

Accountability and Responsiveness in Informal Settlements for Equity

Transforming the lives of vulnerable people in informal urban settlements is vital to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. This entails tackling complex, interrelated challenges of poor health, unequal access to services, insecurity and weak accountability. Rigorous research and evidence, combined with community engagement and ownership, must inform these efforts.

The **ARISE** Hub – Accountability and Responsiveness in Informal Settlements for Equity – is a new research consortium, set up to enhance accountability and improve the health and wellbeing of marginalised populations living in informal urban settlements in low- and middle-income countries. **ARISE** will work closely with, and be guided by, communities themselves: vulnerable people living in informal settlements who are often ‘off the map’.

Launched in January 2019, and funded by UK Research and Innovation’s Global Challenges Research Fund, **ARISE** will run for five years. Initially, we will work in Bangladesh, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone.

Partners

Led by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, the research consortium consists of the following ten partners:

- African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC), Kenya
- College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (COMAHS), University of Sierra Leone
- George Institute for Global Health, India
- Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK
- Institute of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow, UK
- James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, Bangladesh
- Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), UK
- Liverpool VCT Health (LVCT Health), Kenya
- Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC), Njala University, Sierra Leone
- Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), India.
- University of York, UK

The novelty of our partnership and approach lies in bringing insights from a range of fields, backgrounds and disciplines that have not previously worked together on this challenge. Partners have a wealth of expertise and experience as researchers, practitioners, advocates and activists.

Countries

Knowledge is limited of the conditions that promote effective accountability strategies, especially for the most marginalised populations, in contexts with complex governance systems. It is this reality that **ARISE** seeks to understand and address in Bangladesh, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone.

The contexts were selected based on several criteria, including high levels of urbanisation and/or informal urban settlements; diversity; and various types of fragility. Our responsive fund will enable the approach to be assessed in other countries.



More than half of the world’s people live in cities, with one in three of those living in low- and middle-income countries doing so in informal settlements, sometimes known colloquially as slums, with inadequate access to services and opportunities to shape decisions about their environment. Our research will support the people in our focal communities to claim their rights to health and wellbeing.

Professor Sally Theobald, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Principle Investigator, ARISE

As a global network of slum dwellers, one of SDI’s key roles in **ARISE** will be to ensure the perspectives, experiences, and priorities of the urban poor living in informal settlements are central to the conceptualisation of problems, solutions and interventions within India and the broader partnership.

Sheela Patel, Chair, SDI



The challenge

Cities illustrate the world's starkest disparities in income, health and wellbeing. Informal urban settlements face a number of specific challenges, including rapid transitions; health risks and vulnerabilities; and fluid governance, often characterised by neglect from the state and residents' limited voice and power to shape decisions about their environment. The conditions in many informal settlements fuel socio-economic inequities and violence, including political and gender-based violence.

The term 'slum' or 'informal settlement' can denote urban poverty and deprivation, crowding and exposure to environmental hazards. Informal settlements vary considerably, and many are extremely dynamic. Since government data rarely cover informal settlements in detail, vulnerabilities are often invisible in urban planning, health and welfare information systems. Lack of government recognition of settlements can deny citizens access to basic services such as water, sanitation and security of housing tenure. The absence of formal government institutions creates multiple systems of informal governance.

Many residents experience ill health, including infectious and non-communicable diseases and mental health problems. These are driven by insecure housing and livelihoods, lack of social protection and environmental risk factors, such as pollution. Vulnerabilities are fuelled by social marginalisation and exclusion. Deep-rooted, unequal power relations shape risks and people's capacity to respond.

Our approach

To transform the quality of life in informal urban settlements, a new understanding is required of how to strengthen accountability for effective services and responsive health systems, across a range of public and private, informal and formal actors. Action must be coordinated at many levels to tackle the root causes of unequal access to services and opportunities.

Our approach entails:

- Forming new partnerships and alliances between researchers, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations (including organisations of informal settlement dwellers), service providers, government decision-makers and private actors. Together, we will test new solutions.
- Developing analyses by and with Southern researchers and people living in informal urban settlements, and stimulating mutual learning across diverse contexts.
- Identifying social accountability strategies – guided by participatory, citizen-led approaches and qualitative research – that enable stakeholders to navigate and influence governance processes.
- Harnessing the capacity of people in informal settlements to collect, analyse and communicate their health and wellbeing, and identify their priorities for change. We will support communities to make their experiences of inequities more visible, claim their rights and demand action.

Responsive Challenge Fund

In years three and four of the **ARISE** hub we will launch a £1 million Responsive Challenge Fund. Through this, **ARISE** will provide small grants to organisations that test innovative approaches to improving health and wellbeing. This fund will be divided into a £400,000 Core Country Responsive Challenge Fund (CCRCF), and a £600,000 New Country Responsive Challenge Fund (NCRCF) to extend the evidence base and partnerships in other countries.

Each partner institution will allocate £50,000 as small grants through the CCRCF. BRAC will disperse £100,000. Grants will be used to engage community advisory boards based in informal settlements and find fresh solutions to address risk, promote resilience and advance accountability. We encourage submissions from coalitions of informal urban settlement dwellers, partnerships between civil society organisations, researchers, governance actors, such as city authorities, and entrepreneurs, such as app developers.



Contact

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