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Pathways to Urban Equality through the Sustainable Development Goals: Modes of Extreme Poverty, Resilience, and Prosperity

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ABSTRACT

There has been a tendency for debates around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to focus on particular Goals or Targets. What tends to get lost, however, is the bigger picture. In this paper we ask: to what extent and under what conditions do the SDGs offer a pathway to equality? Specifically, we focus on the potentials of the SDGs as a pathway to urban equality in the decade of delivery. We focus on the ways that three key interrelated development agendas, eradicating extreme poverty, promoting prosperity, and building resilience, are mobilised through the SDGs. Together these agendas reveal tensions and opportunities in the relationship between the SDGs and urban equality. In discussion, we reflect on the potentials of an urban equality lens to read the SDGs, and the conditions under which they might contribute to the realisation of fairer and more equal cities.

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Extreme poverty; Prosperity; Resilience; Sustainable development goals; Urban equality

1. Introduction

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a pivotal step towards future prosperity, providing the first universally agreed framework to strive for whole system transformation for global sustainability. Across 17 Goals, 169 targets, and 231 unique indicators, Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (herein the 2030 Agenda) charts a vision to 'leave no one behind,' outlining a clear commitment to inclusive, sustainable, and more equitable development for all countries, based on five pillars (*5Ps*): people, prosperity, planet, peace, and partnership ([UNDP] United Nations Development Programme, 2016). The overall aim of the 2030 Agenda is 'to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature' ([UNGA] United Nations General Assembly 2015). As we are now in the 'decade of delivery' of the SDGs it is apt to take stock and build on the work that has been carried out before to help accelerate interventions in ways that do justice to local needs, contexts, and realities.

Much has been written about efforts to operationalise the SDGs – asking what 'sanitation for all' might mean in practice and whether the standards set are meaningful improvements (Bongartz et al. 2016; Herrera 2019; Diep et al. 2021), examining the downscaling targets to the city-scale (Zinkernagel et al. 2018; Valencia et al. 2019; Fox and Macleod 2021; [UNSDSN] United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2022), and debating the risks of 'target chasing' and whether monitoring data is transparent and reliable (Kharrazi et al. 2016; Lyytimäki et al. 2020). Other scholars have explored the complex and politically fraught negotiations that lead to the adoption of the SDG indicator framework (Fukuda-Parr 2019; Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2019; Fukuda-Parr and Muchhala 2020). While others have critiqued the framework and its assumptions from global South

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perspectives, such as its lack of engagement with informality (Arfvidsson et al. 2017; Nagati et al. 2022).

What tends to get lost in this technical detail, however, is the bigger picture of a world in which 'no-one is left behind', within consideration of environmentally sustainable planetary boundaries. In this paper we focus on the potential of the SDGs to achieve this ambitious goal by foregrounding an urban equality lens, exploring the interconnections between cross-cutting elements of the agenda: resilience, poverty, and prosperity.

Why urban equality – why cities? It is estimated that by 2050, 68% of the world's population will live in urban areas ([UN DESA] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2018); development challenges will increasingly be concentrated in those areas. Despite global reductions in extreme poverty, three quarters of cities are currently more unequal than they were in 1996 (UN-HABITAT 2016). City centre economies are more expensive and exclusive, increasingly fragmented into richer and poorer areas ([UN] United Nations 2020b). The proportion of the world's urban population living in slums grew to 24% in 2018, compared with the previous decrease from 28% to 23% between 2000 and 2014. The absolute number of the urban slum population exceeded 1 billion in 2018 and is projected to reach 1.2 billion by 2030 (Habitat for Humanity International 2021).

These inequalities have only been accentuated by the Covid−19 pandemic. As a recent editorial in Lancet Public Health (2020, p. 460) highlighted, 'we are in danger of missing targets to improve urban environments' due to the pandemic's 'regressive impact' on city economies, jobs, livelihoods, and public investments across the world. By late 2020 the World Bank was predicting an increase in extreme poverty of between 110 and 150 million people, and with that an intensification of sanitation struggles (World Bank 2020). There is also a growing body of work concerned with how climate change is exacerbating urban inequalities, asking for example, how forms of adaptation and mitigation might be reoriented towards more equitable outcomes (Reckien et al. 2017).

While the critical nature of urban issues is reflected by the inclusion of SDG 11 – a specifically urban goal which aims to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable' – many of the other goals must be increasingly realised within cities or in relation to urbanisation processes (Zinkernagel et al. 2018; Valencia et al. 2019; Fox and Macleod 2021; [UNSDSN] United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2022). The SDGs focus attention not just on specific measures of development in the city, but on the larger nature of urban living, including variations in quality of life and opportunity that are often hidden in national data aggregation (Bai et al. 2016). Since the interdependencies across the various SDGs are typically greater in cities, it is important to understand the urban dimension across each of the 17 Goals, and to cast an equality lens across them.

1.1 The urban equality lens

Drawing on the work of Yap et al. (2021) we distinguish between *inequalities of outcome in urban contexts* and *structural inequalities in urban processes*. With regards to the former, research from around the world has identified rising inequalities in health, housing, services, infrastructure, income, and transport, amongst many other domains. Not only are these forms of inequality growing, but they also compound and exacerbate one another; for example, low-income households are more likely to experience health issues and are more likely to exist in areas that are poorly serviced by public transport. Structural inequalities in urban processes meanwhile reflect inequalities rooted in intersectionality. These inequalities take shape across political and social spheres, through differential access to justice and legal systems and lack of representation in political decision-making on grounds of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, livelihood, place of origin, age, and ability, to name but a few examples. For all their allure, cities are synonymous with struggle, uncertainty, vulnerability, and hardship for increasing numbers of people.

Given the ways in which notions of equality and equity are frequently brought together in discourse (Haylett 2003; Stephens 2011; Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013) and mirrored in reality (Osrin et al. 2011; Luh et al. 2013; Archer and Dodman 2015), we focus on what we term building 'pathways to urban equality', a framework that shines a light on issues of equity *and* equality, referring to fairness within urban processes and to equality of outcome within and between cities. Pathways, in this sense, refer to the processes, ideas, and institutions that are required to contribute to fairer and more equal cities.

To relate the SDG agenda to the notion of urban equality, we adopt a broad definition of equality that

includes the city and urbanisation in general, as well as politics, the economy, culture, social difference, and the environment. Our approach in this paper is shaped by the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) programme,[1] and in particular by four dimensions of urban equality: *equitable distribution, parity of political participation, reciprocal recognition*, and *solidarity and mutual care* (see Yap et al. 2021, for a review of the literature theorising and conceptualising inequality). Together, these dimensions of equality connect universal access to income, basic services, and infrastructure (*distribution*); different social identities and how they relate to urban knowledge, organisation, planning, and management (*recognition* of diverse identities); the means to ensure the active engagement of citizens in discussions about the city (parity of *participation*) and the civic life of the city itself (*solidarity*) (Butcher et al. 2021). Butcher (2022) argues that while poverty, inequalities, and urban sustainability feature across many goals and targets, the agenda does not always well-acknowledge the relations which structure inequality – concentrations of wealth, decision-making authority, knowledge, or social status – or their specific manifestations in urban areas. However, the interrelationships between different dimensions of urban equality can be useful for understanding the interactions between the SDG targets (Butcher 2022).

To anchor our discussion, we focus on three key concerns across the SDGs and the larger urban development debate: *extreme poverty*, *resilience*, and *prosperity*. These themes capture the basis and aspiration of the SDGs and the larger debates around urban equality more than any other set of key terms. Since each theme has been characterised differently within the SDG agenda, we examine how these core concepts of international development are brought into view in the SDGs and reflect on what different framings reveal about the Agenda's potential for transformative change. We argue that for progress to be made on urban equality, actors working towards the SDGs must recognise the intersections of poverty, resilience and prosperity and take a whole systems approach to build pathways to urban equality.

2. Methodology

We first examined the different modes of extreme poverty, resilience, and prosperity contained within the SDG framework, focusing on the Goals and Targets as well as the broader 2030 Agenda literature and documentation. This entailed thematic coding of the 17 goals, 169 targets, and 231 unique indicators using explicit and inferred references relevant to the three terms. For the analysis of extreme poverty, the terms *poverty, poor, impoverished, informal, slum, vulnerable, marginalised, disadvantaged, excluded, rights, social protection*, and *income* were analysed. These terms were identified in recognition that extreme poverty is a multi-dimensional set of challenges determined not only to household income, but wider systems of entitlements, provisions, and vulnerabilities across economic, social, and political domains (Yap and McFarlane 2020). For prosperity, the terms *prosperity, prosperous lives* and *fulfilling lives* and a set of concepts associated with material security and living a good life, including *well-being, quality of life, living standards*, *secure livelihood* and *sustainable livelihood*. For resilience, the terms *resilience, vulnerability*, *disaster risk management*, *climate change adaptation*, *social support mechanisms* and *insurance*, *early-warning* and *preparation* were included as specific ways of achieving resilience, interpreted as the ability to resist, absorb, and adapt to shocks and crises. In what follows we examine how three prominent development discourses appear within and across the Goals and Targets, drawing attention to the pluralities of the SDGs and the challenges involved in assessing them.

3. Results

3.1 Extreme poverty in the SDGs

The World Bank's international poverty line defines extreme poverty as people living on less than US $1.90 per day. Extreme poverty is concentrated mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, where 50% of people in extreme poverty live in five countries (Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Madagascar), and in South Asia (India). The World Bank forecasts that by 2030, 132 million people may fall into poverty due to the effects of climate change (Jafino et al. 2020), and nine out of ten people living in extreme poverty will be in sub-Saharan Africa (Zheng and Silwal 2019). Use of poverty lines in policy targets are widely critiqued (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013). The World Bank's focus on the poorest 40% (World Bank 2016, 2018, 2020) obscures the nature of hardship, insecurity and exposure to risk for people who are living just above this poverty line. Relative poverty

(the proportion of people living below a fraction of national median income, rather than in relation to a fixed poverty line) is increasing.

The SDGs set the target of eradicating extreme poverty around the world by 2030. The indicator for this is the proportion of people living below the international poverty line of $1.90 per day (Indicator 1.1.1). However, beyond this conception of extreme poverty as a question of income, the SDG framework speaks implicitly to broader multi-dimensional conceptions of extreme poverty.

The coding exercise revealed that the term *poverty* appears 10 times in the goals, targets, and indicators, while the term *extreme poverty* appears only once. After 'poverty', the most frequently used terms were *vulnerable, poor*, and *rights*. This resonates with other global reports on extreme poverty, where the term is often used to delineate both material deprivation and human rights denial.

This multi-dimensional focus comes through in the detail of Goal 1: 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere.' While the Goal includes specific interventions, such as Target 1b – 'Create sound policy frameworks [. . .] based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions,' it also includes Targets that require multiple interventions. For example, Target 1.4: 'By 2030, ensure that all men and women [. . .] have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services [. . .]'

The eradication of extreme poverty is not confined to Goal 1 but exists across the Goals. For example, while Goal 6 – 'Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all' – does not mention extreme poverty explicitly, lack of access to adequate water and sanitation is a critical dimension of how extreme poverty manifests in many contexts (Castro 2007; Cruz et al. 2015). If extreme poverty is expressed explicitly in relation to income within Goal 1, a far-reaching understanding of extreme poverty appears more diffusely across the goals. This includes a focus on protecting the poor from falling into 'vulnerable situations' caused by different kinds of disaster. Target 11.5:

> *By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.*

This emphasis on protecting people from falling into extreme poverty also emerges in relation to vulnerable groups such as women and girls, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and older persons.

Nonetheless, it is the *economic* dimension of extreme poverty that takes overall precedence in the SDGs. This dimension is expressed through attention to income (1.1; 10.1), access to resources and financial services (1.4), access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food (2.1), the impacts of economic losses due to disasters (11.5), and numerous targets around access to work and renumeration (5.4). It also emerges in relation to 'unfair inclusion', labour market exploitation, and how those in extreme poverty frequently pay more than affluent households for goods and services.

While socio-political issues of representation and identity are included within the goals, political dimensions are not strongly articulated and there is little specific discussion of the role of different social networks in reaching the Targets or eradicating extreme poverty. There is less recognition of the spatial dimensions of extreme poverty, outside of references to 'slums' and informal settlements (Goal 11) or small-scale food producers (Goal 2), although space is implicit in the goals on infrastructure (Goals 6 and 9) and housing (Goal 11), as well as issues regarding access to basic services and the spatial distribution of risk and vulnerability (Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 11 and 13). Extreme poverty also includes subjective questions of well-being (Yap and McFarlane 2020), and this is at least recognised in the SDGs through, for example, reference to 'having felt discriminated against' (10.3.1; 16.b.1).

In terms of delivering these aims in practice, the SDGs have mixed levels of guidance. Proposed interventions can be grouped into five main areas: upholding existing international agreements, resourcing, policy, programming, and capacity-building. While many SDGs identify a level at which responsibility for this intervention rests (local, national, regional, or international), many Targets do not state a specific level at which the actions to achieve the target should be mobilised. For example, Target 1b aims to 'create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support

accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.',[2] Goal 1 also includes Targets that will presumably require multi-scalar interventions, for example, Target 1.4 (see above).

The Goals, Targets, and Indicators are understandably weighted towards state interventions in eradicating extreme poverty, given that states have statutory obligations and the capacity to enforce new laws, policies, and budgets. However, there is little engagement with how civil society and social networks might support the design and implementation of the SDGs, and coordinate their activities with governmental and related agencies. This reflects the broadly state-centric nature of the SDG framework which positions national governments as central actors in realising the Goals and Targets. Civil society and non-governmental organisations can have a voice in the implementation of the SDGs through the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), to which they are invited to apply for Consultative Status. However, this mechanism would not allow civil society organisations to influence the content of the Goals and Targets themselves.

In contrast, groups like the United Cities and Local Governments organisation (UCLG) (2020) have spent considerable time thinking through implementation, and have noted that the involvement of local governmental and non-governmental groups will be crucial to accurate data collection. These organisations have expressed concern that local and regional governments lack support and financial resources, cautioning that their involvement is still too slow to meet the scale of the SDG challenges (ibid.).

In sum, while extreme poverty takes multiple forms in the SDGs, the goals direct clear attention to poverty's economic dimensions and to the role of the state. There is less attention to the political, social, experiential, and spatial dimensions of extreme poverty, though they all appear in different ways, sometimes implicitly; and less attention to the different routes through which the SDGs might be implemented in practice. Issues of *redistribution* are present but largely implicit, while calls for political *participation* are relatively subdued. Issues of *recognition*, with the exception of gender, receive mixed treatment, and issues of *solidarity and mutual care* are largely absent from the 2030 Agenda.

3.2 Resilience in the SDGs

The ambiguity of the term 'resilience' – used variously as both an outcome and a means to achieve other developmental outcomes – is well established within development debates. While the idea of resilience has been carefully defined in fields such as disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, the SDGs and accompanying documents reflect the equivocal, and sometimes contested, uses of the term across disciplinary and socio-cultural lines.

The term resilience appears within seven of the fifteen SDGs. The first use of the term is in the context of Target 1.5:

> *By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations, and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.*

This framing suggests that resilience is a condition of communities and closely tied to related terms of 'exposure', 'vulnerability', climate change, shocks, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and disasters. Across the other six Goals that mention resilience however, it is unclear how far these related concepts are implied. Target 2.4, for example, describes the need for 'resilient agricultural practices' as one of many adaptations necessary to end global hunger. However, it is unclear how far this notion of resilience mirrors the idea of the 'resilience of the poor' described in Target 1.5. The indicator for Target 2.4 offers little clarity, measuring simply the 'proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture' (2.4.1). What, then, is the meaning and significance of 'resilience' in the Target?

The term resilience appears within Goal 9 on *Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure* in terms of 'quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure' (9.1) and 'resilient infrastructure development in developing countries' (9.a). Again however, the indicators for these targets do not propose to measure the form or degree of resilience achieved. 'Resilience' appears again in Goal 11, in terms of 'sustainable and resilient building' (11.c); Goal 13 on *Climate Action*, which aims to 'strengthen resilience and adaptation capacity to climate related hazards and natural disasters in all countries' (13.1); and Goal 14 on *Life Below Water*, which aims for, 'sustained management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid adverse impacts including by strengthening their resilience' by 2020 (14.2).

These examples reflect the ad hoc way in which 'resilience' is applied to both social and environmental processes. Resilience is normally linked to concrete

indicators through the actions of governments, such as the development of disaster risk reduction strategies, or meeting international obligations, such as the Sendai framework.

Under the 'Means of Implementation' Targets, Goal 9 refers to building 'resilient infrastructure' and Goal 11 to making 'cities and human settlements safe, resilient and sustainable.' Resilient infrastructure could be infrastructure that has redundancy built into it such that shocks do not interrupt service provision or at least can be ameliorated. But it could also refer to what has been termed 'resistant infrastructure' (Gernay et al. 2016) or 'climate-proofed infrastructure' (Muller 2007). Safe and sustainable cities can be measured against clear indicators and goals. But is resilience a way of achieving urban security and sustainability or something else? Too often, causal relationships are left unclear, and key terms are substituted for cliches that are difficult to interpret and understand.

Turning our attention to how *closely related concepts* appear in the SDGs, a difference is clearly implied between conditions of vulnerability, safety, sustainability, and resilience, but with no explanation offered as to how these relate hierarchically or in causal sequences. Thus, one can suggest that resilience, as used in the SDGs, would require lowering vulnerability levels, as means for achieving greater safety, and in this way is a mechanism for helping achieving sustainability. Target 13.3, for example, reads:

> *Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.*

While the language of resilience is not used explicitly, the Target speaks to the primary concerns of building individual and human capacity to weather shocks and disasters; as well as education and awareness raising. This resonates with the idea that resilience is not a statement solely of preparedness, but rather that risk reduction implies building multidimensional capacities across a diversity of institutions to address the most fundamental drivers of risk and vulnerability.

Faced with the above described context and the very fact that resilience is now a wide-ranging, almost all embracing concept referring to both the ability to reduce risk and to face disaster; and, given the DRR and climate change adaptation starting point we work from, the most appropriate definition and understanding of the notion is provided in the UNDRR 2017 glossary: the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management. It is against this definition that means, indicators and goal achievement should be measured.

From the Goals, Targets, and Indicators, it can be concluded that resilience variously refers to macro habitats and physically or naturally constructed spaces – the planet as a whole; the urban and the city, rural spaces, ocean and coastal areas – and to more precise and delimited aspects such as communities; infrastructure and technology. Distinguishing resilience as a condition or goal from the process required to achieve it, emphasis is placed on Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA); policies and plans and planning in general; and financial and technical support. From the emphasis made on DRM and CCA, clearly resilience is seen as something relevant when faced with shocks and crises.

The predominant method of achieving all types of resilience in the SDGs is through DRM and adaptation in pre- and post-impact scenarios and contexts. The instruments and methods these employ are seen as constituting the principal resilience strategies and actions available. Many of these derive from spatial, urban, environmental and ecosystem planning, including the use of 'building codes, standards, development permits, land-use by-laws and ordinances, and planning regulations, combating and preventing speculation, displacement, homelessness and arbitrary forced evictions.' Public space management is also given a role in resilience building as are slum upgrading, urban resettlement of at-risk populations, and retrofitting of at-risk infrastructure and buildings. Financing and risk transfer options are also highlighted. Emphasis is given to proactive, prospective management decisions in favour of resilience, but reactive and corrective actions are also mentioned.

In conclusion, resilience is a vague and ill-defined term in the SDGs. A word that serves to depict conditions of increased safety, welfare and sustainability, resilience is clearly used as a substitute for the goals of what is known more widely as DRM and CCA when faced with environmental (and potentially other) shocks and disasters.

3.3 Prosperity in the SDGs

The preamble to Agenda 2030 and discursive representation of the 5Ps in relation to the SDGs alludes to a vision of prosperity that is radically different from that which dominated 20th century policy, of prosperity as material wealth measured by GDP. Instead, prosperity is reframed as a shared and inclusive condition to be weighed alongside ending poverty, tackling inequalities, and safeguarding the environment. In this sense, prosperity is linked to questions of justice, equality, and fairness across numerous domains of social and economic life (including for example, health and well-being, political participation, gender equality); and to the fair distribution of resources with attention to the poorest and most vulnerable individuals and nations. Furthermore, attention to 'prosperous and fulfilling lives' suggests the SDGs are built on a multidimensional understanding of prosperity, which recognises that a variety of intersecting factors shape opportunities to live well, including culturally-specific values and individual aspirations for rights, freedoms, agency and inclusion, and fair access to resources. However, prosperity is not explicitly defined in the 2030 Agenda, and the terms 'prosperity', 'prosperous lives' or 'fulfilling lives' are not included in any of the 169 targets used to measure progress on the 17 SDGs. Despite consideration of urban issues within the 2030 Agenda, particularly through the inclusion of SDG11, there are no references to prosperity in the text and no prosperity metrics in the targets.

Well-being is referenced explicitly in the indicators for Goal 3 *(Good Health and Well-being* target 3.4: measuring progress on the promotion of mental health and well-being), Goal 4 *(Quality Education* indicator 4.2.1: measuring the proportion of children aged 24–59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psycho-social well-being), and Goal 9 (*Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure* target 9.1: measuring quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being). The terms *quality of life, living standards* and *secure livelihood* are not referenced anywhere in the targets or indicators. *Sustainable livelihood* is referenced once in relation to Goal 15 *Life on Land*, and the reduction of poaching and wildlife trafficking.

The 2016 edition of the UN's SDGs Report, which evaluates progress towards the Goals, links prosperity in loose, discursive terms to Goal 8 – 'continued, inclusive and sustainable economic growth is a prerequisite for global prosperity' ([UN] United Nations 2016, p. 7) – and to broader efforts to increase productive employment and decent work, and eradicate forced and child labour and human trafficking.

The 2017 Sustainable Development Goals Report contains more references to prosperity than in other years (although these cannot be said to be extensive): acknowledging that delivering prosperity requires attention to interconnections across different dimensions of sustainable development (UN 2017: 12), and discussing access to clean water (Goal 6) and sustainable use of ocean resources (Goal 14) in terms of how they support economic prosperity. However, these discursive linkages do not have corresponding targets against which to measure progress.

The most direct and definitive articulation of prosperity in the Goals is found in the 2017, 2019 and 2020 editions. Here, the term shared prosperity is linked to SDG 10 and achieving a reduction in income inequality (UN 2017, 2019; 2020b). Progress towards shared prosperity is measured using indicator 10.1.1 from the UN's Global Indicator Framework[3]: 'Growth rates of household expenditure or income per capita among the bottom 40% of the population and the total population' ([UN] United Nations 2020b). Both the definition and target originate from the World Bank's programme on Poverty and Shared Prosperity, adopted in 2013, which has two central goals: 'ending extreme poverty globally and promoting shared prosperity in every country in a sustainable way' (World Bank 2018, p. 20). Promoting shared prosperity is understood to create inclusive and equitable systems where 'the relatively poor in societies are participating in and benefiting from economic success' (World Bank 2016, 2018). Progress is measured by the growth in average income and consumption expenditure of the poorest 40% of the population in different countries (World Bank 2016, 2018, 2020)

The World Bank's Poverty and Shared Prosperity programme focuses on the disproportional benefits that can arise from income and expenditure growth for the poorest 40% and identifies areas of public policy that can reduce poverty and support income

growth to generate shared prosperity. These include universal access to good-quality education and health care, conditional cash transfers, investments in rural infrastructure (roads and electrification), and taxation, mainly on personal income and consumption (World Bank 2016, 2018, 2020). The range of interventions shows that even a narrow definition of shared prosperity as income and expenditure growth for the poorest depends on complex, multi-scalar systems that encompass infrastructures, conditions and policies at the local, regional and national levels.

4. Discussion

Tracing the different modes of extreme poverty, resilience, and prosperity in the SDGs reveals firstly how these agendas are intrinsically interlinked, and secondly, how they are all fundamentally connected to issues of urban inequality. These relationships within urban equality are not acknowledged in the SDGs which are thus falling short of their 'transformative' potential – especially in relation to the standalone Urban Goal (11) and the Inequality Goal (10).[4] The SDGs are an influential intergovernmental framework in global and local policy formulation which can be used to further equality by approaching the agenda through an urban equality lens that recognises the relationships and intersections of poverty, resilience and prosperity contributing to people's ability to build a secure livelihood, in urban contexts especially where inequalities are at their starkest. This means acting beyond siloed urban domains like health or housing and adopting a focus on the intersection of adequate housing and location, sanitation, water, health services and governance. Cities are complex systems with numerous actors and processes interacting across geographical, institutional and governance scales (McPhearson et al. 2016). As such, achieving sustainability in cities requires a whole systems approach – taking into consideration numerous synergies (both within the SDGs and urban social-ecological-technological life more broadly) and connecting action across sectors (Bai et al. 2016). We are calling for a focus on the political economic and metabolic drivers of inequality that hinder progress towards prosperity, resilience and ending poverty.

4.1 Shared prosperity or poverty reduction by another name?

There is a gap between the ambitious headline rhetoric of shared prosperity espoused by the 2030 Agenda, which emphasises human flourishing and fulfilment, and the narrow measure of income and consumption growth for the poorest that is used to operationalise shared prosperity. 'Prosperous and fulfilling lives' are about being able to live well today and in the future, and are determined by good (and stable) material living standards, life chances, rights, freedoms, how we experience the world and our place in it, and how these experiences translate into feelings of life satisfaction, well-being, freedom and control over our futures (Moore 2015; Mintchev et al. 2019; Moore and Woodcraft 2019; Woodcraft et al. 2020). Shared prosperity defined as income and consumption expenditure growth for the poorest 40% is a narrow interpretation of prosperity as a monetary condition, which runs counter to research and policy acknowledging that a range of infrastructural and institutional frameworks are necessary to reduce poverty and enable people to live good lives (e.g. universal health and education, transport and communications infrastructure, food security, social services, accountable governance). This problematises the ambitious rhetoric of the SDGs in several ways.

While income growth for the poorest households is necessary to reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty, we need to recognise the effects and limits of such growth. In contexts characterised by poor governance, under-developed infrastructures, and multiple forms of insecurity, income growth can enable people to better meet their basic needs. However, long-run analyses show that income growth alone will not lift the poorest households out of poverty or increase life chances in a sustainable manner. Sustainable poverty reduction demands a coherent range of interventions that focus on addressing basic needs, increasing the public provision of goods and services, investing in human capital, creating a robust social safety net, and ensuring progressive taxation of income and wealth. Taking Africa as an example, gender inequality and low levels of human capital are known to impede poverty reduction efforts (Beegle and Christiaensen 2019). In the aggregate, pro-poor income growth leads to reductions in absolute poverty, but these reductions do little to reduce urban poverty, and variation between countries is tremendous

(Ravallion et al. 2007; OECD] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2018). Furthermore, as the goal of pro-poor growth strategies is an average increase in income for the poorest 40%, this goal overlooks inequalities in patterns of distribution within countries.

Defining shared prosperity as income growth to alleviate extreme poverty creates an unhelpful binary distinction between poverty and prosperity. Poverty reduction is assumed to mean enhanced prosperity and is reported as such, even in light of the substantive evidence that human flourishing and poverty reduction are dependent on multiple, interconnecting factors. Not only does this definition of shared prosperity fail to take account of the things that make life worth living for individuals, but it obscures the collective nature of prosperity. Many of the inequalities that limit life chances are too great for individuals to control or mitigate against by making individual investments in health, education or enterprise. There is an extensive literature differentiating the outcomes of inequality driven by life choices, from the inequality caused by life circumstances over which an individual has no control (Roemer 2000). This literature acknowledges just how significant place is to material living standards and life opportunities in terms of life expectancy, infant mortality, years (and quality) of education, and health outcomes. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in 13 children died before their fifth birthday in 2019. This is 15 times higher than the risk for children born in high-income countries ([UNICEF] United Nations Children's Fund 2021). In Europe and North America – children of school entrance age can expect 15 to 20 years of formal education. Children entering school at the same time in countries with the poorest access to education can only expect 5 years (Roser 2013). Increasing individual incomes and thereby population ability to meet basic needs can mitigate some of the effects of these inequalities by increasing nutrition, calorific intake or the ability to purchase medicines. However, the combined effects of these inequalities are too great for the majority of people to control (Roser 2013). It is essential that we consider the ways in which structural conditions intersect with life experiences at different scales.

Reconnecting these bodies of research to discourse on prosperity in the context of the SDGs is critically important because defining and measuring shared prosperity as pro-poor income growth is based on a logic of individual self-sufficiency, rather than collective inter-dependency, and of basic needs rather than human flourishing. Given the wide variations in experiences of poverty within and between countries, the strong connection between place and life opportunity across a wide range of policy domains, and the unequal effects of age and gender, only a contextual and inter-sectional approach can make prosperity a meaningful goal for the SDGs. At present, pro-poor income growth has become an 'end' rather than a 'means', which in practice means settling for a reductive vision of prosperity in which the world's poorest people are better able to meet their basic needs.

Poverty reduction is an essential step towards enabling people to live prosperous and fulfilling lives; however, income growth is not equivalent to living a good life, free of conflict, with material security, life chances, and opportunities. Empirical research examining meanings and pathways to prosperity for citizens in Dar es Salaam and Havana (as part of the KNOW programme) (Woodcraft et al. 2020), and ongoing research in Lebanon, Kenya, and the UK (Moore 2018; Mintchev et al. 2019; Moore and Woodcraft 2019), draws attention to the diverse meanings of prosperity, and the context-specific local and structural conditions that can support or prevent people from living fulfilling lives.

Taking lived experience as the starting point for action on prosperity, we find that people make a clear distinction between basic needs and livelihood security. Rights, freedoms, security, and life opportunities shape life chances and allow people to live fulfilling lives on their own terms. This 'non-expert' definition of prosperity includes capacities for personal development, opportunities for civic and democratic participation, feelings of control over the future, and collective social progress. The distinction between foundations of prosperity and fulfilling lives is an important one for action on the SDGs because it highlights the limitations of policies, interventions, and targets that focus solely on income growth and basic needs. The determinants of prosperity identified by citizens in Dar es Salaam, Hamra and east London clearly map onto many of the 17 SDGs (e.g. water and sanitation, livelihood security, education, governance and responsibility). However, the lack of a coherent articulation of prosperity as more than pro-poor income growth in the SDG framework and targets limits the scope for meaningful action.

In summary, there is a disconnect between the ambitious rhetoric of SDGs and the shared prosperity indicator used to measure progress, which is a poverty reduction indicator in all but name. While SDG discourse reflects a wider vision of shared prosperity, the shared prosperity indicator shows that the SDG view of prosperity has not developed over time or considered the thinking on global prosperity today (Moore 2015; Jackson 2017; Moore and Woodcraft 2019; Moore and Mintchev 2021). As it currently stands, the shared prosperity indicator fails to reflect the multi-dimensional and non-monetary aspects of prosperity; to pay attention to the collective nature of shared services, social infrastructures, and freedoms that enable people to live fulfilling lives; or to recognise the connections between systemic conditions, structural inequalities, and individual life chances. This runs the risk of undermining the ambitious vision of prosperous and fulfilling lives for all, and furthermore, failing to learn from the operationalisation of GDP growth as a proxy for prosperity, which has seen the adoption of economic growth as the goal of economic activity, rather than a means to improving flourishing by enhancing living standards and life chances.

4.2 Securing livelihoods, a three-pronged approach: poverty, resilience and prosperity

Prosperity, or the possibility to live the good life, is about more than just income – it is context-specific, relational and multidimensional. Poverty, too, is not just a question of income but a set of intersecting challenges, affecting different populations within and between cities in different ways at different times (Yap and McFarlane 2020). Poverty, resilience, and prosperity hold close and complex relationships but are not always linear. For example, poverty and a lack of prosperity can be understood as basic drivers of the risk that antecedes crisis conditions. Inequalities and exclusion can transform everyday conditions of risk into crises; households living below the poverty line have reduced capacity to build up the assets that provide resilience against economic shocks.

Resilience, seen through the lens of urban equality, suggests that the lack of resilience is a direct result of inequality in access to goods and services, voice and participation, whilst increased resilience depends on measures that serve to decrease inequality, poverty and exclusion and increase prosperity. Both the lack of resilience and the achievement of resilience are dependent on policies and actions associated with various economic and social policy dictates and changed drivers of risk, in corrective and prospective fashion, channelled through DRM and CCA.

The progress in achieving the SDGs assumes a constant attention to key policy objectives and the instruments required to achieve them. Shocks are still predominantly seen as temporary, if severe, interruptions to a normal development pathway, as opposed to being seen as the natural result of the contradictions in that normal pathway. 'Natural' disaster and unforeseen, emergent, crises such as Covid–19 still dominate thought and action. Attention is mainly given to preparedness and response to systemic risk conjunctures, as opposed to reducing or controlling their appearance through changes in development approaches to eliminate root causes and risk drivers. Compensating such interruptions, seen as conjunctural, rather than structural, is the objective. Resilience can in this way be understood as a mechanism for conservative action, a series of conditions that allow the absorbing of shocks and what they mean as regards poverty, inequality and down-graded prosperity, assuming the shocks will go away soon. The introduction of the idea of transformation associated with resilience changes the very nature of the idea as originally developed and gives resilience a more development strategy orientation rather than one of compensating, absorbing or coping with temporary problems. Increasingly, the notion of returning to normal post-shock is being replaced by the notion of a 'new normal' or 'building back better'. This shift implies a critique of the development model in place, which then gives resilience a transformation bent, as opposed to a stabilising character of conservative nature.

The Covid–19 pandemic has further revealed this nexus between poverty and prosperity and the challenges for building resilience to face systemic risks and disasters in the future. Crises tend to strengthen the adverse conditions that precede them, expressed through greater levels of poverty, lack of prosperity, exclusion, and marginalisation. Local lockdowns, for example, impact many urban households but those groups already marginalised are more likely to be pushed into poverty when mobility and livelihoods are constrained. Just one example of the multiple, causal and reciprocal relationships between prosperity, poverty and resilience.

Meaningful action on urban inequality requires a whole systems response that recognises and engages with the complex relationship between poverty, resilience, and prosperity. To realise urban equality, governance institutions need to work collaboratively with civil society and business to foster strategies that recognise how the social, political and environmental aspects of urban life interrelate. Acknowledging the intersections through research can help to highlight how food deficits linked to poverty, for example, impact educational attainments linked to resilience. This knowledge then needs to be translated into the SDG framing so that policy actors both locally and globally can make progress on these intractable issues holistically, to build urban infrastructures that support prosperity, resilience and building capacities and capabilities of residents to reduce poverty.

4.3 How can an urban equality lens contribute to the SDG agenda

Drawing specifically on dimensions of urban equality, we reflect on the ways in which an urban equality perspective might help guide more fair and equal development outcomes through the SDG agenda, within and between cities and regions. The discursive framing of the Goals tends towards the recognition and participation of elements of equality, and less so redistribution, even though some of the aims may demand redistributive measures to raise the necessary capital (see also Butcher et al. 2021).

An urban equality lens demands both equality of *outcome* within and between cities and equality *within urban processes*. The SDGs do not engage with some of the more fundamental socio-economic drivers of extreme poverty, nor do they assess the conditions that undermine prosperity and resilience, such as the role of global capital flows and foreign direct investment in exacerbating urban inequalities, for example through major infrastructure projects (Keivani 2010, p. 11). Importantly, addressing equality outcomes means focussing not just on the positive processes that might help to create equality (e.g. distribution and participation) but the deleterious economic processes that create unequal distributions in the first place.

The urban equality lens also raises the specific challenge of scale, which has long been a source of debate in relation to the SDGs ([UCLG] United Cities and Local Governments 2020). The tensions and gaps between the SDGs as a global policy framework and their implementation at national or city-level suggests that cities need forms of committed and monitorable innovation infrastructure – city learning labs, NGO networks, research-led initiatives are good examples – to champion an alternative perspective and to advocate context-specific action.

Political participation is not adequately articulated in the SDGs, but efforts at grassroots agency and co-production are central to realising urban equality, allowing different voices and skills to flourish in urban development plans and projects. Without explicit attention to inclusive political processes and citizen input into strategies and policies that seek to make cities safer and more prosperous, the marginalised and vulnerable populations that already bear disproportionate burdens of environmental and socio-economic inequalities will be further excluded.

4.4 Measuring urban equality through lived experience

Quality of life cannot just be improved through reducing poverty (although this key goal must remain) – what empirical research in Dar es Salaam tells us is that secure livelihoods are the foundation of a citizen-led definition of prosperity (Woodcraft et al. 2020). Settlement dwellers in Dar es Salaam demonstrate how key social services such as childcare, healthcare, transport and education are essential factors enabling individuals to generate income and to support the livelihood security of whole households. Reductions to poverty are only one part of what contributes to quality of life. What follows is a reinvention of urban policy and planning and public services – supporting urban and social infrastructure – to deliver quality of life and flourishing as the primary outcome. Involving multiple stakeholders and metrics, encouraging a broad shift in the understanding of the role of the city as related to the economy to being about liveability and social and economic well-being bringing together positive environmental and democratic outcomes.

A more ambitious and cohesive articulation of prosperity is necessary during the decade of delivery on the SDGs, as the global goals are operationalised through sub-national, regional, county and city-level initiatives. Acknowledging the distinction that citizens make

between basic needs and prosperous and fulfilling lives is a crucial step. As is recognition that developing policies and interventions to support prosperity as a lived experience, rather than an abstract policy goal, must take account of context: meaning place, political systems, economic and welfare regimes, and specific configurations of exclusion and inequality that are experienced at the intersections of critical services. This shift should be accompanied by new indicators, which focus on flourishing, quality of life, or life satisfaction as 'outcome' measures of prosperity, alongside the multiple goal-specific targets that measure rights, service provision and good governance. From an equalities perspective, this means moving away from the use of aggregate data to report on pathways and progress to prosperity, and taking seriously the argument for multiple forms of monitoring that address intersectionality, feminist inquiry and other perspectives.

Recently, researchers Bali Swain and Ranganathan (2021) investigated interlinkages at the SDG target level to identify trade-offs and synergies between the SDGs and concluded that universal benchmarking of SDGs is counterproductive. They suggest identifying a specific community of SDG targets to guide and prioritise goals in different regions (ibid.) adding further to the argument for locally driven insights into lived experience and citizen-led understandings of prosperity to drive urban policy formulation. Redefining prosperity based on lived experience highlights the intersections between prosperity, poverty, and resilience in order to take significant action on urban equality.

5. Conclusion

The SDGs are a crucial tool in achieving just urban futures. They contain a diversity of positions and assumptions and action towards the goals are interpreted within distinct national and local contexts and narratives. By interrogating three key principles to the SDGs – extreme poverty, prosperity and resilience – weaknesses within the SDG framework are revealed. The current paper argues for an urban equality lens to orient decision making and action towards the SDGs and especially Goal 11, recognising the intersections of poverty, resilience and prosperity contributing to people's ability to build sustainable urban livelihoods. This means acting beyond siloed domains and taking a whole systems approach to urban equality. 'Partnership' is one of the 5Ps of the 2030 Agenda and it is key here for a reformulated version of urban governance that looks at whole system interactions. Cities are nodal points within complex and dynamic emerging systems – including food, biodiversity, water, and health – therefore, improving quality of life sits within this complexity of systems. Governance, business, and civil society need to come together in a shared vision for the future that brings together economic, social, environmental and democratic outcomes and fosters strategies and policies that recognise the intersections between these aspects of urban life.

An urban equality perspective draws attention to the ways that policies, programmes, and initiatives – the 'how' of development – can be formulated in ways that either challenge or reinforce dynamics of urban inequality. In enacting the 2030 Agenda, policy-makers, city officials, civil servants, and many others, are required to make practical decisions about how initiatives will be developed and delivered. Such decisions relate closely to issues at the heart of discussions of urban equality: whose knowledge counts; whose voices are heard; who is included or excluded from processes of urban management? For this reason, reconciling the 2030 Agenda with the aim of achieving equality in urban processes represents one of the greatest challenges for achieving the SDGs and building pathways to urban equality.

Notes

1. KNOW is a four-year project funded through the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund, involving several academic and non-academic partners across multiple cities in Africa, South America and Asia, led by The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London: https://www.urban-know.com.
2. The SDG framework contains two types of Target: 'Outcome Targets' are numbered e.g. Target 1.1, while 'Means of Implementation Targets are designated with a letter, such as 1b; the term 'poverty' appears in both forms of targets.
3. Progress on the SDGs is monitored using a database of available global, regional and country data and metadata for the SDG indicators, which is maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division and is available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs.
4. Butcher, Acuto and Trundle (2021) provide analysis of the intersections between 'equality' and 'urban' across the 17 SDGs and a framework for mobilising urban equality across the 2030 Agenda.

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