Towards housing justice

Four propositions to transform policy and practice

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IIED's Human Settlements programme works through partnerships to create towns and cities that are sustainable, prosperous, resilient, healthy and safe, and inclusive and equitable. We do this by generating high quality evidence, shaping debates, building coalitions, and influencing policies and practices at multiple scales.

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The current global housing crisis is sustained by housing systems that do not respond to the reality of the world's majority. This paper discusses how addressing this crisis through a 'housing justice' lens can open up areas of intervention and transformation for policy and practice that can contest unfair and unsustainable housing systems. It presents four propositions for a justice lens: anti-discriminatory housing policy and practice; radically democratic forms of housing production; housing as an infrastructure for better cities; and expanded visions for housing futures.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACHR	Asian Coalition for Housing Rights
HDI	Human Development Index
HIC	Habitat International Coalition
HLPF	(UN) High-Level Political Forum
HSG	Human Settlements Group (IIED)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDI	Slum Dwellers International
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

Summary

Background

The global housing crisis needs to be addressed through a justice lens. A housing justice agenda aims to tackle the perverse nature of current housing systems, which are *exclusionary,* as they tend to prioritise interventions that leave large parts of the population out of responses and decision making; *extractive,* as they emphasise exchange value over use value; *exploitative* to both people and nature; and *enclosed,* as they operate within narrow views that prioritise individual rather than collective aspirations.

This paper attempts to define the scope of IIED's housing justice work, reflecting on exchanges with social movements, grassroots groups, researchers and allies who for a long time have been leading initiatives around the right to adequate housing. Building on spaces of solidarity and resistance that have been forged to contest the current dynamics of housing systems, the paper proposes housing justice as a frame to challenge these positions and transform policy and practice.

Defining housing justice

Drawing on ongoing exchanges and knowledge about the right to adequate housing, theories of justice, as well as a recap of the history of IIED's work on housing, we propose a placeholder definition of housing justice.

We propose that housing justice is *a vision that seeks the transformation of housing systems to ensure the equitable distribution of capabilities for people to live in housing conditions that enable just and sustainable human flourishing*. The paper briefly unpacks each part of this definition discussing: '*just and sustainable human flourishing*' from a social justice perspective, drawing mainly on the work of Nancy Fraser; '*capabilities for people to live in housing conditions*' from a capability perspective, focusing on the personal and the collective; '*ensure the equitable distribution',* drawing on feminist, decolonial and Southern theories to engage with issues of inequality, power, diversity and the politics of reparation; and '*a vision that seeks the transformation of housing systems*', asserting that justice is a vision which we can work towards, requiring continuous deliberation and contestation to define meaningful pathways towards it.

Four propositions to transform policy and practice

What are the implications of this definition for policy and practice? How is it part of wider and longstanding struggles for the right to housing? The main section of this paper presents what we believe a housing justice agenda *does* to policy and practice. It identifies and discusses four areas of intervention that such a definition opens up:

- ▪ ***Anti-discriminatory housing policy and practice***. Housing deprivations have a disproportionate impact on particular groups and geographies, which cannot be detached from historical trajectories of oppression. Reshaping these trajectories requires reparatory mechanisms for those who have accumulated the historical burden of discrimination. This proposition calls for policy and practice to promote affirmative actions towards systematically discriminated groups across gender, ethnicity, race, class, tenancy status, migration status, sexual orientation, and ability, among others.

- ▪ ***Radically democratic forms of housing production.*** The decision-making processes that shape housing systems need democratic structures that recognise and support non-speculative forms of city-making. This proposition calls for policy and practice to embrace, protect, support and expand radically democratic forms of housing production such as cooperatives, collective savings groups, community land trusts, participatory upgrading, and inclusive forms of public housing.

- ***Housing as an infrastructure for better cities.*** Housing production impacts urban development. Often, it locks cities into unsustainable trajectories, deepening environmental degradation and social–spatial segregation. However, if housing is treated as a social, care and reparative infrastructure, it can promote better cities that can flourish sustainably. This proposition calls for policy and practice to develop planning and housing mechanisms that put at the centre the social and environmental function of land and property.

- ***Expanded visions for housing futures.*** Diverse types of knowledge and 'ways of doing' produce housing. A justice lens invites us to imagine diverse responses that engage with the needs, aspirations and practices of the world's majority of today and tomorrow. This proposition calls for policy and practice to engage with the multiple actors participating in the recognition, protection and fulfilment of housing rights; recognise practices and forms of knowledge taking place at the margins of planning systems; and diversify design, financial and governance responses.

The housing crisis needs a justice lens

The persistent nature of the housing crisis is sustained by housing systems that are exclusionary, extractive, exploitative and enclosed. Transforming those systems requires a justice lens that considers the diverse needs and aspirations of the world's majority.

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The current housing crisis is defined by the experience of the world's majority. Roughly 2.8 billion people globally experience some form of housing inadequacy, 1.1 billion of whom are living in informal settlements (UN Habitat, 2023). This 'crisis' is not the result of exceptional circumstances; rather, it is a constant reality for many people, because "for the oppressed, housing is always in crisis" (Madden and Marcuse, 2016:10). We seem to live under what the former president of the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) calls 'social anaesthesia' whereby we witness persistent processes of discrimination and deprivation and are not surprised by them, even labelling the people experiencing exclusion and violence 'minorities' (HIC, 2020). The housing crisis is a human rights crisis (OHCHR, 2020), with implications for millions of people's ability to live a fulfilling, healthy and good life.

For IIED, as an international policy and research organisation, how do we define the remit of our agenda in relation to such a crisis? In an effort to better articulate IIED's work on housing we recently identified a series of strategies to work with groups that are systematically excluded from housing rights to advance 'towards housing justice' (Frediani and Cociña, 2023). But sometimes we need to be more precise in capturing the scope of a 'housing justice' agenda: why it is relevant, what its implications are for policy and practice and how it is part of wider and longstanding struggles

for the right to housing. This paper offers a series of propositions to answer these questions, contributing to ongoing conversations with partners and colleagues, and imagining new ways of thinking and doing in the housing field.

Our diagnosis is that while the factors that explain the housing crisis are complex and diverse, it is largely sustained by housing systems that do not respond to most people's needs. Housing systems — which include housing policies but also the full ecosystem of transactions, norms and practices behind housing and urban production — ignore the true nature of housing deprivation, as they are often shaped by inaccurate assumptions about people's experience of this crisis. This limitation is reinforced by weaknesses in the multilateral system, which has failed to effectively promote transformative agendas to realise housing needs and aspirations. The cumulative crises stemming from the climate emergency, violent conflicts, poor health and forced migration reinforce each other in ways that disproportionately affect those living with housing and urban deprivation. This promotes cycles of marginalisation that intersect with inequalities in gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and ability, among others. In sum, current housing systems, which are underpinned by commodification, are failing to respond to most people's needs because they are *exclusionary, extractive, exploitative* and *enclosed.*

Cockle Bay community in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 2022 (Alexandre Apsan Frediani, IIED)

Housing systems are *exclusionary* because they tend to prioritise interventions that marginalise large parts of the population from housing responses and meaningful decision making. They do so by producing unaffordable housing, prioritising profit and ignoring the 'continuum of land rights',[1] and perpetuating legacies of inequality. Housing systems push people to the outskirts of cities, excluding them from social and economic networks, services and infrastructure. They are also *extractive* because they emphasise exchange value over use value. They do this through financialisation of housing (at local and global levels) and through an extractive relationship with nature, relying on carbon-intensive building materials and prioritising urban expansion that locks cities into unsustainable carbon-intensive and fuel-dependent development. Housing systems are *exploitative* to both people and nature because they invisibilise, criminalise and even violently destroy resources and people's investments in the production of their habitat, particularly in informal settlements. They also exploit groups, particularly women, that have historically carried out unpaid forms of care work that sustain the reproduction of life. Finally, housing systems are *enclosed,* because they usually operate within narrow and rigid sectorial services that tend to provide standard 'one-size-fits-all' solutions that prioritise the individual over the collective, ignore the urban dimension of housing and dismiss more diverse and democratic community-led housing practices.

We need framings to promote housing policy and practice in ways that challenge these positions by reflecting on and responding to the experiences of the world's majority. In this paper we therefore examine how using justice as a lens opens up areas of intervention and transformation that can contest the perverse nature of current housing systems. In this document, we discuss four propositions: *anti-discriminatory housing policy and practice; radically democratic forms of housing production; housing as an infrastructure for better cities;* and *expanded visions for housing futures.* These propositions provide elements to re-think and clarify what we understand by housing policy and practice, and enable us to re-imagine how they can respond to the needs and aspirations of the world's majority.

We begin this reflection by providing a placeholder definition of what we understand by housing justice. This is a working definition that draws on IIED's rich history of work on human settlements and housing (see box 1), ongoing conversations with partners, and conceptual debates that provide us with elements to engage with the notion of justice. The main section of this paper presents what we believe a housing justice agenda *does* for policy and practice, namely, it discusses the four areas of intervention and transformation mentioned above. We conclude by reflecting on how we will use this lens to envision a collective horizon that frames IIED's collaborative work on housing justice.

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[1] For a definition of the continuum of land rights see Du Plessis et al, 2016.

BOX 1: IIED'S HUMAN SETTLEMENTS GROUP AND THE HOUSING QUESTION

Since IIED's establishment in 1971, the work of researchers such as Barbara Ward, Jorge Hardoy, David Satterthwaite and Diana Mitlin has been central to housing questions in relation to a sustainability and development agenda. As early as 1976, Barbara Ward stated in her book *The Home of Man* that housing injustices are a political choice, because for a country to "leave any of its citizens in poor, unhealthy, substandard housing the issue is one of choice, not necessity. It means that government and people alike have not given the provision of homes the attention and priority which, in justice, in humanity, in dignity and compassion, they require" (Ward, 1976:109). Debates around housing gained momentum with contributions from authors such as John F C Turner and with the establishment of the Human Settlements Group (HSG) at IIED in 1977, following the first UN Conference on Human Settlements in 1976. This conference led to the creation of the UN Center for Human Settlements, precursor to UN-Habitat, and the establishment of the civil society network Habitat International Coalition (Cociña et al, 2019). From the outset, HSG strove to put the Habitat I agenda into practice, with a strong emphasis on urban poverty and on promoting "a broader recognition of the multiple forms of deprivation suffered by much of the urban population" (Satterthwaite, 2003:122). In this period, Hardoy and Satterthwaite contributed to the debate through their work on cities of the global South on issues related to housing and health, the environment, governance, basic services and urban poverty. Their work was embodied in publications such as *Shelter: Need and Response. Housing, Land and Settlement Policies in Seventeen Third World Nations* (1981); and *Squatter Citizen: Life in the Urban Third World* (1989).

The launch of HSG's journal *Environment & Urbanization* in 1989 (following the launch of its Spanish version in 1983) marked a key milestone in documenting and sharing urban experiences from low- and middle-income countries, bringing in the voices of academics, activists and grassroots groups (Cross, 2003). Following the establishment of Slum Dwellers International (SDI) in 1996, HSG initiated several collaborative partnerships with SDI and its national affiliates and federations, working on issues related to informal settlements, basic services, community participation and finance, and housing and shelter more widely. IIED, and HSG in particular, began to play a key role as an intermediary between grassroots organisations and international

funders for resources to enable community-led finance for housing. An example of this model was the Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA) programme, a US$14.5 million project led by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) and supported by IIED with funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The programme, which ran from 2011 to 2014, resulted in secure land and housing for 49,356 low-income families in 127 cities across Asia (Mitlin, 2015).

Alongside these efforts and working with organised grassroots groups, HSG continued its work on housing through key contributions to reports such as the UN's 1996 *Global Report on Human Settlements* (UNCHS, 1996) as well as regular contributions since 1997 to the urban sections of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports. These have been fundamental to bringing the 'social' and 'urban' agendas — including housing issues — to the climate change discussion. Likewise, IIED's intellectual contribution continued through publications such as the edited volume by Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2014), *Reducing Urban Poverty in the Global South*. These works focused on important issues such as WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), tenure security, and finance. More recently, 'housing' as a field was taken forward through reports such as Satterthwaite's *Rethinking Housing Policies* for United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG, 2019), and two *Environment & Urbanization* special issues in 2020 on housing.

It is in the context of this rich history that we are defining our housing justice work at IIED. This history has been built upon a strong commitment to partnerships that are based on international solidarity and direct collaboration with grassroots movements and their networks. Historically, alliances with organisations such as HIC, SDI, ACHR and WIEGO have been fundamental to the IIED's way of working. These have been complemented more recently by collaboration with coalitions such as the Global Platform for the Right to the City. At the centre of these partnerships and solidarity there is a recognition that structural housing inequalities have been forged by colonial histories of exploitation. Acknowledging, respecting and building upon such a history and ethos based on solidarity requires carefully choosing the agendas and the intellectual and political traditions we are joining — as we explore in this document.

Source: the authors in conversation with David Satterthwaite

Defining housing justice

What does housing justice mean? In this section, we propose a definition and unpack its different components, and how they engage with conceptual debates and social movements' claims.

2

Defining housing justice is not an easy task, but we believe it is worth framing it in a way that explains the conceptual point of departure from where we are engaging with the notion of justice.

A starting point for this exercise is the international and local recognition of the right to adequate housing through governments' commitments and obligations. This has enabled the establishment of clear dimensions regarding housing, including tenure security, habitability, affordability, location, access to services, accessibility and cultural adequacy.[2] But this is not enough. Multiple crises have made the realisation of the right to adequate housing increasingly challenging. We acknowledge the limitations and important critiques of universalist views of diverse realities. Rights frameworks can have blind spots when it comes to implementation and local relevance. Even when housing rights are fulfilled, housing injustices may still persist. In this respect, we believe housing justice offers a more expansive field of knowledge and action, operating through but also beyond human rights frameworks.[3]

We propose that housing justice is

a vision that seeks the transformation of housing systems to ensure the equitable distribution of capabilities for people to live in housing conditions that enable just and sustainable human flourishing.

We would like to unpack this definition, starting at the end of this statement.

The vision is about housing conditions that enable '*just and sustainable human flourishing'.* Human flourishing relates to the social, economic, cultural, spatial and environmental dimensions that allow everyone, in their radical diversity, to have a fulfilling life. We consider such flourishing from a social justice perspective, drawing on the seminal work of Nancy Fraser (1995), and research that has used Fraser's ideas to explore issues of urban equality and just cities (Fainstein, 2010; Allen and Frediani, 2013; Levy, 2015; Yap et al, 2021). From a social justice perspective, housing injustices are grounded in a combination of unjust distribution, unjust recognition and unjust participation. Therefore, human flourishing requires material redistribution of resources,

recognition of marginalised identities across gender, class, race, sexual orientation, and others, as well as forms of governance that ensure parity of participation.

We also say that housing justice is about the '*capabilities for people to live in housing condition*s' that enable such a flourishing. Here we can engage with the rich body of knowledge built upon the seminal work of Amartya Sen (1979; 1999) on the capability approach, which focuses on people's ability and opportunities to achieve the things that they value. Capabilities therefore means not only the personal capacities but also the resources, power and conditions to achieve those things. Importantly, centring on capabilities is not the same as focusing on the individual, as these are intrinsically relational, personal and collective. Capabilities should be understood by recognising social diversity, power inequalities and complexity, and how they are collectively shaped by legacies of discrimination that translate into diverse social experiences.

Martha Nussbaum (2011) and others in this field have produced rich literature on how to conceptualise human development from a justice perspective, focusing on the examination and expansion of capabilities. Understanding housing (and cities) as engines of human development allows us to engage with the drivers, practices, aspirations, abilities, opportunities and conditions that perpetuate or challenge housing injustices (Frediani, 2021). This framing highlights the importance of seeing housing as both an end and a means for social justice, with implications for housing policy and practice (Kimhur, 2022). 'Good housing' is a key dimension of a 'good life', with an intrinsic value in the pursuit of wellbeing and playing a key role in advancing other dimensions of human flourishing, such as good health, education and living standards (Frediani et al, 2019; see box 2).

Our understanding also involves capabilities to transform housing conditions. This is not about devolving the responsibility to build and provide housing for people, but rather to enable the conditions for residents to have control over their own homemaking practices. To ensure such conditions the state must exercise its power to tackle exclusionary, extractive, exploitative and enclosed practices. Besides the agency of individuals and collectives, there are structural

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[2] The definition from OHCHR Fact Sheet on the right to adequate housing includes seven dimensions (security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy); and four entitlements (security of tenure; housing, land and property restitution; equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing; and participation in housing-related decision making at the national and community levels). See: OHCHR and UN-Habitat (n/d).

[3] Importantly, the formal recognition of the right to adequate housing with all its dimensions, as part of UN human rights frameworks, has enabled the production of a growing body of knowledge about housing conditions and rights violations. More specifically, the work of the Special Rapporteurs on the right to adequate housing has enabled the systematic documentation of the extent to which the right to adequate housing is fulfilled, as well as pointing out and monitoring existing housing rights violations. They have also contributed to documenting and highlighting the structural conditions that allow the reproduction of such violations in relation to financialisation, forced evictions, homelessness, among others. For the work of former Special Rapporteurs on the right to adequate housing see: Rolnik (2019); The Shift (n/d).

processes that obstruct or enable certain housing conditions, related, for example, to real estate trends and the financial sector; regulations; or value systems embedded in housing responses associated with patriarchy, violence, ageism, ableism and racism.

Our definition proposes that housing justice should seek '*to ensure the equitable distribution*' of those capabilities. As such, it needs to actively promote policies of reparation, advancing material redistributive responses that recognise differences and redress legacies of discrimination and violence. Equitable distribution requires actions to address diverse conditions, needs and aspirations, highlighting those who have been excluded from housing opportunities. We understand that housing injustices are the product of power asymmetries that are embedded in long histories of inequality across gender, race, sexual orientation and class, from an intersectional perspective. In discussing equitable distribution we draw on at least two important traditions that, like Fraser's work, highlight these asymmetries

First, we draw on feminist theories that have acknowledged power asymmetries and highlighted that most inequalities are underpinned by the historical uneven distribution of burdens and autonomy. Likewise, they have helped recognise that the asymmetries and contradictions between the production and reproduction of life, as well as between private and public spheres, are defining elements of housing injustices (Federici, 2020). Feminist theories have also highlighted how inequalities are perpetuated by the unjust ways in which knowledge is produced and valued (Haraway, 1988; hooks, 1991; Ahmed, 2004; Fraser, 2013). In other words, uneven material distribution and exploitative practices will only be addressed if the inequality in knowledge production is also challenged (Fals-Borda, 1987).

Second, as housing injustices are the product of histories and geographies of oppression, tackling them requires a decolonial and Southern lens. Decolonial thinkers have recognised histories of continuous colonisation as a constitutive part of the current political economy and its inequalities (Quijano, 2000; Escobar, 2010). More specifically, what have been termed as 'southern turn' or 'south-eastern perspectives' in urban planning, have questioned the universality of urban planning theory and practice, highlighting how inadequate western planning framings have been complicit in reproducing urban injustices across the global South (Watson, 2016; Yiftachel, 2006). Most housing injustices are underpinned by such colonial legacies and their often inadequate, de-contextualised and discriminatory planning framings (Macarthy et al, 2022). Southern framings highlight the importance of engaging with localised urban trajectories and histories of colonisation when seeking such *equitable distribution,* with consequences in terms of the politics of reparation (Harrison, 2006; Watson, 2009; Parnell et al, 2009; Bhan et al, 2018; Bhan, 2019).

Finally, we propose that housing justice *'is a vision that seeks the transformation of housing systems'*. As previously stated, housing systems are more than housing policies; they are shaped by transactions at different scales, cultural and legal norms, regulations, markets and the wide range of local practices that shape and transform habitat and housing conditions. Transforming housing systems, therefore, implies engaging with the broad spectrum of housing practices, from people's everyday housing and city-making efforts to structural conditions and reforms.

Housing justice is not an unachievable vision, but rather something that we can work towards. In other words, it is a moving horizon that changes as we walk towards it. It requires a political commitment that is constantly being renewed, with continuous assessment of the pathways towards it. The vision of housing justice needs to be defined through constant public deliberation and contestation. Housing justice, as defined here, emerges from places of struggle, contestation and friction with systems that are failing most people, and doesn't always sit comfortably with more mainstream housing debates. Therefore, the challenge is to build collective relevance for and from places of resistance and unfairness, while permeating and transforming housing systems.

BOX 2: THE HIDDEN VALUE OF IMPROVING HOUSING IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

In 2023, IIED's Housing Justice team joined forces with Habitat for Humanity International to produce a background research study for the launch of the Home Equals campaign. This study investigated what the human development impacts of large-scale housing improvements in a country would be, if such improvements enabled everyone living in informal settlements to have equitable access to adequate housing. The research team (Alexandre Apsan Frediani, Camila Cociña and José Manuel Roche) developed a methodology to explore how increased access to adequate housing in informal settlements affects the income, health and education for both residents of informal settlements and wider society.

The evidence produced is clear: when residents of informal settlements do better, everyone does better (Frediani and Cociña, 2023). Some of the key findings include:

• At the national level, equitable access to adequate housing in informal settlements can directly generate as much as **10.5% economic growth** (measured as either gross domestic product or gross national income per capita).

• Life expectancy could increase by up to 4%, adding an average 2.4 years to life expectancy. More than **730,000 preventable deaths could be avoided annuall**y, a figure that is higher than the total number of deaths attributed to malaria globally.

• In some countries, the expected **years of schooling would increase by as much as 28%**. Globally, as many as 41.6 million additional children and young people could be enrolled in primary and secondary education. This is equivalent to 16.1% of the total number of children and young people currently missing education.

• Providing access to adequate housing in informal settlements could lead to **a jump of up to 18 places in the Human Development Index** (HDI) country ranking and a change in human development level from low to medium, or from high to very high.

For more information, see:
Frediani, AA, Cociña, C, and Roche, JM (2023) *Improving Housing in Informal Settlements: Assessing the Impacts in Human Development*. Habitat for Humanity International, Washington, D.C.

Banjarmasin, Indonesia, 2019 (Alexandre Apsan Fredaini, IIED)

Towards housing justice: four propositions

What are the implications of mobilising a justice lens for housing policy and practice? We propose four key areas to consider: anti-discriminatory housing policy and practice; radically democratic forms of housing production; housing as an infrastructure for better cities; and housing policy and practice that broaden visions for housing futures.

3

What does a housing justice lens *do* to housing systems that are exclusionary, extractive, exploitative and enclosed? What are the implications of bringing the proposed vision of justice to the forefront of housing policies and practices? We believe housing justice sheds light on certain topics pertaining to housing systems and opens up opportunities for interventions and transformation.

The notion of housing justice has been used to call for a fundamental disruption of current paternalistic approaches to housing reform (Lancione, 2024). While we agree there is a need for deep transformation of the perverse nature of current housing systems, our view is that shifts in policy and practice can open up pathways for sustained change. In what follows, we discuss four propositions and their transformative implications for policy and practice.

Most of these reflections have emerged from ongoing conversations with partners and colleagues who, from different locations and institutional settings, are involved in common struggles around the right to housing. We see these reflections as a contribution to the longstanding efforts that have been led by social movements, grassroots groups, researchers and allies.

1. Anti-discriminatory housing policy and practice

Recognising the inequalities and historical legacies of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism that shape current housing injustices highlights the need for anti-discrimination as a steering principle of housing justice, which has implications for policy and practice. Housing deprivation has a disproportionate impact on particular social groups, geographies and identities, and this cannot be detached from the historical trajectories that have shaped policy and practice.

'Anti-discrimination' should not be just a label. Rather, it is a principle that should be actively embraced by housing programming through deliberative reparation processes. Neither market solutions nor neutral social policies can make reparations for the accumulated burden of racial and other historical forms of discrimination. As Fraser has suggested, reshaping trajectories of historical discrimination requires active reparatory mechanisms that consider the redistributive, recognition and participatory elements of human flourishing.

Discrimination in housing has been a central issue for housing movements. In the US context, for example, fair housing groups have actively used questions of racial discrimination as a fundamental element of 'unfair housing' systems (Sidney, 2003). The principle of anti-discrimination also speaks to efforts to conceptually reframe housing in ways that address their often-embedded discriminatory nature. Notions such as 'housing as commons', for example, invite us to understand and problematise coinhabiting practices, to recognise usually invisibilised forms of collective dwelling, and "to directly link the questioning of dominant social relations with an ecosystemic approach" (Stavrides and Travlou, 2022:4). Reparatory housing efforts are also embedded in debates about care ethics, which have been taken forward, for instance, in the search for new feminist housing — and commons — thinking, through the understanding of the "care-(as)-work in collaborative housing projects" (Fernández Arrigoitia et al, 2023).

The implications of this proposition for policy and practice are multiple. It calls for housing systems to promote affirmative actions towards groups who have been systematically discriminated against across gender, ethnicity, race, class, migration status, sexual orientation, and ability, among others; protect people from evictions; better regulate discriminatory practices that affect the value chains of building materials, whose benefits and profits are often captured by local and international elites; tackle the uneven distribution of housing burdens and risks; protect tenants and regulate rental markets; respond to homeless populations through approaches such as 'housing first'[4] that protect vulnerable groups from rights violations. Above all, anti-discrimination housing policy and practice are about centring care as a guiding principle for reparatory interventions.

2. Radically democratic forms of housing production

Housing injustices are often driven by mechanisms that systematically exclude certain groups from decision-making processes about their own lives. Governance structures and housing production systems tend to value certain forms of knowledge, city-making and dwelling, while at the same time invisibilising, or even criminalising, others. The production of housing has implications in structures that condition the relations between people, cities and nature at multiple levels,

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from the personal to the territorial. Shaping these relations requires an open infrastructure that recognises and responds to the needs and aspirations of the diverse people they impact.

These mechanisms cannot live exclusively within market logic. They require democratic structures that allow and support non-speculative forms of city-making. In other words, housing justice calls for norms and mechanisms driven by housing use value and not exclusively by its exchange value. As such, it opens up spaces for radical democratic forms of housing production that advance socially and environmentally just principles.

These ideas have been systematically explored in the significant body of knowledge developed around community-led housing practices, particularly those termed by Latin American movements as 'social production of habitat' (Ortiz, 2007; Zárate, 2018). These have operationalised in contextual ways the urban theories built around Lefebvre's (1991) notion of social production of space. Through collective people-driven processes of enumerating, planning, managing, building, maintaining and dwelling in spaces, social movements and residents have been able to steer social and physical transformations (Jakob, 2003; Romero, 2003; Zárate, 2004; Ortiz and Zárate, 2004). The accumulated knowledge about collective forms of social mobilisation (such as enumerations and collective savings), spatial production, self-management, and city-making, produced by networks such as Slum Dwellers International (SDI), Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), has been crucial for pushing the boundaries of our understanding of the very notion of 'participation', and what it entails to embrace democratic housing policy and planning (Frediani and Cociña, 2019).

The implication of a radically democratic housing system is to embrace, protect, support and expand such democratic forms of housing production. This comes about through community land trusts, cooperatives, collective savings groups, collective occupations, participatory upgrading, inclusive forms of public housing, and other initiatives that promote housing as a public good — and as such, as a collective and common good. These collectively managed and non-speculative forms of housing put at the centre the need for more open and democratic governance structures that recognise and support the social and collective processes taking place.

3. Housing as an infrastructure for better cities

Housing production is a constitutive element of urban development. In other words, the way housing is produced and used has direct implications for creating better cities. Our definition of better cities is rooted in the ideas of the 'right to the city' and 'just urban transition' as crucial agendas to tackle the twin crises of climate change and inequality (Walnycki et al, 2022). The construction of housing is critical in shaping urban and territorial systems, and the social, environmental and economic fabrics that are part of those systems. A justice lens is a call for the recognition of housing as inseparable from neighbourhoods, cities and territories.

Housing is fundamental in promoting particular forms of urban development, which can either lock cities into unsustainable social and environmental trajectories or, alternatively, promote better cities that can flourish sustainably and advance the right to the city.

On the one hand, housing production can generate social lock-ins by creating poverty traps that are reinforced by spatial segregation. Segregation is reproduced when lack of affordable housing in well-located areas pushes low-income groups to marginalised and poorly served areas of the city, which can reinforce vulnerabilities and increase exposure to violence. They can also generate environmental lock-ins because carbon-intensive urban expansion impacts the environmental function of land and urban–rural linkages, promotes fuel dependency and reduces the capacity to adapt to and mitigate climate change. This therefore links with questions of climate justice as part of an indisputable agenda for the role of housing for just ecological transitions — because "there is no climate justice without housing justice" (Frediani, 2022).

On the other hand, when housing policy and practice seek to advance better cities, housing can be a vital infrastructure for justice. Cities are made up of several forms of infrastructure. Well-located and well-served housing can be a crucial one that provides access to urban services and entitlements. Housing also acts as a social infrastructure, strengthening social fabric and local livelihoods. Collective struggles for the right to housing create organisational infrastructures that can contribute to improving democratic practices, through the formation of associations, cooperatives or savings groups, which enhance collective learning, dialogue and

action. Thus, housing has been conceptualised as an "infrastructure of care" (Power and Mee, 2020), drawing particularly on the linkages between gender equality and housing, interrogating the different functions of housing as an urban infrastructure. Likewise, looking at grassroots-led practices, housing has been referred to as "reparative urban infrastructure", when referring specifically to occupations of vacant buildings in central areas of the city (Scheba and Millington, 2023).

The implications of approaching housing as infrastructure for better cities are multiple. It means that governments at all levels must: use zoning, land use regulations and incentives as key mechanisms to address housing discrimination, segregation and fragmentation; prioritise low-income groups when transforming well-located and well-served areas — through upgrading, densification or retrofitting — using democratic mechanisms and rights-based approaches; consider the right to adequate housing as part of urban resilience and disaster risk reduction programmes; support grassroots efforts to decarbonise the city (Cociña and Frediani, 2024); incorporate circular economy principles into housing, considering housing implications in urban, ecological and livelihoods systems. In short, this is a call for housing and planning systems to ensure cities put the social and environmental function of land and property at the centre.

4. Expanded visions for housing futures

Justice is a vision that requires constant review to renew the pathways towards more equal, caring and sustainable futures. Housing justice is a call to imagine more diverse and open responses to the housing needs and aspirations of the world's majority of today and tomorrow, and to open up housing policy and practice in ways that recognise, value and mobilise diverse types of knowledge and 'ways of doing'.

Policymakers and decisionmakers often operate as if the lack of *formal* or unitary housing policies means that there are no housing systems providing answers to people's needs and aspirations. On the contrary, societies do have structures and mechanisms through which governments, legislators, markets and people are shaping existing housing conditions. This belief has been called the "myth of housing policy" (Madden and Marcuse, 2016:119). Looking at housing systems

through a housing justice lens is a call to expose and interact with these diverse structures with more clarity. This requires questioning how housing systems perpetuate epistemic injustices by rendering invisible existing practices.

Engaged academics and networks of scholars and activists have contributed substantially to our reading of this debate by providing grounded critical theory that diversifies the notion of housing. The previously mentioned Latin American debates about the social production of habitat have been critical in this regard. But some of these reflections have also been built around work focused on the United States and Europe, with important contributions to the framing of housing issues elsewhere. In their book *In Defense of Housing*, David Madden and Peter Marcuse (2016) untangle housing as a political–economic problem, reflecting on how the permanent housing crisis is the product of class struggles, conflict and power inequalities. They call for redefining what and for whom housing policies are. We share with them the urgency and need for questioning and reframing the very definition of housing policy in ways that recognise the inequalities embedded in housing systems. Likewise, the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy's work on housing justice has proposed principles to guide housing justice endeavours that expand the realm of housing scholarship, around three propositions: "from the housing crisis to housing justice"; "property regimes are colonial regimes"; and "housing justice demands research justice" (Roy, 2019). Although drawing mainly from the experience of US struggles, UCLA has also connected its work on unequal cities and housing justice with debates from the global South, mainly through scholars such as Gautam Bhan and Raquel Rolnik from India and Brazil respectively.[5] As part of these critical debates on housing, scholars and activists have also advanced and expanded the notion of 'radical housing' through spaces such as the *Radical Housing Journal* (RHJ Editorial Collective, 2019) building upon notions of squatting and housing resistance and practices (Vasudevan, 2015; Brickell et al, 2017). The 'radical' aspect has been mobilised to interrogate and engage with the idea of "dwelling as difference" and with the "everyday practices of dwelling at the margins" (Lancione, 2020: 275).

The implications of broadening visions for housing policy and practice are multiple. It implies engaging with the different actors and levels of government that participate in respecting, protecting and fulfilling

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[5] See: https://unequalcities.org/public-debates/#videos

housing rights, recognising them as valid stakeholders for housing responses. This includes local and regional governments, organised civil society and communities, sectorial government departments and the private sector (Cociña and Frediani, 2023, see box 3). It is also about recognising practices taking place at the margins, alongside or even in opposition to formal planning systems, as valid forms of participation in city-making. It implies making housing financing and delivery mechanisms more flexible and recognising more diverse, emerging and often collective ways of dwelling, and not always responding to heteronormative and individualistic forms of living. It is also a call for opening up the ways in which we imagine spatial responses and the portfolio of housing design and architecture to support more diverse forms of dwelling.

In short, it is a call for a knowledge production agenda that seeks more openness and diverse visions about *where, how, by* and *for whom* housing policies happen. As discussed earlier, feminist theories have been key for highlighting the interlinkages between knowledge and justice, and questioning the structures that shape how knowledge is produced and valued. These ideas have been taken forward by debates highlighting that there are forms of injustice that are distinctively epistemic (Fricker, 2007; Santos, 2014). And, more specifically, through ideas about the politics of housing knowledge, recognising that this goes beyond research and policy but "exists out in the world, as part of the housing system" (Madden, 2023).

BOX 3: HOW LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS ARE ADVANCING THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING

IIED's Housing Justice team worked with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL, to explore the role of local actions for the advancement of SDG target 11.1 ('By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums'). Based on experiences collected from local governments and civil society, the report identifies a range of housing initiatives 'from below' that are crucial for diversifying the efforts to advance the right to adequate housing, organised in three strategies:

- *Recognition:* Local action, through a range of initiatives, instruments, innovations and partnerships, can advance the recognition of the right to housing of those who have been systematically excluded from housing systems, by acknowledging existing informal housing efforts and community-led processes of knowledge production.

- *Protection:* Local action can secure the protection of housing entitlements, safeguarding residents' rights by providing adequate market regulations, incentives and frameworks, enabling diverse forms of tenure, and acting against forced evictions and housing rights violations.

- *Fulfilment:* Local action is critical for fulfilling housing rights, enabling and directly providing social housing, as well as creating the conditions for supporting community-led housing initiatives and enabling informal settlement upgrading.

The paper was produced in the context of the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum (UN-HLPF) review of the progress of SDG-11 on sustainable cities. It fed into the 7th report, *Towards the localisation of the SDGs*, presented by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments at the HLPF.

For more information, see:
Cociña, C, and Frediani, A.A. (2023). "Housing and basic services from below: How LRGs are advancing the right to adequate housing". In United Cities and Local Governments, *7th HLPF Report Towards the Localisation of SDGs*. Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, New York.

Looking forward

IIED's Housing Justice agenda is shaped by the debates, struggles and practices described in this paper. We are progressing this agenda through three main workstreams: enhancing local capabilities of grassroots groups; promoting housing policy and practice that consider the voices at the frontline of housing injustices; and forging alliances and solidarity to advance housing justice.

4

Our framing of housing justice is a reading and articulation of the spaces of solidarity and resistance that have been forged as a response to the perverse nature of existing housing systems. It is, above all, an effort to contest and expose housing injustices while building propositions for those who struggle against them. The four propositions described in this paper (*anti-discriminatory*; *radically democratic*; *infrastructure for better cities*; and *visions for housing futures*) emerge from envisioning the material consequences of advancing housing justice. That is, the implications of transforming housing systems in ways that ensure the equitable distribution of capabilities for people to live in housing conditions that, in turn, enable just and sustainable human flourishing.

For IIED, as an international policy and research organisation with a long history of international solidarity around housing, this framing is a call to mobilise and advance such propositions in ways that link local struggles with global processes. It is in this context that we have defined our agenda of work around the following three main workstreams:

▪ We will continue to work with grassroots groups to enhance local capabilities and strengthen social mobilisation, because we believe that housing justice is advanced when grassroots groups are better able to influence decision making and shape the production of their habitat.

▪ We will promote just national and local policies that are produced democratically, because we believe that governance structures that recognise multiple stakeholders, types of knowledge and realities can generate policy and practice that advance housing justice.

▪ We will forge alliances and advocacy strategies for housing justice in international and local spaces, because we believe that, when working collectively and in grounded ways, housing networks and activists can transform local realities while shifting global frameworks and narratives.

The four propositions offered in this paper will contribute to ongoing conversations with partners and colleagues in the search for new imaginings for *thinking* and *doing* in the housing field. They are, above all, a call for new ways to engage with the reality of the global housing crisis: a crisis that is preventing millions of people from living a fulfilling life; a crisis that is largely sustained by systems that are unresponsive to most people's realities. Housing justice is a call to transform such systems.

Ocupação Jorge Hereda, São Paulo, Brazil, 2023 (Alexandre Apsan Fredaini, IIED).

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The current global housing crisis is sustained by housing systems that do not respond to the reality of the world's majority. This paper discusses how addressing this crisis through a 'housing justice' lens can open up areas of intervention and transformation for policy and practice that can contest unfair and unsustainable housing systems. It presents four propositions for a justice lens: anti-discriminatory housing policy and practice; radically democratic forms of housing production; housing as an infrastructure for better cities; and expanded visions for housing futures.

IIED is a policy and action research organisation. We promote sustainable development to improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which these livelihoods are built. We specialise in linking local priorities to global challenges. IIED is based in London and works in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific, with some of the world's most vulnerable people. We work with them to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them — from village councils to international conventions.

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