

**Official Event
Plenary Session**

**Human Rights Cities
Responding to Poverty and Inequalities
Full Paper**

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Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this important conference on HRE. I am honored to be able to participate although I must apologize for not being there in person. Talking of poverty, inequality and human rights is always a sobering and challenging exercise where we need to exert a lot of careful balance between good and bad news.

(1) Regarding facts and evidence, there is a lot we already know.

At the Bank we estimated that 8.4% of the global population living under US\$ 2.15 PPP in 2019 (or 648 million) and have nowcasted that such poverty rate in 2022 would be 8.4%, that is, 3 years lost in the fight against extreme poverty and the aspiration of ending poverty by 2030.

There is significant regional variation in the share of the extreme poor who live in urban areas, ranging from 57 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean to only 13 percent in South Asia.

For every child living in extreme poverty in an urban area, there are 5 in rural areas.

We also know a lot in terms of gaps in access to services such as health, education, electricity, W&S, infrastructure in urban areas vs rural areas. Gaps in access to these services but also to physical, digital, cultural spaces, impede people to participate in society with dignity, which clashes with human rights principle.

(2) But there is also a lot we don't know:

We cannot measure poverty or inequality within cities, at least with the information we typically use. We cannot precisely unpack either gaps in the access to public services within cities between the poor and the non-poor, or across specific vulnerable groups, such as ethnic or SOGI minorities or persons with disability.

Of course, we can use satellite data (nightlights are increasing popular), administrative data (for access to certain services or social benefits), or georeferenced censuses. But none of those sources will give a clear and comprehensive way to diagnose and monitor poverty, inequality or exclusion patterns and trends within a city.

(3) With what we know and don't know, we cannot be hopeful about the future:

Progress in reducing global poverty has essentially halted and the current estimate by 2030 show increasingly clearly that we will not likely end extreme poverty by 2030.

Within-country inequality increased in as many countries as it declined, but after decades of convergence, global inequality increased.

The poorest have also suffered disproportionate losses in health and education with devastating consequences from COVID-19.

And CITIES are critical part of these patterns and projected trends.

(4) And yet we have a lot of evidence of policies that are proven to reduce poverty and inequality consistent with HR across different contexts, also including urban areas.

- Early childhood development and nutrition interventions
- Universal health coverage
- Universal access to quality education
- Cash transfers to poor families
- Rural infrastructure, especially transport and electrification
- Progressive taxation

All these are absolutely relevant policies to cities, both across cities and within cities, with municipal authorities being at the forefront of the delivery of such services, the implementation of programs but also the political negotiations for investments and revenue collection and distribution from the central government.

But yet, it must be noted that cities face limitations in the scope of decisions they can take, sometimes only on the margin, such as, for example, companion benefits to national programs on cash transfers, others not even that, as in the case of the

progressivity of a PIT, for example.

Also, to be noted, that not all cities have the same capacities and resources to implement strategies or influence decisions and that also bears important consequences on the extent to which pro poor and equalizing measures can be implemented within a city.

(5) So, in such a context, how do we move realistically from aspiration to reality without remaining in wishful thinking?

-Clearly, we know what to do to achieve or move towards a meaningful human rights economy, and in a way, this conference is testament of that.

-We can be certain that NOT ONLY THE RIGHT POLICIES TO REDUCE POVERTY AND INEQUALITY ARE CONSISTENT WITH HUMAN RIGHTS but also that there are no inevitable tradeoff between efficiency and equity, as in all six policies I mentioned above, we can both reduce poverty and inequality without hurting economic growth in the cities and elsewhere.

-So, if we know what to do and cannot do or are not effective in doing it, it must be then a question of lack of sufficient political consensus or sufficient resources (technical, human or financial). The main obstacle to advancing into a HRE is, in my humble view, not an issue of knowledge but an issue of capacity and commitment. IT IS NOT ABOUT WHAT TO DO BUT HOW TO DO IT!