



Decentralisation, Budgeting and Governance: Lessons from Key Chance2Sustain Cities

By Glen Robbins

There is some evidence in all the case studies that indicates a growing convergence between digitizing citizen property information central to billing and taxation (and therefore municipal fiscal resources management) and spatial knowledge sources. There is, in the Indian case study cities, a considerable drive to enhance the information available to public officials about properties in all areas of the cities. Traditionally, property taxes and billing arrangements have been weak in many of these cities but efforts to confront corruption, growing access to technology (inside and outside government), more widespread use of mapping and GIS approaches as management tools, and revenue recovery pressures on municipal entities are all reported – whether in Work Package 5 or Work Package 6. These approaches have long been a feature of approaches of the South African and some of the Brazilian case-study city municipalities, but are also noted in the Peruvian cases. For example reforms in Lima local government have seen the digitizing of property data-bases similar to that which has occurred in Durban and Gaurulhos for some time.

Over and above these activities there is some evidence in all the case studies that indicates a growing convergence between digitizing citizen property information central to billing and taxation (and therefore municipal fiscal resources management) and spatial knowledge sources. There is, in the Indian case study cities, a considerable drive to enhance the information available to public officials about properties in all areas of the cities. Traditionally, property taxes and billing arrangements have been weak in many of these cities but efforts to confront corruption, growing access to technology (inside and outside government), more widespread use of mapping and GIS approaches as management tools, and revenue recovery pressures on municipal entities are all reported – whether in Work Package 5 or Work Package 6. These approaches have long been a feature of approaches of the South African and some of the Brazilian case-study city municipalities, but are also noted in the Peruvian cases. For example reforms in Lima local government have seen the digitizing of property data-bases similar to that which has occurred in Durban and Gaurulhos for some time.

Recent mobilisation around corruption in Delhi has included protesting groups raising claims related to these issues. In Durban the Municipality has an internet-based searchable listing of all properties assessed for property taxes and any citizen with access to an Internet connection can examine the tax being allocated to a specific property. This has allowed citizens to use these comparisons to argue for lower assessed taxes, or more often result in a correction of assessments that are lower than they should be. However these processes do not necessarily lend themselves to collective action and are only geared to a very narrow set of indicators that favour the administration rather the citizens in any direct manner.

In Durban, the eThekweni Municipality has started to try and combine layers of GIS mapping data related to submunicipal district level aggregated needs (based on both



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Chance2Sustain examines how governments and citizens in cities with differing patterns of economic growth and socio-spatial inequality make use of participatory (or integrated) spatial knowledge management to direct urban governance towards more sustainable development.

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community discussions and official statistical sources) with planned service delivery sites and capital projects to try and build a better technical case for budgetary decision making. Whilst these have not yet translated into explicit public engagement processes they have been a feature of interactions between elected representatives and municipal officials. They are also starting to be made public through official municipal planning documents such as the Integrated Development Plan. The potential of these sources of information and the related technologies to migrate into civil society processes (noting that they are already pervasive in the private sector) is strong with the potential that point in space or area specific identifiers on maps can often be more accessible than spread sheets and the like that have little or no spatial references. The potential of drawing on citizen knowledge in bottom-up processes that can be translated into spatialised knowledge was explored in Work Package 3, 4 and in Work Package 5.

Action research processes in Durban with an informal settlement community showed that converting of community prepared maps into a digital layer can help transfer knowledge from these communities to municipal officials. Localised participatory budget processes in Lima and Gaurulhos also generate spatially distinct inputs into city decision-making that have had some connections to formal municipal spatial referencing processes.

Drawing from the discussions it was clear that all the cities had experienced, and continue to experience, ongoing processes which contribute to the evolution of municipal influence and responsibility with regard to fiscal processes. These processes have had a substantially different character across the cities, in that they have been influenced by differing histories and contexts (even within the same countries vis-à-vis the issue of special treatment of capital cities). These same local contextual factors also impacted on the extent to which these processes of decentralisation, in terms of local fiscal matters, were enabling new spaces for more participatory governance. The results of this research would suggest that these processes have not been automatically associated with enhanced participatory governance beyond the often complex and citizen-remote experiences of representative democracy and the innovations in participation that have presented in some other spaces in local government.