

EcCoWell Community Recovery Program

University of Glasgow

Yulia Nesterova and Michael Osborne

*While the University of Glasgow has a number of activities that reflect EcCoWell principles, this report is focussed on the international activities of the **Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods** which has operated with nine research partners in eight countries in Asia and Africa. This is an ambitious collaborative project directed at developing a holistic and in-depth understanding of the complex issues to be addressed. The report illustrates how EcCoWell principles can be applied in international contexts.*

At the Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods ([SHLC](#)), funded via UK Research and Innovation ([UKRI](#)) as part of the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund ([GCRF](#)), we work to generate such understanding and evidence to tackle the challenges of social and economic unsustainability in fast-growing urban centres in Africa and Asia. To do so, we adopt a novel approach: instead of studying and/or comparing countries, we utilise an interdisciplinary, city- and neighbourhood-level lens to systematically investigate the complex connections and relationships between urban (SDG11), health (SDG3), and education (SDG4) challenges in neighbourhoods.

Poverty in and unsustainability of urban areas in the Global South has been a major challenge to researchers and policy makers for a very long time. International and national urban policies still tend to operate at a very general level with policy makers having limited knowledge about the unequal distribution of opportunities, benefits, and harm within the urban population. Understanding of urbanisation is fragmented and research overwhelmingly focuses on conditions of slums at the expense of investigating specific local social, economic, and physical structures, and how they are changing, especially at the neighbourhood level.

Sustainability, prosperity, and resilience of cities, countries, and the world as a whole can only be achieved if we have a holistic and in-depth understanding of the complex issues we are dealing with, why they exist, and how they can be addressed effectively. We argue that such understanding should start with exploring such micro units as the neighbourhood: first, neighbourhood is the place where social policy is delivered, and second, it is the place that determines residents' exposure to peace and security vs violence and harm, prosperity vs

poverty and destitution, and opportunities vs disadvantages. However, despite the emphasis of the [New Urban Agenda](#) of UN-Habitat on maximising the benefits and minimising the harms of urbanisation for all, there is a lack of evidence for action at the time when evidence-based and cost-effective interventions are desperately needed.

At the Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods ([SHLC](#)) we work to generate such understanding and evidence to tackle the challenges of social and economic unsustainability in fast-growing urban centres in Africa and Asia. To do so, we adopt a novel approach: instead of studying and/or comparing countries, we utilise an interdisciplinary, city- and neighbourhood-level lens to systematically investigate the complex connections and relationships between urban (SDG11), health (SDG3), and education (SDG4) challenges in neighbourhoods. Unlike the majority of studies, we also made a decision to shift from studying large cities to studying and comparing two cities in each country: one major national city and one 'typical' regional city. This approach allows us to draw comparisons from several dimensions: within country and region, between countries and regions, and between different economic development levels and types of cities and neighbourhoods. Profiles of a number of the cities that we work with have been published in a special issue of [Environment and Urbanisation ASIA](#).

And we do not do it alone – for a more locally-driven, equitable, and effective approach, we formed an international consortium of nine [research partners](#) in eight countries: Bangladesh, China, India, the Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, and the UK. Our team of experts comes from a range of different fields including urban studies, architecture, design and planning, demography, education, health, law, and more. To support our ambitious collaborative project that runs from 2017 to the end of 2021, we received funding via UK Research and Innovation ([UKRI](#)) as part of the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund ([GCRF](#)).

To provide policy makers and planners with more localised, contextual, and specific responses to urban issues on the ground, we are working on three main packages:

- 1) Sustainable cities and communities: we analyse the underlying social and economic forces of urban development and the changing internal structure of cities to understand the different neighbourhoods.
- 2) Sustainable health and wellbeing: we assess the relationships between city and neighbourhood characteristics, health services, and the health and wellbeing of residents.
- 3) Inclusive and equitable quality education and learning: we assess the provision and outcomes of formal and non-formal educational facilities and services to understand how education and continuous learning can contribute not only to economic prosperity but also to improved quality of life in communities, health and wellbeing, city governance, civic participation, and other aspects of cultural and social development, especially in challenging circumstances.

Education Team

PI: Professor Ya Ping Wang

Co-Is: Professor Michele Schweisfurth and Professor Mike Osborne

Research Fellow: Dr Yulia Nesterova

PhD Students: Preeti Dagar, Rhona Brown

Project News

While a lot of our work is still in progress, we have produced a number of outputs of various kinds for our education portfolio. These include:

An initial report that compares education progress in twelve cities in six countries we are working with: [Education policies, systems, and progress in Africa and Asia: a comparative analysis](#) prepared by our Research Fellows, Dr Yulia Nesterova and Dr Graeme Young, and a literature review on [Education policies and issues in developing countries](#) prepared by Dr Carli Rowell. Some of our publications are now in press or in preparation – see below for more information.

We have also started our engagement with the wider public, and we are working to increase the scope, variety, and quantity of such outputs. Our Co-Investigator, Prof. Mike Osborne, for example, gave an interview on [Learning Cities](#) to DVV International, our partners at Ifakara Health Institute (Tanzania) prepared a blogpost, [COVID-19 and Tanzania's cities: why collaboration is key](#), for our website, and our research fellow Dr Yulia Nesterova wrote a piece for *Impakter Magazine*, entitled [Schools out forever? Supporting resilient learning in the face of COVID-19](#). Our partners in Rwanda have made an important contribution to the UNESCO/PASCAL Observatory webinar series, [Learning Cities' COVID-19 recovery: from research to practice](#), reporting on the topic of the *challenge of measurement, planning and evaluation in learning cities in the city of Huye*, the recording of which can be found at this [link](#). In that event we heard from Co-Is Pierre Claver and Josephine Mwangeli, and the Mayor of Huye, Sebutege Ange.

Research is one of our two main goals. Our other core task is [strengthening capacity](#) of researchers, government officials, and policy makers across the world to ensure that we can build sustainable neighbourhoods and cities. Our capacity building activities include a small grants fund, a visiting research fellow programme, training workshops, knowledge exchange events, and other opportunities that help us strengthen research and organisational capacity, develop a new generation of multi-disciplinary urban researchers, establish a sustainable international network, and facilitate knowledge exchange between the UK and Global South countries. Knowledge exchange has also involved week-long partner meetings and visiting neighbourhoods to meet residents and officials in the cities where we are working.

We have some really exciting examples of such work to share. Amongst some 20 projects that we have funded is an interdisciplinary project exploring 'liveability' in Mongla and Noapara in

south-western Bangladesh from the perspectives of residents, officials and stakeholders. The study explored how residents in each of these cities perceive their neighbourhood and what are their priorities in making their city liveable. The concept of liveability and its components of livelihoods and food security, utilities and transport, health and natural environment, education, housing, central and local government, safety and security and lastly social and leisure provide rich and complex insights into the daily life of cities and what is needed to create liveable, regional cities. This work was presented in a webinar, details of which can be found at this [link](#).

Publications

Ahmad, S., Baffoe, G., Bhandari, R., Young, G. and Osborne, M. (2021). 'Sustainable, healthy, learning cities and neighbourhoods'. In M. Venter et al. *Learning for a Better Future: Perspectives on Higher Education, Cities, Business and Civil Society*. Durbanville: AOSIS (in press)

Nesterova, Y. and Young, G. (2020) *Education policies, systems, and progress in Africa and Asia: a comparative analysis* Available at <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/research/education-policies-systems-progress-africa-asia-comparative-analysis/> Accessed 29 July 2020

Nesterova, Y. and Capsada-Munsech, Q. (2021). *National and subnational approaches to regulating private technical and vocational education and training: comparative insights from Asia and Africa*. Paris: UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report. (commissioned, in preparation)

Osborne, M. and Hernandez, S. (2020) *Sustainable learning cities: Inclusion, equity and lifelong learning*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. (in press)

Rowell, C. (2020) *Education policies and issues in developing countries*. Available at <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Education-Policies-and-Issues-in-Developing-Countries-Literature-Review-April-2020.pdf>, Accessed 29 July 2020

Rowell, C. and Osborne, M. (2020) 'Beyond Schooling: Learning Cities and Adult Education in the Global South' in M. London (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Lifelong Learning*, Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.