Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Allan Lavell (FLACSO)

Safety, resilience and sustainability of cities and human settlements signifies guaranteeing these conditions for the elements that comprise them. This is so both individually (health systems, transportation lines, housing, education facilities, cultural centers etc.) and integrally (i.e. the linkages between these in the frame of life zones and neighborhoods, functional economic areas, etc.). Guaranteeing functional spatial interconnectivity is also critical.

Cities and human settlements are integrated functional, socio-environmental systems, not sectors or individual development concerns, where the components must be integrated thematically and territorially if security, resilience, sustainability, efficacy and efficiency are to be achieved. A challenge to such conditions is offered by the growing and changing nature and influence of urban disasters, related to climate variability and change and geological or geomorphological conditions, and the levels of exposure and vulnerability in urban systems and their components.

As with cities and human settlements, the nature and causes of urban disaster risk and disaster do not relate to single sector concerns. Rather, these conditions are the product of the complex interaction between multiple elements and conditions that define the city and its functioning, and which may find themselves under differential disaster hazard, exposure and vulnerability conditions. Disaster risk and disaster, (which tend to affect urban centers more and more and will do so in the future due to the ever-increasing dominance of human settlements in population and economic distributions), and their management, are not sector defined, but rather, conditions derived from the integrated playing out of what have been termed "skewed development processes". They represent unfulfilled or failed development and are symbolic of failed human-environmental interactions and relations. One result of such failings is in fact our own anthropogenic construction of new and more complex hazard factors (climate change is the most imposing of these).

Given the above arguments, security and sustainability of cities is inevitably a cross thematic and sector concern. In fact, if we were to reconceptualize the notion of "sustainable development goals" it is possible to argue that these should be defined from the beginning taking typological integrated human systems such as small, medium and large cities, subsistence   and commercial agricultural zones, as a basis and then examining these holistically from the perspective of the themes and sectors that now dominate the sustainability goals matrix of the UN. As it is the goals are dominated by thematic or sector concerns and the goals relating to cities and human settlements beaks that logic.

The ability to achieve secure, sustainable, resilient and inclusive human settlements thus derives from our ability to break the chain of sector causality and move in more holistic, integral modes with relation to such critical areas as socio-spatial segregation and urban poverty, processes of urban environmental degradation, the interconnectivity of urban systems, urban governance and the need for cross territorial integration. Unfortunately, our mind sets, and structures of command are not normally set up to deal with integration, and sector and thematic thought and practice still dominate. The outcomes of partial approaches enacted through thematic or sector concerns is

highly influenced by the power relations within a city and the influence of urban rent factors, thus demanding much improved urban governance and control.