COMMUNITY PRACTICE, THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND CIVIL SOCIETY MEASURES IN BRAZIL

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Abstract

“Community practice” is defined as those tasks and measures that facilitate the social, physical and economic development of underserved communities. Within the field of environmental design, “community practice” is manifested as participatory planning and design processes. This article also considers community practice in the expansive role of “public interest” design and as a discipline-based vehicle to implement the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Millennium Development Goals are eight goals, 21 targets and 60 indicators charted to address global poverty. Of the eight goals, MDG 7 Targets 7C and 7D focus on improvements to the built environment and informal/“slum” communities. They offer the strongest nexus to participatory and community “design” practices in service to the MDGs.

Introduction

Similar to the general population, many environmental designers (i.e., physical planners, architects, landscape architects, civil and architectural engineers, etc) are generally knowledgeable about the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, many planners and designers are unaware of the potential nexus between the MDGs and community practices as an interface to participate in decisions for sustainable development. A Brazil case study serves to exemplify urban poverty in one developing country and the civil society institutions that foster “grassroots” participation in Brazil. The conclusion addresses the potential of environmental design’s community practices to expand civic participation in implementing the MDGs.

Keywords

Millennium development goals; poverty; Brazil

1) Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger
2) Achieve Universal Elementary Education
3) Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
4) Reduce Child Mortality
5) Improve Maternal Health
6) Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
7) Ensure Environmental Sustainability
8) Develop Global Partnerships for Development

(See http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/ for the complete Goals, Targets and Indicators. See Figure 1 for MDGs graphic.)

Of the eight goals, Millennium Development Goal 7 (MDG7) to “ensure environmental sustainability” and its Targets 7C and 7D, interface with environmental design through specific objectives to improve the built environment and informal/“slum” communities. Interestingly, a preliminary literature search reveals little theoretical or applied research related to environmental design and the MDGs. This study intends to elucidate the MDGs’ relevance to environmental design and to argue the importance of community practices in implementing MDGs objectives for improvement of poor urban environments.

Across the social sciences and humanities, “community practice” references those convergent actions of community organizing that focus on the social, physical and economic development of underserved communities (Stes, Chaskin and Parks, 2007; Rothman, 2001). In this study, the term is also inclusive of participatory planning practices and “public interest” collaborations for the public welfare.

This study attends to the questions: What are the interfaces between the Millennium Development Goals and environmental design’s community practice? How are they manifested and what does it portend for environmental design’s role in the MDGs? Toward answering these questions, the study situates the MDGs from the perspective of impoverished urban conditions, i.e., irregular urbanization, “slum” environments and substandard housing. Using Brazil as a case study, the paper assesses current government and civil society efforts to meet MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D to improve urban environments. In doing so, the intent is to provide a basic understanding of its instrumental
in global efforts to alleviate physical poverty.

The study is organized into four parts. The first part discusses community-based practice in the context of public interest design in the United States. Part two provides an overview of the Millennium Development Goals, with a discussion of the MDGs-associated terms, “urbanization” and “slums.” In part three, Brazil is a case study for urban poverty and civil society “best practices” to achieve public participation in Brazil. Part four (and conclusion) discusses the elevated importance community practice models can provide to the MDGs’ goals for sustainable planning.

**Public Interest Design and Community Practice**

In a recent Chronicle of Higher Education article, Thomas Fisher calls on environmental designers to use the current global crisis to re-appraise the profession’s future direction. He calls for a renewed ethical approach and “public interest” model in design practice akin to the 19th century public health model that attended to under-served communities. “Do we really want to continue to be servants of the superrich, or does our responsibility—and our overlooked opportunities for new types of services—also lie with the health, safety, and welfare of all?” (Fisher, 2009) In service to development entities such as USAID, the World Bank, or private organizations like the Gates Foundation, Fisher’s “public interest” model proposes to focus on developing replicable solutions for basic needs, (i.e. shelter, sanitation, clean water, and energy production) for impoverished global communities.

In the context of community practice Fisher’s vision attempts to bridge top-down and bottom up approaches to the global problem of improving distressed communities. Top-down modes of development, often without community investment or sustainable results have been modus operandi for many international and national entities. Conversely, bottom-up development efforts focused on sustainability through community engagement and stewardship are often without external planning expertise or enduring technology. Fisher’s public interest model is one of the dialogues imagining the interconnectivity of environmental design/community-based practices with the MDGs. A budding literature in public interest design that includes an international dimension is coalescing around Victor Papanek’s original, Design for the Real World, and includes recent work by Bryan Bell, Paul Polak, Cameron Sinclair and others.

With similar commitment to design’s social responsibilities, the public interest organizations Architecture for Humanity and the Global Studio are addressing disaster and crisis needs at national and international scales. As an international network of volunteer design professionals Architecture for Humanity channels funding resources to projects that improve the quality of local lives. Its practitioners mobilize participants to inform planning for disaster shelters and post-conflict locations, access to public services, and solutions to climate change impacts. Adjunct to the Architecture for Humanity is the Open Architecture Network (http://openarchitecturenetwork.org). Citing MDG 7’s Target 7D objective to improve the lives of 100 million “slum” inhabitants, the Network provides an on-line source of architectural...
plans globally accessible to professionals and lay people. Its goal is to evolve “hundreds of thousands” of ideas to improve global living conditions.

Similar to the Architecture for Humanity and the Open Architecture Network missions, the Global Studio (http://theglobalstudio.com/) is self-described as an “action research program that promotes students, academics, and professionals’ engagement in bottom-up, collaborative partnerships to address the environmental needs of underserved communities.” The Studio differs from the other programs in its goals to build both academic and professional networks as it disseminates community practices specifically adapted to implement the MDGs.

It can be argued that Fisher’s proposal adds to public interest models addressing community needs at local and international scales. However, the above organizations represent a small percentage of the environmental design disciplines and practitioners engaged in public interest and community practice work. Presently, within environmental design the MDGs and the role of community practice in service to sustainable global development have not been recognized by professional associations (e.g. the American Institute of Architects, The American Society of Landscape Architecture, the American Planning Association, etc) nor are the MDGs a focus of environmental design education or university outreach. Any widespread disciplinary commitment to community practice in service to the MDGs would have to be predicated on environmental design education based in community/development knowledge and student civic engagement beyond study abroad programs. Toward that end, a current Association for Community Design survey is soliciting practitioners’ input for instituting an educational certificate in “Public Interest Design” (www.communitydesign.org). Such education would enable more young people to pursue public interest employment to integrate Fisher’s “replicable solutions” model into effective “bottom-up” community-building processes.

The Millennium Development Goals
While consensually perceived as ideals, the MDGs are complex in the nature of their targeted objectives and how they are prioritized for implementation in different countries. The following discusses the MDGs formation and parameters, MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D for improving the built environment, and operational terms associated with the MDGs.

MDGs Background
The MDGs developed from an international response to 1980s’ globalization and the widening social-economic divide between developed and developing countries. International meetings to address global development culminated in 2000 when 189 world leaders adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2). At the 2001 General Assembly, the Millennium Development Goals were declared a “road map towards the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.”

While hunger, health and education are major aspects of world poverty and constitute the first six MDGs, it is MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D that are charged with improving substandard housing
and “slum” environments. While not denying the interconnectedness of the first six goals in the primary attack on global poverty, we contend that poverty is generally associated with specific spatial contexts and deleterious environmental conditions. Perceptions of poverty are grounded in physically bound geographies that both the poor and the non-poor associate with “being poor.” It should therefore be argued that efforts to ameliorate hunger, health, and education must be rooted in physical environments that are environmentally and socially supportive.

**Millennium Development Goal 7**

MDG7 and Targets 7A, 7B, 7C, and 7D developed from international discussions at the Rio 92 and Habitat II conferences. Unlike the other MDGs, MDG7 and its Targets for ecological sustainability (Targets 7A and 7B) and sustainable development in poor urban communities (Targets 7C and 7D) are disparate in scale and aspirations. Generally speaking, most countries have prioritized funding for MDG7 Targets 7A and 7B programs for ecological preservation and restoration, designating less funding to programs for Targets 7C and 7D (UN Habitat, 2006: 34). A study of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (that each country develops to qualify for MDGs funding) reveals a strong lack of commitment to prioritize MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D (Fukuda-Parr, 2008). In Brazil, the United Nations Development Programme administers the country’s limited funding to facilitate Targets 7C and 7D projects. This limitation is supposedly related to Brazil’s scope of needs and the enormous financial investments required to implement Targets 7C and 7D proposals (Galvani and Morse, 2004). The 2008 UN Report confirms the difficulties in addressing MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D, and firmly advises “national governments and the international community to respond to the lessons of experience and to adjust to changing circumstances” (United Nations, 2008). MDG7 and its Targets 7A, 7B, 7C, and 7D to address large-scale environmental issues and substandard communities are complex subjects that warrant in-depth research beyond the scope of this study. The following discussion of Targets 7C and 7D is based on research associated with the MDGs-referenced terms, “urbanization”, and “slums”.

“Urbanization” is often defined as process(es) of becoming “urban”. However according to the State of the World’s Cities 2006/7, the definition of “urban” varies globally, ranging from administrative criteria, population size, proportion of the labor force in industrial employment, etc.

With or without definitions, urbanization is proliferating globally. Since 1950, the world’s urban population quadrupled and developing countries account for over 90 percent of the world’s urban growth. In 2005 the world’s urban population was 3.17 billion out of a world total of 6.45 billion. The year 2007 marked the first time the world’s urban population equaled its rural population. Between 2005 and 2030, the world’s urban population is expected to grow at the rate of 1.78 percent with urbanite numbers expected to reach almost 5 billion by 2030. Superseding the 1950s’ “megacity” phenomena of 10 million inhabitants, new urban conurbations of more than 20 million people in Asia, Latin America and Africa are being referenced as “metacities” and “hypercities” (Camhis, 2006: 71-72; UN Habitat, 2006: 6). Swallowing up adjacent rural areas, smaller cities, and towns, these new urban forms
are multi-nuclear agglomerations operating as singular entities. By 2020 all but four of the world largest cities will be in developing regions.

Viewed as ubiquitous to urbanization in most developing countries, the term, “slum” is sanctioned by the UN and associated with MDGs measurements of how poverty is manifest in each country’s urban areas (Tibaijuko, 2005: 18-19). For international development, the term “slum” is operationalized as a unit to assess quality of life components that include potable water and basic sanitation. A “slum household” is quantified as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area that lacks one or more of the following four conditions:

1. Durable housing – a permanent and adequate structure in a non-hazardous location to protect inhabitants from climate extremes.
2. Sufficient living space - no more than 3 people share a room.
3. Access to improved water – a supply of affordable-priced water for family use secured without extreme effort on the part of women and children.
4. Access to sanitation – a public or private excreta disposal system/toilet available on site to household members.

Urbanization and “slums” as defined constitute the contexts onto which the eight MDGs are subscribed for improvement of the global human condition. While MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D are perceived as separate from Goals 1-6, their importance as settings for the success of MDGs programs to combat poverty should be assigned more priority in international development.

The following, Table 1.0 provides a perspective how each MDG relates to the poverty of urban environments.

**MDG 7, Target 7C**
“Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation”

The lack of safe drinking water and basic sanitation are intricately bounded up with rapid urbanization and “slum” development. Underlying unprecedented urban growth, inequitable distribution of wealth and the formal economy’s inability to create sufficient jobs combine with public policy failures to ensure people’s lack of access to basic needs. These in turn create the counter-forces of an informal economy run by marginalized groups housed in stigmatized settlement areas (“slums”) in or adjacent to the formal structure of “the city”. Multiplied by thousands of locations across urbanizing landscapes, “slum” locations are also sites for the vagaries of environmental disasters, crime, etc. In environmental design, providing access to water and sanitation is infrastructural, i.e. foundational to physical development. Metaphorically, MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D can be viewed as “infrastructure”, necessary to establish and build sustainable MDGs programs to combat poverty.

**MDG 7, Target 7D**
“By 2020, to have achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.”

Human rights advocates voice strong opposition to MDG7 Target 7D and challenge the Goal as a moral decision involving “slum”
inhabitants’ human rights. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, housing with food, clothing, medical care, and social services are considered “merit goods” important to human well-being (Sachs 2005: 253). In the State of the World’s Cities 2006/7, Scott Leckie, of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (www.cohre.org) accuses the MDGs of straying from “the language, sentiments and vision of human rights.” (UN Habitat, 2006: 31) He questions world leaders’ moral right to decide that Target 7D should serve less than 10 percent of almost a billion “slum” inhabitants. He asks, “Is it an acceptable future that 1.3 billion people will call urban slums “home”? (ibid).

From an environmental design perspective, there are embedded challenges in MDG7 Target 7D. Forecasts of dominant growth trends from the 1990s indicate the magnitude of “slum” settlements will continue to increase into the future. Statistical projections indicate that even if Target 7D is attained by 2020 it will be inconsequential in light of anticipated global
“slum” population growth. Based on the 1990 world “slum” population statistic of 715 million, the following, Table 2.0 describes three UN Habitat-generated scenarios.

The scenarios indicate the need for environmental design interventions that can judiciously build capacity in informal settlements to secure basic services as well as plan and implement adequate housing for all classes. As MDGs 1-6 efforts progress to save and extend human life, MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D must expand efforts to make existing informal communities sustainable.

**Table 2.0: UN Habitat - Slum Population Scenarios. (Source: UN Habitat 2006).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1</td>
<td>Assumes present trends of urban and “slum” growth continue unabated into the future, without governments’ support for upgrading “slums” or alternatives to new “slum” formation.</td>
<td>Finding: World “slum” population in 2020 will be 1.4 billion people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2</td>
<td>Assumes implementation of current Goal 7 policies to improve the lives of 100 million “slum” dwellers by 2020.</td>
<td>Finding: World “slum” population in 2020 will be 1.3 billion people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenario 3</td>
<td>Assumes that in the next 10 years policies are adopted and rigorously implemented to reduce the proportion of “slum” dwellers from 31 percent of the 1990 global urban population to 15 percent in 2020. This would reduce by half the proportion of people living in “slums”.</td>
<td>Finding: World “slum” population in 2020 will be 700 million.</td>
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“**Slum” Settlements and Civil Society Measures in Urban Brazil**

In the context of the MDGs and MDG 7 Targets to improve the environment and “slum” communities, this study documents how the MDGs and Targets 7C and 7D are addressed in the country-specific setting of Brazil. Brazil serves as the research case study because the UN classifies it as both a “developing” country for the production potential of its natural reserves and as a “cusp” country for its proactive engagement in Latin American and global development. Recognized in political science as a “third wave” country, Brazil’s civil society is noted for its activism for more equitable distribution of resources (Avritzer, 2002). In the last five years, Brazil has also been selected for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 World Olympic Games. The country’s stable economy and the 2010 election of a woman and a former political activist, Dilma Vana Rousseff to the Brazilian presidency, portend a spectrum of challenges and opportunities for the government to achieve the MDGs as its...
political and economic development reflect a trajectory similar to Western development.

Brazil is a complex country. The upper class' control of resources and the lower class' growing numbers dominate the country's social and economic systems. However, according to UN Country Team assessments, Brazil's compensatory social programs have made major progress in addressing issues of hunger, basic health, and education for children. In the UN Habitat evaluative “scorecard” for reducing “slum” growth, Brazil is rated as a “stabilizing” country, i.e. it is starting to stabilize “slum” growth rates through urbanization programs for basic infrastructure and improved housing in informal settlements (although chronic poverty persists in many urban areas). Additionally, Brazil's 2004, 2007, and 2010 National Monitoring Reports demonstrate the country's commitment to achieve its indicators for the Millennium Development Goals. The following details Brazil’s urbanization formation and civil society’s efforts to build capacity for urban and community improvements.

**From Rural to Urban Brazil**

Brazil’s urbanization provides an explanation of how “slum”/favela settlements evolved in the country. In the context of the MDGs, Brazil’s efforts to address housing equity are key to controlling unregulated urban growth and to improving “slum” communities.

Founded in 1500, Brazil was a Portuguese colony, a slave society, with a mono agriculture economy. According to Oliveira Vianna (1956), urbanization gained momentum in Brazil in the 19th century with the advent of industrial development, although Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and Salvador already had significant populations. Two major socio-political transformations accelerated Brazil’s urban development: Brazil’s independence from Portugal in 1822 and slavery’s official abolition in 1888.

Similar to the United States’ post-slavery era, Brazil’s 19th century economy and urban growth were fueled with the influx of immigrants and freed slaves from rural areas. Working class housing in cities became precarious, especially the provision of basic infrastructure. Deficits in housing forced overcrowding in multifamily structures called ‘cortiços.” Without potable water and sanitation, ‘cortiços’ became sources of public health problems, facilitating the spread of cholera, yellow fever, and typhus in cities (Colela, 1991). Policies prohibiting ‘cortiços’ led to their removal from city centers and displacement of residents but did not offer definitive solutions for tenable housing. Subsequently, the policies were banned and into the 20th century informal housing development shifted to the undeveloped outskirts of cities to accommodate families removed from inner city favelas (Bonduki, 1998).

Brazil’s urbanization process is one of cyclic spatial and social exclusion. During periods of (real estate) speculation the market creates a housing deficit, restricting access to land and housing. The deficit leads to more speculation and together both lead to expulsion of the poor from developed areas and to informal development in peripheral areas. The lack of public services feeds speculation through differentiation in urban land values. For example, transportation obeys this logic and makes those that have to live further from the center even
poorer, not only because they have to pay more but also because services and goods are proportionally more expensive in the peripheries (Silva and Bowns, 2008; Santos, 2005). In 2001, after more than thirty years of urban reform activism, federal legislation entitled “The Statute of the City”, was passed to ensure inclusive local planning.

Brazil’s “Slum” Status
It is estimated that 82% of Brazil’s population lives in urban areas while 34.3% of the urban population lives in substandard housing and/or in subnormal settlements (Brazil National Monitoring Report, 2010). See Figures 2 and 3. According to recent studies of Brazilian housing conditions (Fundação João Pinheiro, 2009), the housing deficit is estimated at 5.8 million units while more than 15 million houses are considered to be in substandard conditions. Some 9.8 million people live in informal housing to which they don’t have secure tenure. Additionally, 6.7 percent of Brazil’s urban population lives in overcrowded residences (Brazil National...
Monitoring Report, 2010). These numbers provide an image of housing conditions in urban Brazil and indicate the magnitude of challenges the Brazilian government faces to achieve MDG 7 proposals to improve poor urban communities.

Despite this extreme scenario, in the past decade Brazil’s housing conditions have improved. According to IBGE (the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), urban inhabitants living in adequate housing increased from 51 percent in 1992 to a current estimate of 61.5 percent. Brazil’s performance in connection with MDG 7 Target 7C to halve the proportion of people living without access to safe water and basic sanitation improved primarily with respect to providing access to water. In all urban areas, the proportion of the population with access to water increased from 88 percent in 1992 to 91.6 percent in 2008, meaning Brazil has reached the target of access to drinking water. Access to sewers increased in urban areas from 66 percent to 80.5 percent in 2008. Sewage related problems persist because only about one third of all collected sewage is adequately treated (Brazil National Monitoring Report, 2010). (This is due to the high costs for sewage treatment and it not being a funding priority in the previous decades.) It is important to note that, although expansion of infrastructure service is overall positive, major differences of access and quality persist in both urban and rural areas (Brazil National Monitoring Report, 2010). Nonetheless, much of the progressive improvements of Brazil’s poor urban communities can be ascribed to the collaborative partnerships between the government, the market sector, and the third sector i.e., civil society.

Civil Society Measures and Participation in Brazil

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, conducts research in fifty countries and defines “civil society” as: “the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interests.” (Keane 2003; http://www.civicus.org)

Over the last thirty years the term “civil society” has increased in currency and complexity of meanings. Rooted in Greek and Roman political formation and the Enlightenment, the term encompassed varying forms of public association and citizenship across historic periods and political states. Wiarda (2003) contends civil society diverged into two major strands. The Roman conception of citizen participation as state-centered, top-down structures was disseminated to southern and eastern Europe and colonies in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. A bottom-up, pluralist model typified America and Western Europe and was more characterized by bottom-up social activism than stable associations. Civil society in many 21st century developing nations is a merger of the two strands. Grassroots organizing and community practices associated with the 1960s’ American social movements in which many design practitioners implemented civil strategies to increase underserved communities’ participation in environmental policy decisions are now integral to many established civil society organizations.

In his study of civil society activism in Latin America, Leonardo Avritzer identifies Brazil as one of the countries in which the return to democracy has allowed citizens to participate
more intensively in the decision making and planning processes (Avritzer 2002). However, there are still strong differences amongst groups in terms of levels of political education and strategies to secure human rights, particularly “slum” inhabitants. In democratizing developing countries, community practice for mobilization and participation are being implemented in the context of larger civil society efforts. These measures are evident in Brazil’s participatory-based institutions addressing urban conditions. In the 2004 National Monitoring Report, President Lula da Silva wrote, “... the State alone is not able to solve the most deep-rooted problems in our country. Civil society – labor unions, business entities, non-government organizations, churches and social movements – plays a role as important as the government’s in effectively transforming the country” (Brazil Presidency, 2004).

Within the limits of this study, we introduce three civil society measures addressing issues of poor communities in Brazil: the participatory budget, the Comunidade Solidária initiatives and the Statute of the City federal legislation. All three programs are broad-based in implementation and geographical influence.

**The Participatory Budget**

In Brazil, the “participatory budget” is a voluntary city government program for citizen involvement in sustainable urban management. Initially, promoted by Brazil’s Labor Party (PT) as an innovative mechanism for participation, it allows the community and citizen-led councils to deliberate the allocation of public goods including public works, schools, transportation, etc. Between its emergence in the 1990s in Porto Alegre and 2006, participatory budget programs in Brazil expanded from 36 to 170 municipalities and model similar programs in South American, European and African countries (Avritzer 2009). Variable in format and implementation, the “budget” can be a “wish list” for a percentage of municipal funds that is first identified within neighborhood forums and further deliberated in citywide councils for funding. In Porto Alegre participatory budgeting increased public schools from 29 to 84 schools. In 1999 Belo Horizonte allocated up to half its public investment resources using participatory budgeting. In Curitiba the “budget” integrates public transportation and urban planning with low-cost housing programs and work opportunities for street children (UN Habitat 2006/7, 168; Camhis 2006, 83; Novy and Leubolt 2005, 2027-2029; Avritzer 2002, 135-138).

Not viewed as a panacea by all, critiques of Brazil’s participatory budget programs include: lack of equitable class and gender representation and ineffective participation outside of the PT’s sphere of influence.

**Comunidade Solidária**

The Comunidade Solidária (CS) initiatives were born out of Brazil’s return to democratic government and the groundswell of popular activities to address post-dictatorship inequities. Established by the Cardoso government in 1995, the CS was initiated as a social development strategy intended to fight poverty and exclusion through working partnerships between government, business and third sector organizations. In 1999, CS fostered legislation, Law N (9,790/99), to restructure regulation of the Third Sector as separate from the State and the Market and to instituted OSCIP (Civil Society Organizations of Public Interest). The Solidária programs were developed on the
principle of disseminating “social technology” i.e. developing processes and creating products that are feasible, effective and replicable (Cardoso et al, 2002). It’s programs, Alfabetização, Universidade Solidária, and Programa Voluntários created corps of volunteer citizens, students, and faculty that promulgated literacy, job training, and social capital in impoverished Brazilian communities and are replicated in Mozambique, Angola, and East Timor (ibid).

Brazilian civil society’s efforts position it as a participating “architect” in the country’s MDGs implementation strategies. How robust are Brazilian civil society non-profit/NGOs and how do they align with the current government’s social reformation plans? An NGO example is the Atelié Acaia, a grassroots organization, whose work manifests civil society in its efforts to restructure São Paulo’s SESA favela community through programs for housing renovations, job training, and college preparation (Bowns, 2007). Currently, no official directory quantifies the geography, numbers and social services of Brazilian NGOs and community associations (Cardoso et al cite contact with +2500 non-profits in 2002). However, ABONG (www.abong.com.br) and the Brazil Foundation (www.brazilfoundation.org), track hundreds of funded NGO programs. Both share missions “to generate and invest resources in civil society programs that promote sustainable local development and transform social conditions in poor urban communities” (ibid). Additionally, Comunidade Solidária initiatives’ continue under the Rousseff government as independent NGOs and part of Brazil’s RedeSol and Comunitas networks that connect NGOs and other organizations engaged in social reformation.

**Statute of the City**

Of the three participatory and civil society measures documented for this study, the 2001 federal legislation Statute of the City, has the most potential to re-structure urbanization in Brazil and to deliver more equitable housing and city services for the urban poor. Along with limited resources and decades of bad administration, the lack of strategic urban planning in many Brazilian municipalities created the inequitable housing conditions described above. Therefore, it is not surprising that most municipalities have not been successful in achieving MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D.

The “Statute of the City” mandates citizen ratification for urban, social, environmental and economic plans for Brazilian municipalities of more than twenty thousand inhabitants. See Figure 4. The Statute requires public participation to approve “Planos Diretores” (Master Plans) and the Plans must ensure that municipal lands serve inclusive civic and social functions and not exclusively economic operations. The Statute is intended to discourage real estate speculation and to secure land tenure for all inhabitants, particularly those living in informal settlements. As primary funder of municipal master plans, the legislation prescribes the plans’ required contents and a planning process that is democratic and representative of each municipality’s population (Avritzer, 2009).

Although the Statute implements urban planning that addresses MDG7 Targets 7C and 7D, local governments face other challenges for successful master plan implementation. Small cities represent almost 73% of Brazil’s municipalities. They have the lowest social-economic development indexes. Their most
critical challenge is lack of experienced planning staff to implement public participation and plan reviews. In acknowledgement, the Ministry of the Cities contracts private environmental design firms with community practice expertise to facilitate local planning processes as it also invests in capacity building programs for administrators to improve participatory planning.

In summary, the Brazil case study of urban poverty and civil society measures provide insights into how chronic poverty in manifested in housing and settlement patterns in many developing countries. Within Brazil, local and federal government, vigorous civil society institutions, professionals and lay volunteers are partnering with communities to build bottom-up capacity and to improve informal settlements for the poorest inhabitants. In UN and Habitat evaluations, current bottom-up and top-downs efforts to advance the MDGs set Brazil apart as a progressive country for other developing countries to model.

**Conclusion: Advancing the MDGs with Community Practice**

In the context of environmental design, the aspect of the MDGs that most aligns with public interest design and community “design” practices is the growing role for community-based involvement to improve urban growth. Indeed, much of the current community engagement characteristic of civil society entities in Brazil is “bottom-up” and highly organized practices for public participation. In the United States, Architecture for Humanity, The Global Studio, and other non-profit firms are a beginning movement to direct environmental design expertise to place-based problems in developing countries. Nonetheless, the implications for facilitating participation in the MDGs are multi-dimensional. The United Nations’ elevation of heretofore discrete, public engagement measures to an order of importance to effect global improvements, portends a new direction in international development, citizen participation, and partnerships.

In the past most international development was implemented without due consideration of users’ engagement for project sustainability. Now, users’ beneficiary involvement in development results from practical and ethical considerations. Finite resources, replacement costs, and maintenance are major, practical factors in development. Also acknowledged is the importance of the users’ sense of stewardship in developing and maintaining public facilities. Public participation however, does not come without critics. Intended as a catalyst for change, others see facilitation measures as incurring costs that include: delays...
in project start-up; unnecessary staff increases; or pressures to increase the level/range of services (Bamberger, 12). In a study of legislated participation in five cities, Nabeel Hamdi assesses the responses as resistant attitudes, low capacity, and citizen participation perceived as “an add-on luxury rather than as a basic right or legal obligation” (Hamdi 2006, 16).

Nonetheless, well-facilitated participation can provide local knowledge, improve project design, and help insure project sustainability. These assets of participation if rigorously supported and implemented globally can contribute to achieving Targets 7C and 7D to improve informal communities by 2020.

In conclusion, this study focuses on providing an understanding of the MDGs and MDG 7 Targets 7C and 7D, from the perspective of environmental design and community practice for international development. The MDGs’ support for civic engagement is intended to decentralize administration and implementation of externally funded projects globally. As currently implemented, community engagement practices are primarily discrete at the scale of local development, i.e. communities, neighborhoods, etc. However, MDGs directives to reduce global urban poverty and to secure sustainable living conditions imply participatory planning and civic engagement strategies replicable at extra-local scales of large, informal settlements, cities, and regions. Most importantly, this paper intends to call attention to the potential the MDGs present for environmental design to interject knowledge and expertise into the development and implementation of measures that will globally address the future quality of urban life and equity.

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