

Preface and Acknowledgements

The book is an outcome of the conference *Sustainable Urbanization in India: Challenges and Opportunities* that was held between January 15 and 16, 2015 at the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK), jointly in association with the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. The conference plan evolved as a part of a larger program organized by the International Social Science Council (ISSC) in 2013. I was selected as one of the 20 World Social Science Fellows by ISSC and was offered the opportunity to participate in the World Social Science Seminar on *Sustainable Urbanization: Innovative Approaches to Understanding Urbanization in the twenty-first Century*, held between March 25 and 30 at the Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar at Quito, Ecuador. It was recognized that the multidimensional perspectives capable of addressing the complex interactions in space and time among the social, economic, political, cultural, physical, and environmental dimensions of urbanization was the need of the hour; these interactions constitute the driving forces behind the type, extent, and intensity of urban growth and conditions for the transition to a more sustainable future. The Fellows were assigned the task of developing these interdisciplinary perspectives and to take these forward in their upcoming research works. Five days of discussion followed on sustainable urbanization, some of it in a traditional academic setting, based on work submitted by Fellows and parts of the discussion also focused on interactive research visioning and action planning. As the post-seminar research activity, I proposed to address the issue of sustainable urbanization within the Indian context. The need to move beyond binary explanations exposing the contradictory nature of urbanization between the developed and the developing world that had already made significant scholarly intervention was thoroughly felt and instead reflecting on Indian cities using polycentric approach and analysis was found to be hugely relevant within the huge, complex and diverse Indian urban scene. The major objective of the 2015 conference was to identify city-specific sources of challenges and explore strategies and potentials to make the process of urban transition both sustainable and equitable. The non-linear, bottom-up, multi-sectoral process-based local contexts explored through different case studies across north, south, east and west Indian cities critically questioned the universal provisions laid out in ‘sustainable urbanization’,

the post-2015 development agenda of the United Nations, and suggested ways that seemed to be important for transcending theories into actions. In the meantime India's dramatic launch of the 'Smart City Mission' paved the way towards the formulation of the book proposal and project from selected papers presented in the conference as it re-emphasized the significance of in-depth identification of challenges and exploration of potentials through nuanced readings and coverage of micro-political processes using pluralistic prisms and conceptual lenses.

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