specific issue, such as local tenure rights, the environment, human rights or gender issues. They can act as intermediary between local communities and local governments. In many localities they have taken up the role as small-scale provider of basic physical and social infrastructure after government withdrawal. Their work may include the transfer of technical and financial resources to low-income communities. Some NGOs active at community level have managed to establish partnerships between CBOs, NGOs and the local authorities, often around a single priority issue. This tends to not only improve relationships, but also information flows, including those on other issues.

NGOs are likely to have access to knowledge in areas of their interest, and often also have some resources to produce knowledge relevant for their work. The degree of access they have often depends on their size, availability of knowledge infrastructure and the degree to which they are linked to local, national and international networks of knowledge and information. They can serve as a resource centre in their specific field of expertise, and can be an important source for the qualitative contextualized knowledge. They are one of the actors that can play a role in systematizing and legitimizing ‘peoples’ knowledge’. By systematizing ‘peoples’ knowledge NGOs can value the knowledge assets of the poor, take stock of them, explore gaps and ways to strengthen them. Similarly there is a need for systematizing and analysing the work of NGOs themselves. In similar ways as the poor develop their knowledge based on practical life experience, NGOs develop relevant practically oriented knowledge (Almansi, 2002).

A limitation of the knowledge of NGOs can be that it is concentrated on a specific area of intervention and therefore limited in scope, both geographically and thematically.

For their role as advocates and mediators NGOs could benefit from better access to general local data, and to improved linkages with local, national and international networks.

### *Knowledge needs of poor urban communities*

The poor and their organizations –be it the informal community-based organizations or the formalized representative civil society organizations—have three basic knowledge needs. First of all there is a need for knowledge on their possibilities and rights to strengthen and secure their livelihoods. This includes knowledge that improves their access to income earning opportunities,

land markets and housing and the like as well as their possibilities and rights vis-à-vis urban institutions. Access to information and communication are essential to develop such knowledge and thus enable the poor to make the most of any opportunities in a dynamic urban environment. To access the information sources people interact with family, friends, public and private sector bodies and a range of others. Improved and more systematized and continuous forms of knowledge generation by and with the urban poor directly strengthens their asset base (cf. Krishna, 2003).

In communities there often is a lot of good localized social, economic and environmental knowledge, but this is hardly accessible for outsiders. Thus there is a need for a better understanding of how the urban poor gather, record and process their knowledge of collective value, and to convey their ideas and interests to others. The ‘knowledge need’ in this case is more adequately defined as getting their knowledge accepted and taken into account in the formal structures.<sup>7</sup>

A third knowledge need is the need to produce, own and leverage the same kind of (quantitative) data that are so often used as argument at their disadvantage in policy decisions. A clear example of this is the earlier mentioned need of the urban poor to get their record on how many they are in a certain settlement accepted and approved in the policy arena. In general the poor have little access to or training in how their knowledge can be documented and communicated to other stakeholders on a regular basis. Building capacities in the area of gathering quantitative data and in documenting and communicating it, can strengthen their position (see footnote 7).

Researchers—both from universities and NGOs—can play an important role as facilitators in this process. Drawing on knowledge of other communities who have shared similar experiences is a particularly effective way of strengthening the position of poor communities in the decision making process (Patel and Mitlin, 2002).

It has to be taken into account that low-income groups are not homogeneous in their abilities to access the different informal and formal sources of knowledge (Max Lock Centre Guide 3, 2002). The inequity in access to knowledge can be used by for instance neighborhood leaders or other local (informal) leaders to strengthen their position within the community by monopolizing information sources (Hordijk, 2002). More powerful actors such as politicians, bureaucrats or professionals interacting with the urban poor can misinform, mislead or manipulate them through providing insufficient or inadequate information, and thus limit the possibilities of the urban poor to act or claim their rights (Hordijk, 2000). Also when it comes to the needs for information and knowledge it is of importance to differentiate between different groups among the urban poor. The information needs of women can be quite different from those of men. Women’s social networks through which they obtain information are different from those of men. Women might be constrained in many ways in accessing information (Baud, 2000). The reasons for this may include their position in society, higher rates of illiteracy and a lack of authority. In general the young urban population is better off in terms of access to information and knowledge than their parents. They tend to be better educated and have more access to information channels.

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<sup>7</sup>Patel S from the NGO SPARC, Mumbai, India in the Cairo workshop 2002.

### *Universities and research institutes*

Though often woefully under-funded, Southern academic institutions have a key role in developing the professional and technical capacity needed for improving local governance and urban development. They can play an important role in the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data at the local level, in systematizing information and in generating local and contextualized knowledge. Relations with national and local governments and/or local communities can be good or poor. It depends largely on the research and teaching culture at the university whether involvement in local development issues is actively sought and fostered. If this is the case universities can play a role in supporting urban communities and/or local governments (see footnote 4).

For these local leaders in knowledge generation and capacity building of the next generation of urban professionals, there is a clear need of universities and research institutes to access knowledge being generated in other developing countries as well as in developed countries. The possibility of knowledge exchange and networking nationally and internationally is of critical importance to improve both teaching and training capacities as well as the functioning as local resource centre. Active networking and a positive involvement in pro-poor urban development may be tied to getting access to outside sources of funding.

The different knowledge needs and capacities of the different actors is summarized in [Tables 1 and 2](#).

### **Responding to the challenges**

If research and knowledge generation has to respond to the information and knowledge needs of local actors this implies that the research agenda has to be set locally, through a participatory process that includes all relevant stakeholders. This is easier said than done. We already indicated how distant the institutions that normally set the research agenda are from local level actors (see [Fig. 1](#)). Local governments, universities and NGOs in countries of the South find it almost impossible to acquire direct funding for their research agendas. Most requests for funding have to be channelled through national level institutions, if and when such possibilities exist. Given that national level institutions have knowledge needs that differ from local institutions, and may be less sensitive to local knowledge needs, this implies that traditional funding mechanisms might have to be reconsidered to enable them to respond to local knowledge needs.

A second barrier for developing a local research agenda through participatory processes is that not all actors are equally equipped to participate in such an agenda setting process. Politicians, local government officials, and poor urban households will need specific support to be able to participate in a meaningful way. Specific attention is needed to convey how and what research can contribute to improve their situation. Here it becomes of decisive importance whether or not ‘those who do’ feel that their practical knowledge and most importantly their needs and interests are taken as seriously as the knowledge and interests of the powerful and the experts ([Vajjhala, 2001](#); [Cairo workshop, 2002](#)).

We earlier indicated that empowering people changes an existing status quo. This also holds true for a participatory process of research agenda setting where hitherto excluded groups are

enabled to participate. When the intention is that research and knowledge generation should play a role in urban governance and/or urban poverty alleviation, researchers have to accept that they are entering an arena of conflicting interests and unequal power relations. This may already hold true for the agenda-setting phase. Many of the vested interests involved may be legitimate, even if they conflict with other interest. The key to achieving partnerships in local development is effective negotiation on such conflicting interests, discovering overlapping interests and mutually beneficial means of achieving individual interests. Achieving partnerships also depends on ensuring that the weaker partners can negotiate on an equal basis with the stronger ones. Access to knowledge and own sources of knowledge generation is increasingly regarded as a powerful tool to strengthen the traditionally weaker partners (such as the organizations of the poor) vis-à-vis local government, but similarly the position of local government vis-à-vis national government entities and the private sector (Cairo-workshop, 2002).

There is a strong possibility that if the research agenda is locally set, this agenda becomes more problem and product oriented. We mentioned earlier that researchers may tend to pay too little attention to the need for direct and visible results of local government and the urban poor. If the research agenda is set by a variety of stakeholders, including local government and poor communities, this weakness might be overcome. The relevance of research and knowledge generation increases when the results provide guidance for concrete interventions and lead to improvement of local conditions. Joint agenda setting can also improve that timeframes are adopted relevant to the local government lifecycle (see footnote 4).

Most important however we consider a change of the role of research in the entire governance process. The relevance of research and knowledge can increase if it is no longer considered as an external input, but as an integral part of the urban governance process. To overcome the barrier ‘that knowledge tends to remain where it is generated’ it is of importance that knowledge is generated by a wider group of stakeholders. Participation thus should not be limited to the phase of agenda setting, but can be extended to the process of knowledge generation itself. This has various advantages. Local stakeholders are no longer considered mere ‘resource persons’ but as co-producers of knowledge. The knowledge generated becomes more relevant for them and may influence their decisions. An interactive form of knowledge generation thus creates a wide variety of owners and users. If research and knowledge generation results from a continuous interaction between researchers, local communities and policy makers it is no longer something that advises ‘ex ante’ or evaluates ‘ex post’, but can provide relevant findings throughout the process. Such a process of shared knowledge generation can advance that various actors buy into the process, and can foster a process of overcoming mistrust and strengthen the formation of cooperative relations.

A clear example of knowledge creation as a result of continuous interaction can be found in the city of Santo Andre, Brazil.

**The role of research in innovative urban management in Santo Andre, Greater São Paulo, Brazil**  
Shortly after assuming power the Workers Party that had been elected in Santo André realized that it had to face a complex challenge: to build sustainable livelihoods for their citizens in the midst of a scenario characterized by an intense macro-economic adjustment, which created unusually high unemployment figures in the older industrialized areas of São Paulo.

Table 1

Actor	Need for information and knowledge	Scale Level	Purpose	Time scale	Knowledge strengths and needs according to MaxLock Institute <sup>a</sup>
National Government entities	Recent measurable indicators allowing comparisons and monitoring over time	Aggregated data at the national and regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Underpin and legitimize policy choices</li> <li>● Monitoring impact of policies</li> <li>● Feed international databases for global comparison and monitoring</li> </ul>	Medium and long term	Often have access to the best available social and economic data, but seldom disaggregated at the local level and often out of date.
Local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recent indicators disaggregated to local level, allowing comparison between different sectors within the city/administrative boundaries</li> <li>● Qualitative data on dynamics of e.g. processes of impoverishment or inclusion/exclusion</li> <li>● Qualitative analysis of interest and strategies of actors</li> <li>● Technical knowledge for sector departments</li> </ul>	Local level (administrative boundaries of local government) and lower levels of scale that differentiate between different sectors of the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Underpin and legitimize policies</li> <li>● Understand dynamics of inclusion/exclusion</li> <li>● Improve effective role as coordinator, mediator</li> <li>● Improve functioning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Short term (for direct implementation)</li> <li>● Medium term (to monitor the impact of policies)</li> </ul>	Local governments need good quality recent local demographic, social and economic data that is seldom available. Informal knowledge of localities and their social networks is important. Knowledge of good practices in other cities can be very useful.

International donor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Quantitative demographic and socio-economic data</li> <li>● Qualitative local and regional studies that reveal particularities and trends</li> <li>● Systematization of good and innovative practices</li> <li>● Comparative research on a wide variety of cases, that can reveal general tendencies of what works and what not under different conditions</li> </ul>	Local, regional, national and global	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Monitor and evaluate national, regional and global changes</li> <li>● Draw policy conclusions</li> <li>● Disseminate lessons learned/good practices</li> <li>● Legitimize existing and new programmes</li> <li>● Legitimize development cooperation</li> </ul>	Medium and long term	Access to good data and at international level. Monitoring and evaluation is critical. Donors need access to locally disaggregated data to inform co-operation policy in urban development and understanding local form of urban poverty and its context
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*Source:* Draft Advisory Report Urban Governance and Urban Poverty Alleviation, The Role of Research and knowledge in Policy and Practice, Prepared by Hordijk M.A. based on the outcomes of the Cairo workshop 2002. Presented to the RAWOO October 2002, unpublished.

<sup>a</sup>This column is a summary of the 2nd guide of the series 'Improving Knowledge Transfer in Urban Development' developed by the Max Lock Centre of the University of Westminster as part of the DFID funded project 'Urbanisation Knowledge and Research Project. The guides are available at [www.wmin.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock](http://www.wmin.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock).

Table 2

Actor	Need for information and knowledge	Scale Level	Purpose	Time scale	Knowledge strengths and needs according to Max Lock Institute <sup>a</sup>
Public utilities and private sector agencies involved in service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recent measurable indicators that allow extrapolation, analysis of current and future demand for services, financial capacity of users to pay for services</li> <li>Technical knowledge and expertise to improve service delivery and/or cost effectiveness.</li> </ul>	Regional and local, disaggregated to cover intra-urban differentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tailor service provision to current and future needs of clients in relation to their financial capacities to pay for services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short and medium term</li> <li>Long term for planning of service extension</li> </ul>	
NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recent quantitative data disaggregated to local and neighborhood scales within the city</li> <li>Qualitative data revealing local negotiations by competing interests, restricted access, power imbalances and processes of inclusion/exclusion</li> <li>Technical knowledge and expertise in specific fields of action</li> </ul>	Local and regional level data Data at community level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocacy</li> <li>Challenge official data</li> <li>Effectively target specific groups</li> <li>Legitimize projects and programs</li> <li>Improve implementation of projects/programs</li> <li>Introduce alternative/innovative technologies</li> </ul>		<p>Improve access to knowledge in areas of special interests. NGOs can be a good source for specific knowledge and can have an important role as intermediaries in negotiating change and knowledge exchange between poor and other interest groups.</p>
Organizations of the poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge on opportunities, institutions and rights as citizens</li> </ul>	Local at municipal and community level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen bargaining position</li> <li>Challenge official data/knowledge</li> </ul>	Short and medium term	Good knowledge of local environment and needs of interests groups. Need

knowledge of local and national institutions and development processes, and of good practices by other CBOs.

- Legitimizing existing 'local' or 'peoples' knowledge to give it weight in the negotiation process
- Demographic and socio-economic data of their own communities and federations

Researchers/  
Professional  
organizations/  
Universities

- Inherent interest in both quantitative and qualitative data on the city they are based
- Inherent interest in production of scientific knowledge that reveals both particularities of the specific city they are based in as general tendencies
- Linking with national and international scientific knowledge production

Local, regional,  
national and global

- Improve training of professionals
- Offer professional capacity to support and improve urban governance and – in some cases – urban poverty alleviation
- Participate and position in national and global knowledge production

Short term, medium  
term, long term

Good resources of  
specialized knowledge

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*Source:* Draft Advisory Report Urban Governance and Urban Poverty Alleviation, The Role of Research and knowledge in Policy and Practice, Prepared by Hordijk M.A. based on the outcomes of the Cairo workshop 2002. Presented to the RAWOO October 2002, forthcoming.

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Convinced that poverty alleviation should also be a preoccupation at city level, the administration elaborated during 1997 the so-called Integrated Program aimed at Social Inclusion. The concept behind its elaboration was in line with the new scenario: social inclusion policies were to replace mere physical slum upgrading programs. The Program counted with a large number of partners involved in several aspects of the program, such as the Urban Management Program, local NGOs and the University of São Paulo. Some of these partners have been actively involved in the generation of knowledge and indicators, monitoring and systematization of the experience. Researchers played a specific role in developing a map with indicators of social inclusion and exclusion at the city level. For each region, a relative indicator was elaborated, which was based on a set of more specific variables. This methodology tried to allow for the multidimensional character of social inclusion—going more in depth, therefore, than the usual approaches focused on urban poverty.

To be able to do so there was a continuous interaction between local government officials and the researchers. It did require serious efforts to make the researchers understand the need of local government, both in terms of what were considered the relevant themes, as well as to make them understand the dynamics of local governance and the need for relatively quick results that directly could be translated into concrete actions. This was achieved through establishing genuine partnerships with the research institutions and through inviting them to be an actor in the urban governance process instead of outside consultants.

On the basis of the research results—the map of social inclusion and exclusion—the implementation of the programme will be improved. The community was involved in the elaboration of indicators. This allowed for a rich set of quantitative and qualitative indicators and subjective evaluations. The first such participatory diagnosis was completed in February 2001.

*Sources:* (Klink, 2002). ‘Towards an urban agenda from a city perspective: revisiting the dialectics between international donors, finance, and urban development’, paper presented at the UTI-RAWOO expert group meeting ‘The Role of Research in Policy and Practice at the interface of urban poverty, civil society organizations and local governance’, 22–24 April 2002, Cairo and Daniel, Celso (2001). ‘Participatory Urban Governance The Experience of Santo André’, in *United Nations Chronicle*, online edition, <http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2001/issue1/0101p28.html>

### *Changing role of researchers*

If research should be an integral part of the urban governance process and efforts to alleviate urban poverty, in a continuous interaction with local communities and policy makers, then the researcher becomes an actor in a wider, dynamic network, full of checks and balances, where they have to face criteria that are not only technical and policy oriented, but also social, political and product oriented. The role for the researcher changes from an ‘expert’ to a ‘facilitator in the knowledge generation process’. The researcher has to act as sensitizer, broker, resource person and ‘peer’ in the process of shared knowledge production. The need for continuous feed back between policy decisions, interventions and outcomes implies that the researcher should continuously take part in the process. It should be noted that such a change in the role of the

researcher also has considerable implications for research funding. First of all it might imply that research funding should span a larger time frame, preferably a minimum of a local government cycle. Secondly, if researchers are supposed to act interactively with other local stakeholders, the direction of the research process and priorities on the kind of results and findings research is supposed to highlight, is likely to change throughout the process. That requires funding mechanisms set according to the needs of research *processes*, and not directed by pre-set priorities over research *results*.

Researchers also may play an important role in training the next generation of urban professionals. The more problem oriented the research is, the more valuable for the training of practitioners. Coupled with the transfer of knowledge in terms of contents and result capacity building should aim at equipping future researchers with the new skills needed to adequately fulfil the roles outlined above. A positive side effect of such an approach is that it can proof the usefulness of (problem oriented) research to (local) government officials.

Last but not least we indicated the specific knowledge needs of the urban poor. It is of importance that they are supported in their participation in research agenda setting and knowledge generation. It is however also important that they are supported in generating the knowledge they need to defend their interests. In such a setting a researcher partners with local communities and puts his capacities at the service of their efforts to improve their livelihoods. A clear example of this can be found in the work of the Indian NGO SPARC.

#### **Data-gathering as an empowering tool for the poor**

In 1984 with SPARCs (Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers) began to work with pavement dwellers in Mumbai. The reality and characteristics of the pavement dwellers had never been systematically looked at, so SPARC decided to do a survey. The outcomes of this survey had several impacts. The most significant on the communities themselves, which now began to see themselves as a group with common needs and aspirations, and began to explore the possibilities of organizing themselves. They began to understand the politics of the city: if you are not counted, then you are invisible and cannot claim your entitlements. The data also challenged existing narratives about the pavement dwellers and therewith challenged prevailing policies.

Based on this experience SPARC developed the ‘community survey’ carried out by the inhabitants themselves as an empowerment tool. Preparation for community surveys involves community meetings to develop a workable set of questions. The surveys are carried out by the inhabitants themselves. Even more important: the results are validated in community meetings. This makes the process transparent, community leaders more accountable, and social control is exercised to ensure that the statistics reflect reality. Therewith the community possesses of valuable information: the information they are interested in finding out about itself as well as information it can use in negotiations with governments. The knowledge base created—which includes a better understanding of their own assets—has two advantages. It enables them to create their own solutions and to act collectively in a more effective manner. It also provided them with information not available to others, giving them an edge in negotiations with outside actors, such as municipal governments. ‘If we want to claim our space at the negotiation table, we have to play the game according to the rules of those in power. Managing information is an important asset.’

*Source:* Briefing by Sheela Patel at the Cairo-workshop, and adapted from Patel (2001). ‘How can poor people benefit from research results?’ In: RAWOO Utilization of Research for Development Cooperation, Linking Knowledge Production to Development Policy and Practice, Rawoo, The Hague.

## Conclusions

In urban governance, the types of knowledge used and the extent of ownership by the various organizations involved in governance processes influence its effective use. Issues that need to be recognized include the following.

- Unequal recognition is given to different types of knowledge and knowledge production. Expert sources of knowledge are given priority by national and local government agencies above local inhabitants’ practice-based knowledge. Locally produced knowledge can contribute to more realistic views of existing situations and needs of inhabitants, and also provide greater local ownership of projects for urban residents.
- Access to different types of knowledge is also skewed in favour of national governments and international agencies, with less power to local governments, and civil society organizations. The differentiated knowledge needs of local governments, private businesses, NGOs and inhabitants are also not sufficiently recognized.
- Locally produced knowledge can be enriched if it is contrasted with practices of other localities. If lessons have to be learnt from positive experiences in urban governance and urban poverty alleviation efforts it is of importance to differentiate between those factors that are locally specific, and those factors that can also have relevance elsewhere.
- Funding for locally owned knowledge production is largely lacking; funds are channeled through national and international institutions with their own agendas. Finding alternative channels for funding participatory research is a challenge at the moment.
- Local agenda-setting and knowledge production requires researchers to re-orient themselves as resource persons and catalysts rather than ‘experts’ on particular subject areas. This is a process not yet strongly acknowledged within or outside the universities that validate knowledge production and its results.
- A local participatory process to set the research agenda and produce knowledge to ensure that it is locally owned and used, does not imply that the outcomes of such a process are only relevant locally. There is also a need for networking and partnerships at other scale levels and between scale levels.
- Comparative analyses can be fostered through horizontal interaction between researchers and other stakeholders from different cities in different regions. Urban governance however does not function as an island: it is embedded in socioeconomic processes at meso- and macro-level that affect the outcomes. Vertical linkages with institutions functioning at higher scale levels can support and strengthen local innovations. Researchers retain an important role in these processes of establishing horizontal and vertical linkages.

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