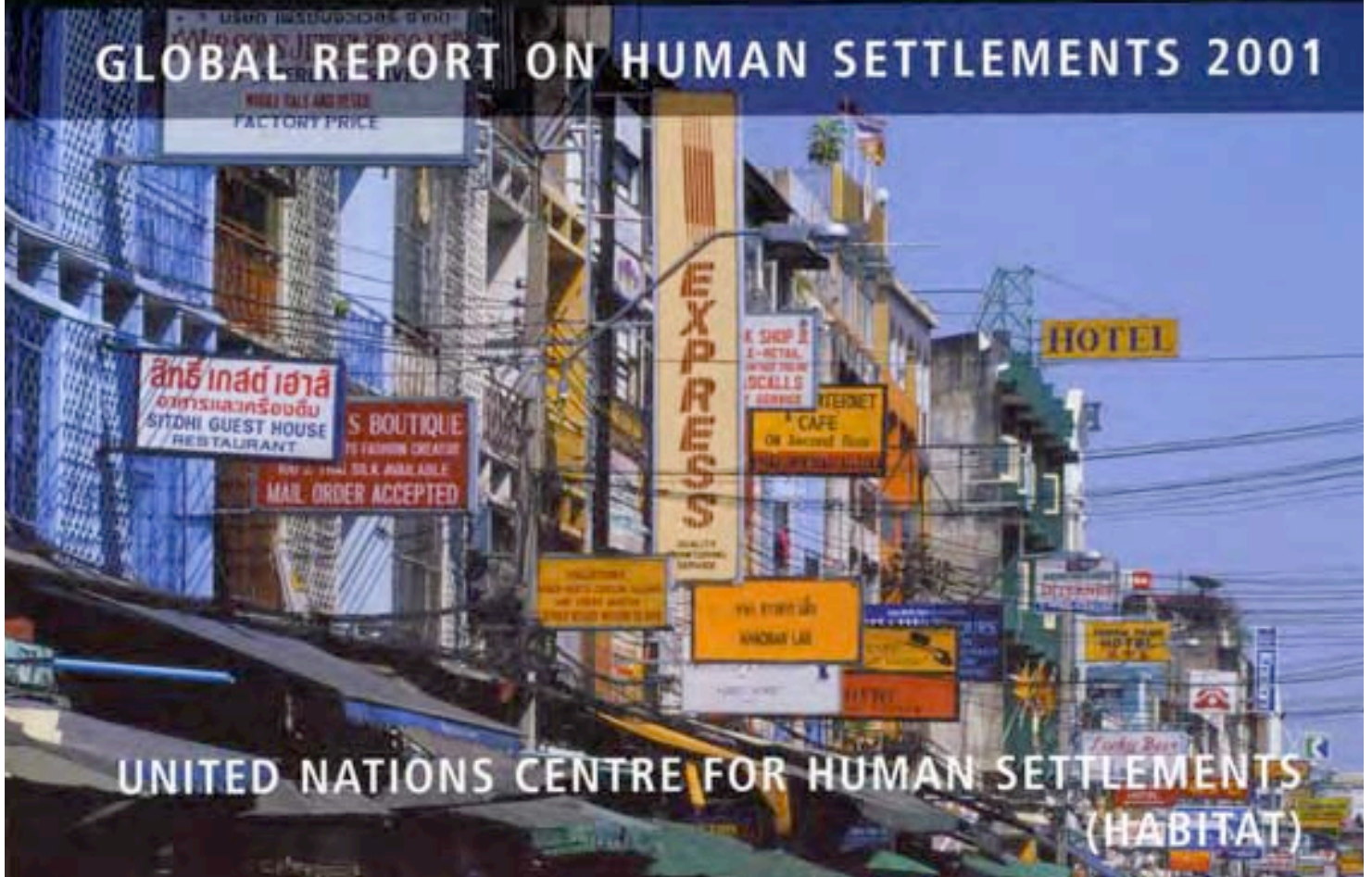# CITIES IN
A GLOBALIZING WORLD

GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2001

UNITED NATIONS CENTRE FOR HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
(HABITAT)

CITIES IN
A GLOBALIZING WORLD
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2001

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

EARTHSCAN

London and Sterling, VA

The village internet programme (VIP), in operation since July 1999 in Madhupur, a village in Tangail district about 160 km away from Dhaka, Bangladesh, has as its main objectives to:

- Familiarize the village people, particularly the young generation, with the use of computer and the internet.
- Provide computer training for a minimal price, thus helping to build a computer literate generation.
- Create IT-related local job opportunities.
- Offer low-cost computing and printing facilities, previously unavailable in this rural area.
- Facilitate access to relevant market information, for example, prevalent market prices of specific products in different locations. This gives the village people a better bargaining capacity when selling their produce.
- Provide email facilities for families with relatives abroad.
- Provide free email services to teachers and students for educational purposes and to doctors and journalists for emergency purposes.

In order to fulfil these objectives, Grameen Communications has introduced the following commercial services, which cross-subsidize the free services provided for educational and medical purposes:

- Job training for students and unemployed youth in rural areas, including data entry and programming, at an affordable price.
- Courses on computer operating systems and application software, eg MS Word and Excel.
- Advertising and marketing facilities through email. Clients are offered free advertisement for the first two months, after which they can become members for a minimum fee.
- Page composition and printing for a fee of 5–15 takas (50 takas = US$1).

Source: Tariq Alam, Grameen Communications, personal communications, 14 and 15 February 2000.

Reconceptualizing transparency: grassroots movements for accountability to the poor[30]

If globalization is as much about the flow of ideas as it is the movement of capital, then among its many manifestations has been the widespread diffusion of ideas about governance. Global institutions such as the World Bank have been crucial in disseminating the idea of good government, a notion that has come in for much criticism since its entry into the development lexicon at the beginning of the 1990s.

Transparency and accountability are central to good, democratic governance

Two concepts have been central to the idea of good (democratic) government: transparency and accountability. The former is, in theory, meant to help achieve the latter, though both are ill-defined. While increased transparency has indeed generated markedly higher levels of accountability in many parts of the world in recent years, the primary setting of this trend has been the private rather than the public sector: it is in the area of corporate governance that transparency has been taken furthest, in the form of stricter and more uniform disclosure norms that clearly have increased the capacity of shareholders to keep a vigilant eye on the performance of corporate managers.

These innovations have clearly influenced approaches by the public sector, especially the 'client focus' rhetoric, if not actual behaviour, of agencies throughout the world. But government bureaucracies have inherited a number of the shortcomings of corporate transparency as well.

The work of several activist groups in different parts of India illustrates the main deficiency of existing efforts, both within and beyond India, to promote transparency in the public and private sectors: their elite bias, and their consequent inability to rectify the information inequalities that characterize even today's globalizing world of free-flowing data. Just as importantly, they signal the radical possibilities of transparency, an idea in serious danger of withering from overuse and underspecification. The experiences of two groups serve as examples illustrating points of broader applicability. The first highlights problems and prospects in public sector, while the latter addresses issues relating to transparency and accountability in the private sector.

● Local participatory auditing of the public sector

The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), or Worker and Farmer Power Organization, is based in the northern state of Rajasthan. Over the past six years, the MKSS has held a series of 'public hearings', unofficial gatherings of ordinary people in villages and small towns. Prior to these hearings, MKSS activists obtain copies of government documents related to the planning and execution of local development projects. India's bureaucracy, still operating within the constraints of the colonial-era Official Secrets Act, is not keen to share these sensitive records, partly due to sheer force of habit and partly for fear of providing evidence of official misdeeds. But sympathetic (or sometimes naive) bureaucrats often provide the necessary documents. Sometimes direct action protests, such as a sit-in outside a local rural development agency office, are required.

The MKSS activists include a number of seemingly unlikely members of local society, such as semi-employed labourers, poor women and members of the lower strata of the Hindu caste hierarchy. Armed with documents indicating the amounts spent on each aspect of specific public works in the local vicinity, the technical specifications of the works and statements indicating payments to labourers, the MKSS goes about systematically auditing these projects. For instance, labourers on employment-generation schemes are shown official accounts, which show that the workers have been paid the minimum wage, and are asked to verify or dispute the amounts entered next to their names in the ledgers. Drivers of camel carts – a popular mode of transport in mainly desert-covered Rajasthan – report on how many bags of cement were actually delivered to specific work sites, in many instances calling into question the inflated figures listed in project documents.

At the public hearing itself, workers and others with relevant evidence that contradicts the statements contained within government records are invited to repeat their testimony. MKSS activists have read aloud (to the largely non-literate villagers) from employment registers that list

recent payments to people everyone knows are long dead. In one case, the public hearing was held in front of a dilapidated school which, according to official documents read out at the meeting, had just been repaired at considerable expense. A stream of satirical commentary combines with public outrage at the extent of fraud to create an atmosphere in which the trappings of power lose some of their magic. Local politicians and bureaucrats, a surprising number of whom actually attend the hearings, are asked to account for these discrepancies, as their signatures are to be found on the documents certifying that construction was complete, even when it manifestly was not, and that beneficiaries of anti-poverty programmes meet the eligibility criteria, even when everyone knows they do not. In some instances, officials have owned up to appropriating funds. In a small number of cases they have actually returned ill-gotten loot.

The public-hearing process has allowed the MKSS to develop a radical interpretation of the notion that ordinary citizens have a right both to know how they are governed and to participate actively in the process of auditing their representatives in minute detail. Not only has the MKSS built a movement demanding the passage in Parliament of Right to Information legislation – a state-level act was passed in Rajasthan in mid-2000, and much-debated national legislation should be enacted by 2001 – it has managed to transform the popular understanding of freedom of information by showing its applicability to the concerns of the rural poor, for whom government programmes are a lifeline against the vicissitudes of (increasingly global) economic circumstances.

Public debate increasingly acknowledges the relationship between opacity and the perpetuation of everyday forms of corruption that afflict highly vulnerable people. Until the mid-1990s, the right to information had been most closely associated with the right to free expression. India thus followed international precedent, which tended to group the right to information with press freedom, as in the United States, where the Freedom of Information Act is associated with the press in general, and has received judicial affirmation under the free-expression provisions in the US Bill of Rights. The MKSS, in its grassroots organizing and practical work, as well as in its own documentation, prefers to locate the right to information within the Indian Constitution's provisions guaranteeing the right to life and livelihood.

There are many implications of this case, but what needs to be emphasized in the context of this report is the extent to which the MKSS's grassroots work has breathed new life into an increasingly hackneyed term, transparency. Its skill in mobilizing ordinary people on very sensitive matters has exposed the hollowness of initiatives by public agencies in many parts of India to pass off bureaucratically controlled information-sharing activities as radical experiments in 'open government'. The type of 'information' that government departments pledge to provide is usually prospective rather than retrospective, thus avoiding the possibility of popular 'audit' and genuine accountability. Government initiatives on transparency often involve bureaucrats preparing promotional literature on existing

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Box 17.8 Sign the contract yourself!

In the global rush to privatize property in developing countries, local specialists and foreign advisers assigned to survey land and grant titles most often treat the family as a unit. Because families change and women often do not receive explicit title to property, the practice increases disparities between women and men. The case of Laos illustrates the issues. Although a small country, Laos is particularly interesting because of the matrilineal tradition in rights to land among the lowland Lao (the majority group); it is also an example of transition from socialist planning to market-oriented reforms.

The reform period began in the mid-1980s. Forest and farmlands that were traditionally used by certain families have gradually been officially titled. The government also permits purchase of up to 15 ha of land per person (the limit is to prevent total domination by one or two wealthy families). The biggest problem is that typically the husband alone would sign a contract for the family's land. This amounted to a transfer of control of land from the wife and her extended family to that of the husband.

This constituted a windfall profit for the husband and his relatives. Divorce and abandonment have been increasing, though still low compared with Western experience. Even though most couples have stayed together, the transfer of control could be seen to affect land use and sale since the husband's family did not have long ties to that plot of land. The practice contributed to more rapid deforestation. In addition, the award of initial titles led some people to believe erroneously that they could sell their land and then get another title for a new plot from the government.

Specialists analysing gender aspects of land titling in Laos began to point out that women were losing their traditional rights and that courts might not recognize their share in land ownership if their names did not appear on the contracts. Local researchers managed to get the contracts altered so that they now have two lines for the signatures of both wife and husband. This has been useful, but problems continue in getting those witnessing the titling process to make sure that the wife also signs. Although this is just one part of addressing gender inequality in property rights, it can be beneficial and one of the simpler, win–win strategies in assigning rights to use and own property.

Source: Tinker and Summerfield, 1999.

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schemes, or else promising to speed up the delivery of 'information services', such as delivery of a birth certificate for a citizen who needs documentary proof of age and residence for a government job. These kinds of initiatives are usually not only anodyne in content, but also seldom developed at local levels accessible to the poor.

The MKSS is fighting an uphill battle, not only because of the power and resources of state and private elites who would like to shield their activities from public gaze, but also owing to the suspicion with which critical public opinion in India has come to view the idea of transparency. The push for transparency is associated with multinational capital, which tends to discredit the idea to some degree among India's mainly left-leaning social activists. Their fear is that official multilateral agencies like the World Bank and transnational NGOs like Transparency International (founded by former World Bank staffers and funded by several high-profile multinational companies) promote transparency only to the extent that it can assist foreign firms in gaining access to the Indian market and exploiting India's natural and human resources. Thus, there is support for more transparent settlement systems on the Mumbai Stock Exchange; but no effort to promote access for members of the public to background documentation relating to Memoranda of Understanding between foreign firms and various public authorities.

● **Private sector transparency that goes beyond disclosure of financial performance**

Indeed, the elite-biased transparency initiatives pursued by government agencies in India are seen as a natural by-product of the form that corporate transparency has taken. The work of a trade union in Mumbai has highlighted the need for private sector transparency to shed its narrow preoccupations with those aspects of financial disclosure that concern, almost exclusively, capital markets. The Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (GKSS), or Textile Workers Struggle Committee, has sought to hold Mumbai's textile firms accountable for their commitments to workers. Ailing companies have taken large packages of state assistance, but have not been forced to account publicly for their use of the funds, which are supposed to assist in the revitalization of the mills, the preservation of jobs and the welfare of workers.

Unions such as the GKSS are hamstrung due to a lack of information. GKSS activists would like not only detailed information on what state-provided revitalization funds have been used for, but also (in those cases where companies have clearly not lived up to their side of the bargain) why government regulators have failed to take action. Thus, the GKSS has turned the spotlight on the lack of transparency in those regulatory bodies responsible for protecting the interests of highly vulnerable citizens from unaccountable exercises of corporate power.

That transparency in the regulatory bureaucracy – which implies transparency in corporations themselves to the degree that they must submit documentation to government agencies which is then available to the public – has not been a concern of either international bodies or Indian public authorities comes as no surprise to activists working among poor communities. The agenda, they argue, is being driven by the interests of domestic and international investors, whose interest extends almost exclusively to data on financial performance. Investors would, of course, care more about information relating to other regulatory functions were they convinced that, for instance, provincial Pollution Control Boards were likely to do their jobs effectively – that is, in ways that might impinge upon profits – rather than, as is all too often the case, with scant regard for proper procedure. The lack of transparency allows these and other regulatory agencies to get away with such lapses and the corruption that accompanies them.

● **Lessons**

Both the MKSS and the GKSS have participated, in collaboration with a range of other NGOs and people's movements, in protests against the process by which public authorities have vetted various business projects involving multinational corporations. It is in this sphere of activity that the lessons of these two organizations may have their most powerful reverberations. The opposition to multinationally financed industrial projects often takes the same locality-specific form that the MKSS has pioneered. This is logical. Just as government accounts can only be effectively audited at the local level (where people's expertise about local events, people and places can be brought to bear), claims by multinationals about the proposed project sites (their environmental characteristics, employment profiles and, most importantly, the opinions of local people about the desirability of such projects) are best verified at local levels.

> Government accounts can only be effectively audited at the local level where people's expertise about local events, people and places can be brought to bear

For this conception of accountability to take root, however, corporations must be obliged to supply information about their intentions not only to government regulators, but to citizens as well. While the main beneficiaries will be people residing in the vicinity of proposed projects, a larger range of actors from among the nation-wide network of civil society organizations will no doubt analyse and debate the implications of the information received; things like environmental impact statements and projections of employment creation, foreign-exchange requirements and all the other things that national laws require authorities to scrutinize before approving the establishment of such ventures.

Moreover, as a number of existing cases of local opposition to multinational projects in India have demonstrated, the information supplied will have to cover the global operations of the firms concerned. Only by studying in detail, on the basis of documentary evidence, the conduct and impact of a firm's previous and existing business ventures in other countries can an informed judgement on an investment proposal be made. Through just such means were activists in the western state of Goa made aware of shortcomings in the environmental record of the DuPont Corporation, which was at that time planning a nylon factory near Goa's famed beaches. Data obtained from activists in the United States highlighted several inconsistencies in the government of Goa's defence of the DuPont project, and the project was ultimately scrapped. This experience is also a good example of 'globalization-from-below', showing how civil society can take advantage of transnational networks to obtain relevant information to help mobilize necessary resources.

> People whose lives and livelihoods depend on the accountable exercise of corporate and governmental power should have official information available to them by right

People whose lives and livelihoods depend on the accountable exercise of corporate and governmental power should not have to rely on having to obtain official information informally by activists. It must be made available by right. For this to happen, governments must rethink transparency; both in terms of their direct interactions with poor and vulnerable people in development programmes, and perhaps more importantly, in the obligations they impose on private-sector actors to divulge details of their intentions and ongoing activities. Pension-fund managers in the North will only demand the degree of transparency necessary to protect their investments. To

protect people, governments (and people themselves) are the only solution.

Reducing Urban Violence[31]

Violence, previously regarded as an issue of criminal pathology, is now recognized also as a development problem, particularly in urban areas.[32] The incidence of crime, robbery and gang violence, as well as gender-based domestic violence, undermines both macro- and micro-economic growth and productivity of a country's development, as well as societal and individual well-being.[33] In addition, the number of countries currently experiencing internal armed conflict has escalated dramatically since the end of the Cold War, with cities often at the centre of civil strife. Map 1 and Tables 15.1–15.3 in Chapter 15 showed the massive dislocations and vast numbers of homeless people that result.

'The same technological means that foster globalization and the transnational expansion of civil society also provide the infrastructure for expanding global networks of "uncivil society" – organized crime, drug traffickers, money launderers and terrorists' – Kofi Annan, **Renewal Amid Transition: Annual Report on the Work of the Organization, 3 September 1997**

The globalization of crime through international rings – such as Mexican and Colombian drug cartels, the Jamaican posses and the Chinese triads – has reduced the significance of city or national boundaries with some violence problems.[34] In urban areas, the relationship between inequality, exclusion and violence is increasingly acknowledged. Its impact on human rights, governance and democratic political procedures is now a global concern.[35] At the same time, there is an alarming trend where safety and security are decreasingly seen as a public responsibility and increasingly treated as a private good, available to those with the ability to pay, protecting those that are better off, while leaving the poor more vulnerable and especially putting women at greater risk. This worrisome trend is closely linked to the quartering of cities, discussed in Chapter 2.

● Definitional issues

References to 'violent crime', 'criminal conflict', 'conflictual violence' and 'violent conflict' illustrate how terms such as violence, crime and conflict frequently are categorized synonymously, despite important distinctions between them.[36] Both violence and conflict are concerned with power. The key difference refers to the fact that conflict – power struggles over competing goals for scarce resources between two or more parties[37] – does not necessarily inflict physical or mental harm on others, while violence by its very nature does.

Conflict can be peacefully resolved through negotiation without recourse to force but becomes violent when it includes fighting and killing

Conflict can be peacefully resolved through negotiation without recourse to force but becomes violent when it includes fighting and killing. Violence by its very nature includes 'an uninvited but intentional or half-intentional act of physical violation'.[38] Finally, crime is an act (usually a grave offence) punishable by law; that is, the breach of a legal prohibition. Perceptions as to which crimes are violent, or which types of violence are unlawful differ widely, determined less by objective indicators of degree of damage or injury than by cultural values and power relations.

Violence can refer to the *nature of a violent act*[39] (including the distinction between direct, indirect, repressive and alienating violence), or to the *organizational level* (such as the distinction between organized [politically motivated, organized in groups] and disorganized violence [individual crime, delinquency, vandalism]).[40] Equally it can be defined *by uneven distribution of power and resources in society*, as in the concept of personal and 'structural violence',[41] or in terms of *unequal access to justice* as in the concept of 'institutional violence' as perpetrated by police and other state institutions.[42] Given definitional complexities such as these, frequently it is virtually impossible to distinguish the point at which violence ends and conflict begins.[43]

● Measurements

The measurement of violence is fraught with difficulties. The most common measures are based on mortality rates. However, statistics are notoriously unreliable as they can only reveal those cases reported, and are difficult to interpret.[44] In addition, national and regional differences in data collection methods recall periods and cultural definitions of crime and violence make valid cross-country comparisons hard to achieve, and only possible through global data sets such as the International Crime Victimization Survey. Other data sources commonly used to measure crime and violence levels include victimization studies, official crime statistics, homicide/ intentional injury statistics from hospitals and undertakers, offender surveys and death certificates.[45] More recently, qualitative participatory urban appraisal techniques have been used for the study of community perceptions of violence.[46]

Categories of urban violence

The range of types of urban violence is both highly complex and context-specific. In a participatory study in urban Jamaica, local residents listed up to 19 types of violence in one community including political, gang, economic, interpersonal and domestic disputes; in a similar study in Guatemala, some 60 types of violence were identified.[47] Therefore, it is important to clarify the complexity of violence without oversimplifying the concept. Any categorization is, by its very nature, static since in the real world, violence exists along a continuum with important reinforcing linkages between different types of violence.

Recent research has divided violence into three categories: *political violence*, *economic violence* and *social violence*, each identified in terms of the type of motivation that consciously or unconsciously uses violence to gain or maintain its power. Table 17.1 summarizes some of the