



**SDI.**  
SHACK/SLUM DWELLERS  
INTERNATIONAL

## Shack / Slum Dwellers International Strategic Plan 2013 - 2017

### 1. PRIMARY MECHANISMS OF SDI'S WORK

*In this and below "SDI" refers to the federations of the homeless and landless, their support NGOs and the collective structures that link these federations and their support NGOs at the international level.*

1. SDI engages the policy space around people's participation in citywide upgrading.
2. SDI explores through practice new paradigms for slum improvement with an emphasis on in-situ, incremental, affordable upgrading.
3. SDI builds new mechanisms and instruments for shelter finance and social organization, with a central focus on women's networks, and based on partnership with government and the private sector.
4. SDI seeks to transform SDI enumeration and mapping data such that it is the standard for urban development decision-making and research, especially through partnerships between community-based networks and state authorities.
5. SDI refines its approaches to professional support and technical assistance to affiliated urban poor federations in order to achieve its aims.
6. SDI builds partnerships with other stakeholders, and institutionalizes tested practices (its own and those of other actors) in order to scale up

### 2. SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES FOR THE STRATEGIC PLAN

#### *2.1 More Robust Systems of Learning, Reflection and Monitoring*

In order for SDI to escalate its impact, its primary tool for learning needs to be applied with more focus and with more robust monitoring and follow-up. This includes building scalable protocols and institutional arrangements for horizontal exchange and action-based learning in informal settlements. Further, we underline the need to strengthen and rejuvenate community savings, especially as a means of bringing women together in order to take on slum upgrading together with local governments.

#### *2.2 Practices of Federation-Building Need to Respond to Demands of Scaling Up*

Community savings will remain the thread that links household finance to development finance. Savings has enormous value as a means of organizing, monetizing the political capital of the urban poor, centralizing the role of women and creating a change process from the household to the national level.

While savings remain central to the SDI approach, current activities suggest that SDI's future, beginning with this strategic plan, will be defined equally by its ability to mainstream, standardize and strengthen community profiling, mapping and surveying. Savings and information gathering and management are the twin engines that will drive SDI's mobilization strategies, its planning interventions, its political and developmental priorities, its international agenda and the monitoring and evaluation of its work.

### ***2.3. SDI Seeded Projects Should Address Affordability and Impact More Widely***

If there is one characteristic that is shared by every city federation that has been able to go to scale it has been a conscious commitment to supporting incremental upgrading of informal settlements, almost always *in situ*.

In the federations that are having a citywide impact, incremental upgrading is significantly increasing the numbers of safer, healthier, affordable living environments than is the case where conventional approaches are being followed. These incremental projects also tend to create much more meaningful engagements between communities and local Governments than housing projects, and to build stronger community organizations and more accountable officials and politicians.

### ***2.4 Financial Sustainability to be Enhanced***

SDI has no illusions about the market. The sector that contributes in a very fundamental way to exclusion and poverty cannot be relied on to address poverty and inequality. One of SDI'S core objectives remains influencing political space in order to secure access to basic needs for its members, the overwhelming majority of whom are very low-income and vulnerable women living in illegal settlements.

At the same time SDI is aware of the potential contribution offered by the market as a means to contributing to project costs and capitalizing investments.

SDI's approach to financial sustainability has been altered fundamentally by the increasing ability of federations in low-income countries, despite the lack of government investments in slum upgrading, to achieve citywide scale. Since this has been built on the backs of donor finance, the question of sustainability has come to the fore. It is clear that in addition to the political agenda, which is to try to re-direct state resources to slum upgrading, it is necessary to develop strategies to secure these market-based opportunities as well.

### ***2.5 Long Term Viability to be Ensured through Cross-the-Board Capacitation of New Leaders Through an Inter-Generational Transfer of Knowledge.***

SDI needs to accelerate the capacitation and empowerment of new leaders, not only to expand the current team but to prepare for the next generation. There is also a need to create the space for inter-generational transfer of skills and knowledge. This applies to members as much as it does to leaders.

## ***2.6 Building a Broad Agglomeration of Grassroots Networks in Order to Impact on the International Urban Poverty Agenda***

SDI needs to build strategic alliances in order to change the international advocacy space in regard to urban poverty issues instead of leaving the terrain in the complete control of larger agencies with a significant stake in the current paradigm.

### **3. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

SDI's serious commitment to building collaborative partnerships between organized communities and (especially) local governments in contexts of deep urban poverty, landlessness and homelessness is one of its most important contributions to participatory, inclusive, pro-poor and sustainable development. It has made SDI into one of the leading global coalitions of the urban poor. It is also one of its most salient challenges, especially when up-scaling to the citywide level.

Balancing the agency of city and settlement level interventions and practices with global structures of governance and sets of rules or ritual requires skillful institution building, capable of navigating the complex and diverse contours of informal settlement upgrading. In this context, one of the most important aspects of SDI's success in forging partnerships in practice has been its ability to negotiate and transact, locally and trans-nationally, around a common set of problems and agendas guided by social and political change.

The development of SDI's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework has been a complex and intricate task that has involved the balancing of external and internal accountability demands. SDI now boasts a comprehensive system for tracking its interventions at the national level, which generally take the form of supporting profiles and enumerations (the all critical baseline activity of communities "documenting" themselves), exchange programmes, seminars and training. SDI is now able to assess and demonstrate how these interventions advance the capacities and struggles for inclusion and access for its member federations, and at the same time to provide regular quantitative snapshots of the nature and scale of SDI's direct and indirect contributions to the physical upgrading of slums.

SDI also plays a critical role at the international level, although it is clear at all times that it engages in global advocacy only if it has direct, tangible benefits for its affiliates at the informal settlement level. The experience of federations of the urban poor that make up the SDI network underlines the potentials and practices for interconnections of actions that impact both locally and globally at the same time. Every time a foreign corporation, government, or other type of organization expresses interest in land or development in a city and in a country, it impacts the everyday lives of the poor. Citizens and their governments are under pressure from both national and international development activities (private and public sectors). In many cases, these limit the options available, particularly those favouring low-income and otherwise disadvantaged groups, thereby restricting their access to secure tenure, basic services and economic opportunities.

The challenge, then, is to build organizations and alliances that can build local strength to manage to balance power and influence of powerful global processes with local needs to make urbanization work for all. The lesson here is that local actors, especially in city government, through exploring the potential of working and supporting city-wide federations of the urban poor makes them more effective in their role managing these processes to address economic opportunities with local accountability in place.

At the global level, SDI is increasingly serving as a platform for allowing representatives of organized urban poor constituencies to speak directly with decision-makers in major international organizations and forums. The aim and impact of these interactions is to strengthen the local processes through which federations form and build city-wide alliances.

In this respect its engagement with Cities Alliance, the World Bank, the Union of Cities and Local Governments (Africa) and UN Habitat have begun to produce results. SDI's most effective engagements in this regard have been to the benefit of India, Uganda, Kenya and Ghana.

Through its Urban Poor Fund International SDI has now seeded over 100 land, infrastructure and housing projects, most of which have been rooted in multi-stakeholder partnerships and have demonstrated the catalytic role that organized communities can play in slum upgrading and poverty eradication strategies that are capable of achieving scale.

While upgrading projects funded by UPFI are very diverse, an important trend is now emerging. The majority of projects are now incremental in nature, with tenure security and access to basic services supplanting housing projects both in terms of number of projects and overall financial outlay. SDI certainly regards housing as a vital part of a slum upgrading and citywide development continuum, but this shift in emphasis means that projects are more affordable and inclusive. This in turn means that the potential for social and political impact is enhanced. Furthermore UPFI funded projects tend to have a positive impact on the spatial planning dimensions of cities and towns. Instead of green-fields housing projects on the fringes of the cities, incremental upgrading projects are generally in better-located parcels of land that are closer to city centres. Over time, these infrastructure interventions often evolve into incremental housing projects, which UPFI also supports. The medium term aim of UPFI in this regard is to leverage outside resources for these projects from the State and from financial institutions.

SDI has also sought to encourage the financial autonomy of its affiliates. Its approach has been to offer minimal support for operational costs and to restrict its capacity-building support to inter-country activities. As far as income-generation opportunities are concerned SDI has limited its role to acting as a conduit, in some cases, for funds for national initiatives.

#### **4. SDI'S THEORY OF CHANGE**

Dominant trends of urban development in the rapidly urbanizing Global South have generated a high degree of informality and poverty. The urban poor need to prioritize their own demands and articulate their aspirations to become critical actors in transforming cities so that they work for them and for all other urban inhabitants.

In order to achieve this they need to create local, national and transnational organizations that build their capacity, create institutional identity, and produce multiple tiers of leadership that can fight and negotiate for space voice and inclusion in the rights of the city. Such organisations allow the poor to become actors that can trigger new institutional relationships amongst government, private sector, and civil society. These are relationships that alter both the decision-making processes and associated developmental outcomes in cities to be more inclusive of the voices and priorities of the poor.

#### **5. SDI'S MISSION**

SDI's mission is to build the voice and agency of slum dweller communities, with a special focus on the role of women, in order to achieve inclusive cities in which the urban poor are to be at the centre of strategies and decision-making for equitable urban development.

#### **6. ACTIONS REQUIRED TO MEET THESE OBJECTIVES**

##### ***6.1 Refine, Improve and Strengthen SDI's Primary Learning Methodology.***

SDI will transition from a broad-based, demand-driven approach to learning, in which federations identify learning destinations themselves, to a sharper more focused approach. SDI will identify three to four countries that will serve as centres for learning. There should be at least one middle-income country, where state and market subsidies define the institutional environment in which community-driven upgrading can take place. These one or two middle-income countries should be complemented by one or two low-income countries, in which a lack of meaningful intervention by the state or the market has defined the terms for community action.

At the same time the process of calibrating exchange programmes and defining them in greater detail needs to be sustained and even intensified. Exchange programmes then become differentiated in accordance with their intended outcomes and monitored and assessed accordingly.

#### DIFFERENTIATED EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES

1. Exposure programme for new affiliates
2. Exposure visit for other organization(s) or network(s)
3. Direct learning around SDI Rituals and Practices (savings, role of women, enumerations, engaging government, etc.)
4. Lobbying and advocacy exchanges, that include stakeholders such as officials & politicians
5. Exchange & training programmes to build and strengthen leadership in terms of governance, structures, accountability, systems;
6. Exchanges and Seminars focusing on locally relevant issues relating to slum upgrading, affordability, incremental development;
7. Exchanges to deal with specific problems relating to informality and development: evictions, land tenure, relocations.
8. Exchanges to provide specific technical and professional training: design, budgeting, project management and maintenance, procurement.

Another strategy to enhance, strengthen and sharpen SDI's exchange-based learning modalities is the establishment of more systematic knowledge activities and principles for eliminating urban poverty through "knowledge hubs." SDI does not have another, conventional, learning and training agency in mind. Instead SDI envisages action-based learning agencies, to be rolled out gradually to the centres of learning.

### ***6.2 Sharpen, Simplify and Systematize SDI Enumeration And Mapping Practices and Promote them as The Standard For Urban Development Decision-Making***

SDI federations have been involved in self-surveying and mapping for decades. The purpose has primarily been to create alternative systems of knowledge that could be owned by urban poor communities to have better control of development decision-making that affects their lives and neighborhoods. Communities were able to use their own data as the basis for triggering new negotiations with formal authorities. The SDI enumeration databases have now reached a stage where they can become the largest repositories of informal settlement data in the world and the first port of call for researchers, policy makers, local governments and national governments.

The proposed centres for learning and more systematic production of knowledge through the hub will be charged with reinforcing the informal, exchange-based training of affiliates (and other grassroots organizations) in the technical and political dimensions of community-based data gathering and management.

### ***6.3 Incremental Upgrading***

Incremental upgrading must lie at the heart of any movement of the urban poor that organizes around land and housing.

To continue to develop this approach SDI will:

- a) prioritize in-situ, incremental upgrading (and negotiated relocations where removals are unavoidable) on suitable land as its core learning and implementation objective;
- b) ensure that incremental upgrading projects are the primary focal points for action-based learning and training in the 3 or 4 centres of learning;
- c) weight UPFI capital grants and loans in favour of incremental upgrading projects, with a primary emphasis on basic services;
- d) create within UPFI new instruments, based on full cost recovery not on grants, for the provision of seed capital for greenfields housing projects.

#### **6.4. Diversify SDI's Income Streams**

A number of federations have reached a level of maturity where they are able to attempt projects that generate net financial returns at the same time that they achieve SDI's two core objectives of influencing the political space and providing access to basic needs for their members. Moreover, these projects are the means through which SDI is able to pioneer alternative economies of shelter production in order to shape more inclusive urban development. These projects currently include:

- mixed housing developments with a cross-subsidy element to ensure the inclusion of low-income households,
- the upgrading and management of informal markets,
- the construction and operation of pay-per-use communal toilets,
- off-the-grid solar energy hubs.

#### **6.5 Leadership Succession Planning and Increased Focus on Youth**

SDI has a small core leadership with considerable experience. At the same time SDI is gifted with a cohort of second-tier leadership at the national level – federation coordinators and senior NGO staff. For several years now SDI founder leaders have been drawing second tier leaders into the decision-making process by setting up a Council of Federations and by expanding the Board. SDI has also opened space for second tier leadership to be more active in the global arena.

However there is an identified need for greater planning and the proper implementation of strategies for the sustained capacitation of these leaders by the existing leadership in the network. Second tier leadership needs to be able to move into senior positions, gradually becoming the voice, the face and the brains of the network. In turn the second-tier leadership needs to mentor a new crop of leaders into the national leadership space.

There is also a recognized need to strengthen systems of peer accountability and the accountability of leadership and their practices both downwards to members and upwards to democratic and equally accountable groups within the network. As this leadership training and development takes place, accountability systems will be examined and improved

## ***6.6 Building Strategic Alliances to Better Contest the Global Advocacy Space***

SDI works for empowerment, social change and for the transformation and inclusion of those whom development has left behind. SDI works for transforming cities from the bottom-up. In order to achieve these goals SDI has to work with international development agencies, foundations and grant-makers, since these are the agencies that set the global urban agenda and determine resource flows and allocations at the global level.

In this 21st century, the older aid architecture and its accountability to the grant makers needs to be transformed into a joint venture, with collective accountability, which also seeks to make governments, cities, communities and financial investors real partners in the upgrading of slums. Ironically, in order to contribute to such an outcome SDI has to move beyond donor dependence, both institutionally and financially and take leadership to reformulate roles and relationships, and to produce new financial instruments. Such a shift is critical if SDI wishes to upscale its interventions and make a substantive contribution to the challenges, in terms of infrastructure, habitat and livelihoods, that the urban poor and city governments will face with increasing urgency in the coming years.