

Claiming Space for Informal Work in Master Planning: Reflections from a People's Campaign in Delhi

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A weekly market in South Delhi.
Photo credit: Rashmi Choudhary

Key Points

- 1 Master plans across the Global South tend to reflect Eurocentric, modernist city visions that are disconnected from the lived reality of the vast majority of people, who live and work informally. In Delhi, previous master plans have been used to legally justify the displacement of poor communities from their homes and workplaces.
- 2 A diverse coalition of civil society organizations, activists and informal workers' organizations came together in the *Main Bhi Dilli* ("I, Too, am Delhi") campaign to advance a more just and inclusive master plan for Delhi for the next 20 years.
- 3 The campaign, which focused on different themes including livelihoods, drew on the lived experiences of informal workers and slum dwellers, technical knowledge, and the experiences of activists and movement leaders to articulate a shared vision for a "people's plan".
- 4 The campaign partners demanded: recognition of the right to use public space for livelihood activities; that space be allocated for informal work; a flexible approach to zoning, including the promotion of mixed-use zoning in residential areas; and the introduction of decentralized multipurpose community centres.
- 5 The campaign partners secured an unprecedented level of public participation and opened up new areas for discussion in a traditionally opaque planning process.
- 6 This campaign experience offers lessons for those trying to secure inclusive planning elsewhere: building coalitions of mixed expertise well ahead of time; foregrounding the lived experiences of informal workers, demystifying the technical aspects of master planning; and articulating not just problems, but also concrete solutions

Introduction

In cities across the Global South, informal workers form the majority of the workforce. Despite its significant size and contributions to sustaining urban systems, very little attention is paid to the informal economy in city planning. Planning frameworks often exclude informal workers or are punitive towards them, leading to insecure access to places of work and living, poor working conditions and earnings, harassment, and even violent evictions.

To advocate for a more just and worker-centred approach to planning, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing's (WIEGO) Focal City Delhi (FCD)¹ team joined with allies to form a coalition-based campaign to mobilize around the 2021–41 Master Plan for Delhi. The campaign became known as *Main Bhi Dilli* (MBD) – “I, Too, am Delhi”. Over the course of a four-year campaign (2018–2021) FCD and MBD partners articulated a livelihood-centric approach to city planning that places informal workers’ needs at the centre of building an equitable city. It calls for: formal allocation of space for informal work; recognition of informal workers’ right to use public space for livelihoods; flexible zoning and promotion of mixed-use at the homes and neighbourhood scale; and a model of multipurpose community centres to decentralize access to social services.

This documentation of mobilization and collective action on master planning in Delhi aims to encourage workers and activists to see master planning as a site of potential advocacy, rather than a tool for exclusion. This is a story of an ongoing struggle, of reimagined zones of contestation to ensure that the deeply

political issues of livelihood and habitat are determined by workers’ voices. This policy brief describes both the *process* of building a livelihood-centric vision of the city, across diverse worker sectors and interest groups, and the *content* of what that vision entails. It reviews the draft Master Plan for Delhi–2041 (MPD–2041), including a discussion of its shortcomings and achievements. This policy brief concludes by distilling learnings for progressive planners, membership-based organizations (MBOs) of informal workers, and civil-society allies interested in building democratic power in planning. This is done with the hope of informing alternative approaches towards more just and fair city-planning processes.

The Role and Significance of Master Plans

Master planning exerts significant influence over urban development. These plans outline macro-level spatial commitments that guide future urban development. They determine where in the city certain activities will take place, and what land area and supporting infrastructure are required. Master plans essentially provide a vision of what the city should look like in the future, guiding other policies and programmes developed by different levels of central, state and local governments.

The City of Delhi produces master plans every 20 years. Despite the power of master plans as a tool to shape the terms of life and work in a city, previous plans (in 1961, 1981 and 2001) have been limited in terms of public participation. Master-planning processes in Delhi and other cities across India have been led by non-elected development authorities and technical experts, with minimal

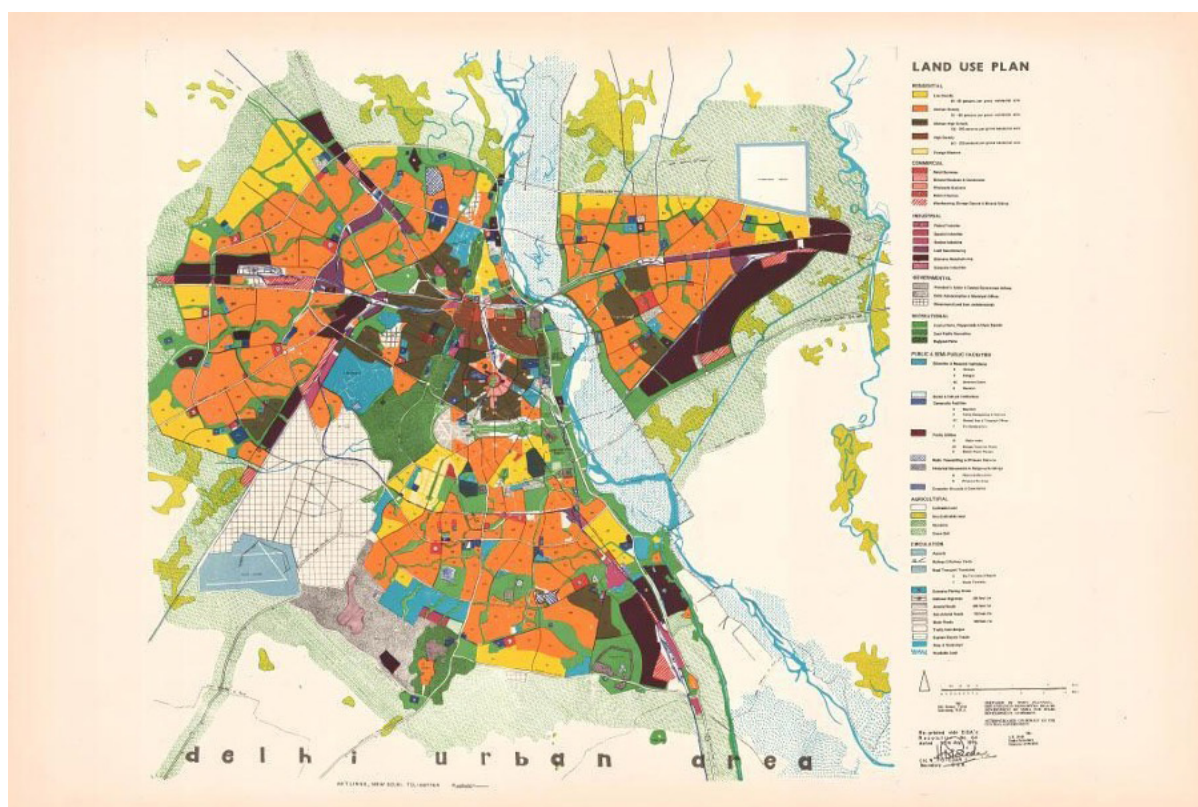
¹ FCD is a WIEGO project that works with informal-worker organizations to increase visibility and advocate for improving legal and policy frameworks and the inclusion of livelihood issues in the urban discourse. Read more here: <https://www.wiego.org/delhi>

involvement from elected political representatives or those directly impacted. This approach adopts much of the form and mandate established by city improvement trusts in colonial times, and separates the critical issue of planning from electoral democracy (Idiculla 2022).

Far from being embedded in context, local knowledge and accountability structures, the government has relied heavily on technical planning “experts”, even outsourcing the 1961 plan to a Ford Foundation team headed by American architect and planner Albert Mayer. Although citizen consultations were mandated in previous planning processes, these were accessible only to groups such as registered residents’ welfare associations (typically present only in middle- and higher-income planned colonies) and industrial associations that lobby for the elite.

The net result of these top-down processes led by technocrats and foreign planners has been master plans that are disconnected from the lived reality of the vast majority of urban residents. Instead, previous master plans for Delhi reflect Eurocentric, modernist visions – imagining the city as neatly zoned and filled with office-going professionals who live in formal housing. In fact, only 23.7 per cent of Delhi’s population lives in planned colonies (Bhan 2013, 59).

This approach to planning – importing norms and models from cities of the Global North – is not unique to Delhi, but forms part of a modernist tradition of planning in the Global South, which Watson (2009: 175) argues “fails to accommodate the way of life of the majority of inhabitants in rapidly growing, and largely poor and informal cities, and thus directly contributes to social and spatial marginalization”. This approach is



The Proposed Land Use Plan of the first Master Plan for Delhi (1961–81) envisioned planned development of the city through land acquisition and management through strict zoning for different uses. Source: Delhi Development Authority website.

driven by aspirations to a contemporary, “world-class” ideal, where production has been removed or hidden from the urban sphere, and commerce and consumption dominate (Davis 2020). Underpinning these aspirations are capital’s pressures on the State to heighten competition, find technological solutions to complex social problems, commodify public land and other resources, and privilege elite groups and commercial interests (Chen et al. 2018).

Planning exclusively for formal workers in cities like Delhi, where informal workers are the majority, not only produces a mismatch on paper, but also has detrimental, real-world consequences for the urban poor, both in terms of shaping development in a way that produces deep spatial and socio-economic inequalities, and in providing a legal basis for the criminalization and even elimination of informal livelihoods and settlements. To the first point, Watson (2009: 175) argues:

Cities planned on the assumption that the majority of residents will own and travel by car become highly unequal ... The separation of land uses into zoned monofunctional areas further generates large volumes of movement (as people must move from one to the other to meet daily needs), and, if residential zoning is enforced, leads to major economic disadvantage for poorer people, who commonly use their dwelling as an economic unit as well.

Similarly, Bhan (2013: 59, citing Roy 2003) argues that the problem of urban development in Delhi is an “outcome of planning” as plans “influence, determine and limit” even what is termed as “unplanned” and produces and regulates illegality as a “spatial mode of governance”.

The plan, as a statutory document that is legally enforceable, also has the power

to declare all “violations” of it illegal and render them insecure. The concentration of informal workers in informal settlements and their involvement in work taking place in spaces outside “workplaces” has made them particularly vulnerable to exclusion and expulsion. The role of the judiciary in enforcing and mandating the implementation of master-plan provisions, as well as elite bias in such cases, has been highlighted by several scholars including Bhan (2016) and Bhuwania (2018). In Delhi, this intervention has led to brutal evictions of communities from self-built housing in what are classified by the plan as “unauthorized colonies” or “slums”, the closure of small commercial establishments in residential neighbourhoods, and the removal of “non-conforming” industries – all of which had a devastating impact on the shelter and livelihood of the vast majority of the city’s workers.

While the master plan may be based on an inaccurate understanding of existing realities, its power to alter developments post-facto and render people’s lives insecure if their livelihoods are not compliant with its dictates is significant and has been devastating in Delhi. As Dhingra (2021) argues: “Master Plans, and canonical top-down urban planning by which they are dictated, produce retrospective illegality and promote mainstream development centred around economic growth and production over the needs of the urban majority.” It was this legacy of exclusion that the MBD campaign aimed to disrupt with advocacy around the 2021–41 plan.

Informal Work in Delhi and the Decision to Engage with Master Planning

Of the nearly five-million workers in Delhi, it is estimated over 80 per cent

are informally employed (Raveendran and Vanek 2020: 2). Informal work is concentrated in five key sectors: home-based work, street vending, waste picking, domestic work, and construction work. These workers operate in different spaces: their own or their employers' homes, markets, streets, construction sites, waste-dumping sites, landfills, and other public spaces. In addition, about one-third of Delhi's population live in substandard housing with inadequate basic services (Government of Delhi: Planning Department 2020: 255). Where individuals live in the city impacts and limits their labour-market choices, with most informal settlements located on the city's periphery. Poor living and working conditions trap workers in cycles of poverty. Many informal workers in Delhi are organized into MBOs.² Along with demands for better earnings, occupational safety and social protections, informal workers and their MBOs have consistently highlighted issues related to decent housing, access to water, sanitation and transport.

Influencing the urban regulatory framework that determines the development of Delhi is critical in addressing these interlinked issues. To this end, in 2018, FCD joined with allies working on diverse urban issues and formed MBD to mobilize around the 2021–41 plan. The coalition partners aimed to make the process participatory and advocate for a more equitable, just and sustainable master plan.

The coalition strategically decided to engage directly in the planning process. Rather than denounce the notion of master planning or advocate from outside the process, MBD decided to subvert the power of the plan to support historically excluded communities and workers. For example, although historically used as a tool to harass and marginalize informal workers, the master plan could be formulated to foster integration by making visible their sites of work – by putting informal livelihoods figuratively and literally “on the map”. Formal space allocations to informal workers in the master plan could lead to their integration on more secure terms and the implementation of other policies that acknowledge informal workers. For example, appropriate land reservations for street vending in the master plan could help facilitate implementation of the landmark Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, and prevent continued evictions of vendors. Through other mechanisms, the master plan also has the potential to ensure access to basic services, create more decent conditions of work, and create a more liveable city.

A People's Campaign Takes Shape: How Informal Workers Engaged with Delhi's Master Plan Process

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA)³ officially announced the drafting of the fourth Master Plan for Delhi

² There are many different membership-based organizations in Delhi that work with different groups of informal workers. Some of Focal City Delhi's partner MBOs include the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) who work with informal women workers, Hawkers Joint Action Committee (HJAC) who work with street vendors and Shehri Mahila Kamgar Union (SMKU) who work with waste picker and domestic workers.

³ The DDA was established through the Delhi Development Act, 1957, as enacted by the Central Government. With the express aim to “promote and secure the development of Delhi”, the DDA combines functions of planning with land consolidation and management, housing development and the provision of public facilities within the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

(2021–41) in April 2018, contracting out the process to the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA). The NIUA was established in 1976 to support and guide the government on urban development and planning. It works closely with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and civil servants in charge of urban development and city planning. The decision to use a semi-public think tank to draft the new master plan allowed a greater chance at advocacy than had been possible in the past with bureaucratic and governmental bodies. This determined what approach the MBD campaign would take to engage with the process.

WIEGO's FCD team brought together informal worker MBO representatives, along with other activists, planners and academics, to discuss individual agendas for the city and the master plan more specifically.⁴ At this consultation, participants decided to meet regularly and thus evolved an organic city-wide campaign. Running parallel to the official planning process, the MBD campaign took many steps to mobilize an inclusive agenda, challenging the existing hierarchies around the “technicality” of the plan, which resulted in, for the first time, the extensive participation of informal workers and other marginalized groups⁵ in the master planning exercise in Delhi.

In the next sections, we trace how the MBD campaign centred the voices of informal workers in the city-planning process over four years through three key phases:

1. Knowledge co-production: Collective sense-making and harmonizing grassroots and technical expertise.
2. Advocacy: Launching a public communications campaign and engaging with the drafting agency.
3. Accountability: Mobilizing a rapid response to the draft master plan and securing expanded space for public participation.

Phase 1: Knowledge Co-Production: Collective Sense-Making and Harmonizing Grassroots and Technical Expertise

A core guiding principle of the campaign was the belief that those most affected by the existing failures of policy and planning have unique expertise around solutions. From the start, FCD advocated for livelihood as a key pillar of the campaign and worked with MBD partners to bring in grassroots activists and worker leaders from various sectors of the informal economy. However, MBD partners recognized that for informal workers and their representatives to be able to articulate targeted recommendations *specifically in relation to the master plan*, they would need support in translating their demands into technical planning language. This required the creation of a process that could harmonize technical knowledge about the plan with workers' grounded

⁴ This consultation was co-hosted with the Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS). Read more here: “Developing a People's Perspective on the Delhi Master Plan”, <https://www.wiego.org/content/developing-people%E2%80%99s-perspective-delhi-master-plan>

⁵ This included groups representing residents of informal settlements, homeless citizens, women, children, and people with disabilities.

knowledge of the dynamics of their livelihoods in the city.

FCD's efforts centred on building a better understanding of master planning in general and getting allied groups to join a coalition to engage with the Delhi master plan, particularly on livelihood issues. To build a robust knowledge base for advocacy, the coalition decided to begin work in the sectors of waste picking, street vending, home-based work, and construction work. In addition to livelihood, there were other thematic groups: housing – covering slum clusters, unauthorized colonies, resettlement colonies and homelessness; gender; transport; disability; and childcare. Each group strived to better understand how the master plan could be a useful document for advancing a social and economic justice agenda.

To this end, meetings were held among planners, experts in each informal work sector and representatives of workers' organizations, where master plan norms relating to each sector were shared and key issues affecting each sector discussed. These discussions served to broaden and "translate" specific workers' demands into spatial or technical recommendations. For example, when waste pickers raised concerns about police harassment, they tended to focus on initiatives such as the issuing and registration of identity cards as a solution. Through discussions with planners and sector experts, it was decided that demands for protection from harassment could also be articulated as a demand for formal spaces for waste-sorting work, close to neighbourhood collection points, where workers could sort in safety. From these meetings, a set of key action points were compiled for each sector and theme that could be articulated as specific demands in the master plan.

In a workshop held in March 2019, agreement on next steps was reached among academics and activists from across the country. The decision was made to open the knowledge co-production process more broadly to build a larger grassroots movement by holding community meetings and launching the *Main Bhi Dilli* campaign. At the workshop, coalition partners agreed that the campaign's messaging would be about the whole city and all urban issues, while the specific focus remained on the core issues of informal workers and others excluded from the current imagination of urbanization.

After launching as a public campaign in May 2019, the group continued to meet regularly. The focus during this period was: to fill information gaps and deepen knowledge co-production work at the community scale; formulate a clear agenda for advocacy and action; and begin communication work for broader public outreach.

Three working groups were formed to focus on these three areas of work. Different coalition members took the lead based on interest and expertise while maintaining flexibility to be able to support each other.

At the end of the first year, the group charged with knowledge co-production assessed that campaign members had extensively deliberated on the master plan and built a shared understanding of its intersections with different sectors and themes. They determined that the next step was to collate insights from these deliberations, refine them further and identify gaps where additional information was needed. This required work on further contextualizing the recommendations at the community scale and, to this end, workers' and housing rights organizations organized over 100



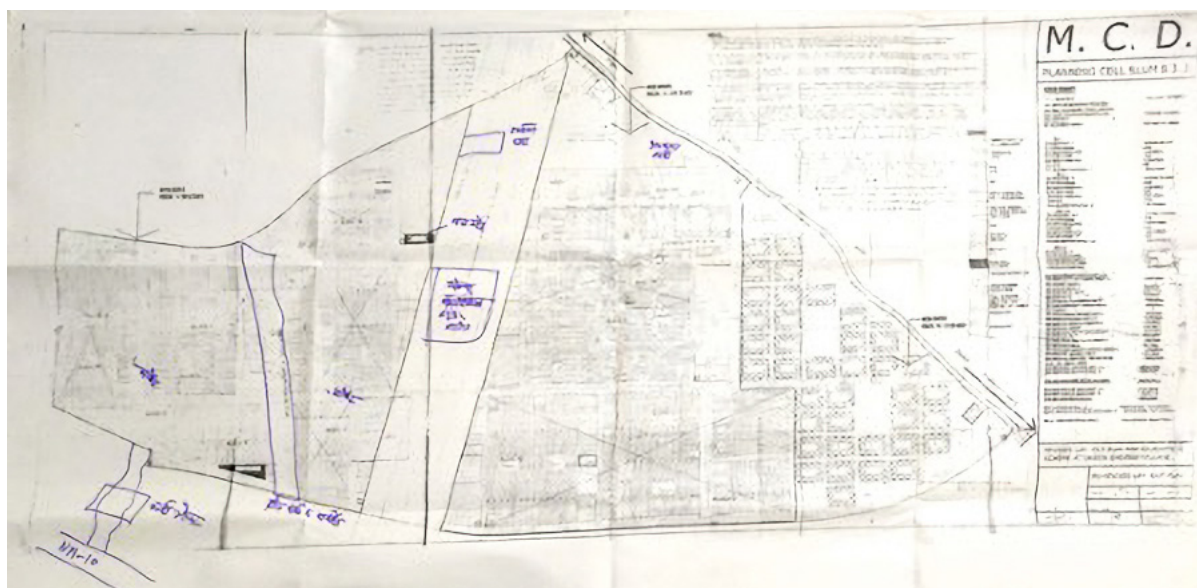
Community members situating themselves on a map of Delhi. Source: Main Bhi Dilli.

public meetings in informal settlements and workplaces across Delhi to source new insights on the problems, priorities and demands of its communities.

These meetings supported communities to see the master plan as a tool for change, and to explore how to connect their urgent everyday challenges and priorities with provisions in the plan. During these meetings, activists would briefly introduce the master plan and the work of MBD, after which participants discussed their issues and what they most needed from the city going forward. These conversations were facilitated by strong relationships between activists and community groups, and the activists' familiarity with these communities allowed for ease of discussion about key local issues. For example, based on their pre-existing knowledge of the community, activists highlighted how issues such as a lack of livelihood or piped water are a function of how the

plan shapes housing for the poor, which then enabled the local community to articulate their concerns and needs for infrastructure improvements.

Activist and worker groups also used popular education methods to enable groups to understand the macro scale of the plan, and to connect their everyday needs and experiences to it. For example, the Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (MHT) started each meeting by presenting a visual layout plan of the settlement where the meeting was being held. By identifying local amenities and unique features, and familiarizing themselves with how to read and use a map, participants were able to think spatially at the scale of their own neighbourhood. This exercise also enabled activists to illustrate the fact that often amenities listed in the previous plan, such as water or drainage pipelines, and child- or health-care centres, had not been implemented on the ground. They were



Suggestions from the Savda Ghevra community noted on the proposed layout plan alongside actual provisions in their community. Source: MHT.

also able to encourage communities to actively start envisioning what they would like to see in an upcoming plan for their own neighborhood. From this engaged and strong foundation, activists would then introduce the larger scale plans – zonal plans (where available) and master plan – for communities to articulate their needs and concerns as residents of the larger city.

These public meetings aimed to source community input, but also create widespread grassroots awareness of the master-planning process and build support for the MBD campaign. Later, when the draft Master Plan for Delhi-2041 was opened to public comment, activists were able to return to communities and engage with them for feedback, building on this initial base of understanding. Drawing on experiences during this process, a toolkit of participatory methods was prepared for future use.

Subsequently, the research group distilled the insights from these meetings

and integrated them with data⁶ from desk research to formulate specific recommendations for the drafting authority. These were structured as fact sheets, written in simple language, with points presented as accessible visuals, and primarily meant to build common understanding among the members of the campaign and the general public.

Phase 2: Launching a Public Communications Campaign and Engaging with the Drafting Agency

The MBD communications group created a website and built up a social media presence to reach a broader audience in Delhi. The website is a freely accessible public archive containing all the material produced by the campaign including fact sheets, technical reports, media articles, and analysis of the master plan. The campaign's social-media engagement was driven by the need to build awareness and a mainstream understanding of the master-planning process, and

⁶ Data included government labour statistics, surveys, and research findings by academics and civil society organizations.

make visible the issues of those who do not have space in mainstream media discourse around the plan. The group also used different communication mediums to target and reach diverse audiences. For example, Twitter was used to generate engagement consistently with as broad an audience as possible through live-tweeting events and meetings, sharing communication products created by campaign members, and engaging with the drafting authorities to access information only being put out electronically. Members of the campaign also used mainstream and online media to communicate the work of MBD and to break down key issues relating to the master plan.⁷

Towards the end of 2019, the campaign had an arsenal of critical data and clear propositions with which to approach the NIUA. At the time, the NIUA was completing background studies to feed into the drafting process. After consistent efforts to contact the master-plan drafting team, MBD was able to arrange an initial meeting with the NIUA in November 2019. At that meeting, fact sheets were presented by worker leaders and mobilizers rather than non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives or technical experts. Through this interaction, it became clear that some core areas of concern to informal workers would need to be set out in clearer terms if they were to be taken up by the NIUA. For instance, the use of homes as workplaces by home-based and other informal workers was a critical point planners were not cognizant of and specific recommendations were needed to ensure that the master plan's provisions

did not penalize such activity. The NIUA team requested the campaign to prepare “technical reports” on key issues, written in the language of the master plan so that they could be directly inserted into it. MBD subsequently prepared reports on issues ranging from home as place of work for home-based workers, to the need for multi-purpose community centres (issues which are discussed in more detail in the next section).⁸

The individual and institutional connections among campaign members and the NIUA facilitated the success of the campaign in securing engagement at this early stage of the planning process. The presence and support of established urban-policy researchers and practitioners associated with organizations with a respected body of work helped establish MBD as a valuable partner that could feed into the planning process. Further, it was clear to the NIUA that MBD had done its research and was approaching the planning agency with substantive solutions and not simply a list of problems and critiques. Intervention at this early stage, before the draft was made public, was possible because MBD was able to position itself as a conduit for planners to better understand public needs and highlight the role civil society can play in improving planning by proposing solutions grounded in community expertise.

In 2020, owing at least partially to the pressures applied by MBD and other civil-society actors, the DDA organized a series of public consultations for vision building and understanding people's needs from the master plan *before* it was drafted – the first time this had ever been

⁷ A series of articles by MBD members on various aspects of the draft Master Plan for Delhi was published on *Scroll* (Delhi Master Plan 2041 <https://scroll.in/topic/56449/delhi-master-plan-2041>).

⁸ Other report topics included: decentralized waste infrastructure, implementation of the Street Vendors Act, hostels for migrant workers, homelessness, heritage, environment, and other informal sectors. All reports and factsheets can be found on the MBD website (<https://www.mainbhidilli.com>).

done. Achieving these consultations was one of several ways MBD successfully opened up participatory space within the planning process. Public consultations were not legally mandated at this early stage, and where traditionally only organized bodies of elite residents have had their voices heard through informal consultations on the master plan, the presence of a public campaign ensured that meetings were also held with workers' groups and the residents of slums and unauthorized colonies. This is an important precedent that was set through the activism of the campaign.

Phase 3: Mobilizing a Rapid Response to the Draft Master Plan and Securing Expanded Space for Public Participation

The DDA released the draft Master Plan for Delhi-2041 on its website on 9 June 2021 and announced a period of only 45 days for citizens to send in their objections and suggestions. When it was first announced, the process of giving citizen feedback was set up to be entirely virtual and consequently inaccessible to most informal workers due to the digital divide. The process for physical submissions was not widely advertised and could only be made at DDA headquarters.

The draft master plan contained a land-use map and two volumes: the first titled "Vision 2041 and Enabling Policy Framework", and the second "Spatial Development Strategy and Action Plan" (including a monitoring and evaluation framework). Volume 1 focused on the principles and approaches to guide urban development in different areas, such as the environment, economy, shelter and social infrastructure, public spaces and transport. Specific allocations and norms for how the development would be

implemented and tracked were contained in Volume 2.

Campaign members worked quickly to deconstruct the plan and disseminate its contents in accessible language to Delhi's broader public. The MBD leveraged the strength of its diversity and regrouped into sectoral and thematic groups, as was done in the first year, to quickly and carefully review the plan clause by clause. The results of the MBD's review and accompanying recommendations were shared via social media, public meetings and at a press conference. This initial broad public-awareness strategy was aimed at helping as many people as possible understand the plan, and encourage them to go online and submit their own suggestions and objections.

As per the Delhi Development Act, 1957, which provides the legal framework for master planning in Delhi, once a draft is in the public domain, citizen inputs must be solicited and provisions must be made for them to submit objections and suggestions. Historically, this has always been the stage at which public and media attention is generated about the master plan, which is followed by a phase of public hearings. Informal workers and other marginalized groups have seldom been able to claim a seat at the table, even at this phase, due to the non-transparent, fast-paced and expert-driven nature of the process. This time, however, when the draft master plan was released with just over a month for citizen input, MBD worked quickly to force open a space for meaningful public participation.

First, the campaign put sustained pressure on the DDA to extend the timeframe for citizen feedback. Through letters written to the authorities, media campaigns and public protests, the campaign successfully pushed the DDA



MBD campaign members outside the DDA headquarters, filing suggestions and objections to the draft Master Plan for Delhi-2041 in person (19 August 2021). Source: MBD.

into granting a 30-day extension to the public comment period.

With extra time secured for feedback, the campaign's final strategy focused on massive, direct community outreach. MBD worked with a cadre of grassroots leaders who held close to 250 meetings with street vendors, waste pickers, domestic workers, home-based workers, residents of informal settlements and other communities across the city. Leaders used popular education techniques in markets, public spaces, parks and streets to deconstruct the

complex maps and figures, and to support communities in articulating their needs and objections to the draft master plan. One of the MBD member organizations, Social Design Collaborative, created a popular education toolkit for community leaders to use in explaining the draft master plan and gathering objections from community groups. Called *Kaun Hai Master? Kya Hai Plan?* (Who is the Master? What is the Plan?),⁹ the toolkit relied on participatory tools such as flash cards, maps and blackboards to explain what the draft master plan was saying about issues relevant to community

⁹ *Kaun Hai Master? Kya Hai Plan? (Who is the Master? What is the Plan?)* <https://www.socialdesigncollab.org/modskool/Kaun-hai-Master%3F-Kya-hai-Plan%3F>



Contents of the participatory toolkit Kaun Hai Master? Kya Hai Plan? (Who is the Master? What is the Plan?). The different components relate to various aspects of planning such as livelihood, transport, housing and services. Source: Social Design Collaborative.

members' lives (transport, work, social infrastructure, etc.) and help them to articulate their objections.

By the deadline set by the DDA, MBD partners and community leaders had physically gone to the DDA headquarters and filed nearly 25,000 objections from communities across Delhi on issues relating to livelihood, housing and social infrastructure. The DDA was initially resistant to receiving the paper submissions, but campaign representatives convinced them to accept every single objection and provide individual receipts. This was a historic achievement in the city's planning process, normally the exclusive domain of well-off and powerful groups.

The process described here took place at an extremely vulnerable time,

immediately after the devastating second wave of COVID-19 in Delhi that affected working-poor communities most acutely. It is a testament to the strength of workers' organizations, activists and individual workers that they were able to recognize the gaps in the draft master plan and its potential harm if unaddressed, and act at this critical moment to claim their right to participate in defining Delhi's future.

Following the submission of comments, the DDA constituted a board of enquiry and hearing as mandated by the Delhi Development Act, 1957. However, citing pandemic restrictions and the large number of objections received, these meetings were held virtually, with little scope for public participation or engagement. The public comment period officially closed in November 2021 and it is



Training conducted with women waste-pickers using the participatory toolkit Kaun Hai Master? Kya Hai Plan? Photo credit: Social Design Collaborative.

expected that the final plan will be issued in 2022. MBD is committed to monitoring any further developments, ensuring the timely implementation of enabling provisions, and resisting or challenging provisions that are detrimental to the groups it represents. Pushing for the formulation of zonal and local area plans is also a significant area of intervention for the campaign as decentralization to more local scales would enable more substantive citizen participation.

Key Components of a Livelihood-Centric Approach to Planning

During the course of the campaign, FCD and its partners articulated a position on how informal workers can be better supported in the master plan. In this section, we explain the key *content* areas constituting a livelihood-centric approach to master planning and highlight four key principles that place

informal workers' needs at the centre of building an equitable city. These are:

1. Formal allocation of space for informal work
2. Recognition of informal workers' right to use public space for livelihood
3. Flexible zoning and promotion of mixed-use zoning at the scales of homes and neighbourhoods
4. A model of multipurpose community centres to decentralize access to social services.

These four principles formed the core of the MBD's proposal to the DDA on how the master plan should be developed. After explaining each principle, we provide a brief overview of how the present draft master plan has approached livelihood, and identify the continuing gaps and issues of concern.

A livelihood-centric master plan requires formal recognition of informal livelihoods and adequate provisions

for land and supporting social and physical infrastructure that workers can access. This is based on a recognition of the linkages between better jobs, viable housing and informal workers' role in creating an environmentally sustainable city. Understanding the need for a livelihood-centred framework also enabled the campaign to work on sector-specific proposals that would illustrate how a macro-spatial document like a master plan can be used to advocate for better working conditions.¹⁰

1. Formal Allocation of Space for Informal Work

Informal workers are providers of key urban services, such as waste management and affordable commerce, and yet these critical forms of work are not recognized and facilitated in urban policy. As a master plan primarily regulates the nature of land allocation for different uses in a city, the MBD argued that it would be critical to formally designate workspaces for informal workers.

For instance, waste pickers face daily harassment when they need to sort and segregate the waste they collect, which requires space. When waste pickers use public spaces such as open *dhalaos* (neighbourhood waste collection and sorting sheds) and roadsides for sorting, law-enforcement officials and private residential associations view this as an eyesore and often use fines and physical violence as a deterrent. As a result, waste pickers often lose out on high-value recyclables because they could not be sorted adequately. In the absence of publicly recognized spaces for waste sorting, waste pickers are forced to bring the waste to their own homes and

settlements, which can create significant health risks for families.

The designation of public waste-sorting sites was a key proposal that waste pickers and their representatives identified for inclusion in the master plan. An existing policy framework supports this proposal – the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's *Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016* – which mentions the need to integrate informal waste pickers at every stage of the waste cycle and place the responsibility of providing adequate space for decentralized waste management with urban development authorities. To implement these rules, the master plan would have to designate sorting spaces at various scales of waste generation and management, such as waste segregation centres at the community level, and mini material recovery facilities at the ward or zonal level. All of these will need toilets, handwashing areas, and storage space. These space allocations need to be made mandatory in the master plan, with clear instructions for allocation of land at the decentralized locations the responsibility of city authorities. Similarly, street vendors advocated for the recognition of existing markets as their workplaces, and construction workers pushed for amenities to be provided at labour chowks such as toilets, shaded areas to wait in that protect from the rain and heat, and drinking water.¹¹

By formally allocating spaces for waste picking, street vending and daily wage work, the master plan would take an important step towards *recognizing* the contributions of informal workers to

¹⁰ Read more in the *Livelihood in the DMP 2041* factsheet: https://www.mainbhidilli.com/_files/ugd/9be98c_926f3120c1ed4e7b8c51dfa4c30b27b4.pdf

¹¹ Labour chowks are assembly points for finding work. Workers arrive in the morning and wait to be hired by contractors or others in need of their services.

the urban economy, and creating more enabling and decent working conditions for them.

2. Recognition of Informal Workers' Right to Use Public Space for Livelihood

The second principle is based on the fact that many informal workers operate in what is termed “public space” in planning documents. This brings them directly into competition with other uses, such as vehicles and parking, pedestrian traffic, and formal retail shops. Recognition of the right to work in public space is particularly critical for street vendors as they are often seen as “encroachers” occupying others’ space. MBD’s proposal on public space centred on the recognition of vending as a public good, and vendors’ right to use and access public space for their livelihoods as existing on a par with the rights of other urban users.

Street vendors in Delhi frequently experience harsh evictions, harassment and bribery by law enforcement, municipal officials and market associations, which are organized by formal shop owners. These challenges continue despite India’s path-breaking Street Vendors Act, 2014, which contains explicit provisions for the protection of existing vending spaces and the creation of new ones, reaffirming vendors’ right to public space.

MBD proposed aligning the master plan with the Street Vendors Act, 2014, which would result in the delegation of all decisions on the regulation of vending and no-vending zones to elected town vending committees (TVCs).¹² This is

the opposite of a top-down approach. By using the master plan to mandate a decentralized approach, local bodies with vendor representation and expert knowledge on local context would be empowered to define spatial boundaries for street vending. Moreover, as a long-term macro-spatial plan, vendors argued the need for provisions in the master plan protecting existing natural markets and integrating vending into street design and public space guidelines.

3. Flexible Zoning and Promotion of Mixed-Use Zoning at the Scales of Homes and Neighbourhoods

According to the 2011 Census, only 14 per cent of the total housing stock in six out of the nine districts in Delhi were used exclusively for residential purposes, while the majority had other uses – a fact that has been referenced in the baseline study on shelter done by the NIUA during the master-planning process (NIUA 2020). The recognition of homes as spaces not just for, but also for productive activity was the third major principle promoted by MBD to create a more worker-friendly city.

Home-based workers who engage in a variety of economic activities from within their own homes are the group most affected by restrictive zoning practices, which adds the burden of illegality to their already highly precarious form of work. During MBD consultations, they pointed out that the space in their homes is often inadequate when taking up large work orders or storing in bulk.

In the absence of any laws or protections for home-based workers, provisions in the master plan can be used as one lever

¹² TVCs are the multi-stakeholder bodies mandated in the Street Vendors Act, 2014, made up of authorities, market associations, NGOs and, importantly, 40% representation of street vendors themselves. The responsibilities of the TVC include surveying all vendors in the city, designating areas as vending and no-vending zones, and setting up a grievance redressal body, as set out in law.

to create enabling conditions for work – for instance, zoning for mixed-use, with expanded permissibility for livelihood uses, particularly in low-income settlements where home-based work is clustered. FCD’s city-level mapping of home-based work in Delhi¹³ also revealed broader patterns, such as a spillover of work from formal industrial areas into informal settlements, which must be accommodated through the provision of community-level work centres, storage spaces, and access to cheap and affordable transport.

Further, the master plan defines size and design norms for housing. In this area, the master plan could recognize home-based workers’ need for flexibility to incrementally build and alter their housing according to their economic capacity and their production needs, rather than imposing rigid norms based on formal housing standards. Finally, the master plan could support communities of home-based workers by setting out norms for the provision of basic amenities in informal settlements. Large informal settlements are productive hubs creating jobs and sustaining local economies, and infrastructure provision could create not only a safe, hazard-free physical environment for existing livelihoods, but also a conducive environment for new livelihood activities to emerge.

4. A Model of Multipurpose Community Centres to Decentralize Access to Social Services

The fourth proposal, emerging directly from consultations with women informal workers, was for the development of multipurpose community centres in

informal settlements. These centres are designed to ensure, at a single location, improved delivery of social services such as child care, supplemental health services, and access to government schemes and benefits. In addition, livelihood is a key public function that accompanies social infrastructure allocations. The allocation of space for multipurpose community centres needs to take place at decentralized levels to ensure sufficient proximity to work and homes. The allocation of space should be determined by the scale at which a particular function can be best delivered. For instance, registration for a government scheme must be at the community level to facilitate access but needs a small space allocation, whereas skills training for construction workers needs adequate space but can be organized at the zonal level. These centres have the potential to increase women’s participation in the workforce and provide supportive services to help workers shift from precarious to more productive types of employment.

Overview of the Draft Master Plan for Delhi-2041 and Where It Falls Short

The advocacy undertaken by FCD and MBD was successful: For the first time, the draft master plan recognizes the informal economy as the largest employer in the city, makes mention of workers’ groups such as waste pickers and street vendors, and extends mixed-use zoning norms. It also adopts some enabling norms for the redevelopment of some categories of informal settlements and for better provisioning of social infrastructure such as health posts and

¹³ As part of its ongoing work on bringing visibility to the presence of informal work in Delhi, FCD has used ground-level evidence to create a visualization of the presence of home-based work in the city: https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/file/Home_based_workers_map.pdf

anganwadi (child-care) centres in densely built urban settlements.

In many critical areas, however, the plan falls short. While facilitating economic development is a key objective, all the plan's strategies are designed to benefit only a small group of corporate professionals. Further de-industrialization of the city is sought with support only for high-tech, knowledge, finance and real-estate developments.

While the language of the plan may indicate inclusion, the accompanying allocations and development norms do not match this vision. Without concrete spatial allocations or references to established laws and policy mandates governing different sectors of informal work, the plan's progressive language will not change the current conditions of Delhi's informal workers. For instance, there is no reference in the draft master plan to the workspaces of people in the informal economy, despite being identified as the largest employer in the city. No land is reserved or allocated for the labour chowks that are key productive hubs for daily wage labourers in construction and other sector workers. *Dhalaos*, vending markets and homes, all of which are vibrant hubs of economic activity, find no mention in the section titled "Spaces of economic production".

Although decentralized waste management is the stated aim, there are no localized space allocations for it and existing waste-sorting sites are envisioned to become mechanized material recovery facilities. Despite the concerted advocacy by street vendor groups, there is no mention of the Street Vendors Act, 2014, and the provisions are similar to those of previous plans, which were ineffective in establishing vendors' right to use public space. This disconnect raises doubts

about how effectively the envisioned integration of workers may be enforced or implemented. The MBD campaign, however, has resulted in a clear agenda for informal workers that will be carried forward through further advocacy.

Achievements and Challenges

This policy brief documents the process of engaging with a historically exclusionary process, highlighting the opportunities for resistance, struggle and advocacy at the interface between techno-managerial planners/government administration and collectives of the working poor. The strategies employed in building and nurturing a diverse network like the MBD coalition is also a story of building a movement that negotiates within spaces of a formal urban-planning process while remaining true to the constituencies it represents. MBD used a co-productive approach to bring together diverse forms of knowledge (lived experience, technical knowledge, and forms of knowledge held by activists and movements) even if the State did not. As a result, the coalition attempted to model an approach to planning that could capture the on-the-ground realities and needs of city residents in a way that could not be achieved by the top-down approach used by planners. In order to be truly inclusive of the needs of informal workers and other marginalized communities, city planning has to adopt a co-productive approach, bringing planning to the people, as MBD has done.

In terms of achievement, the campaign succeeded in expanding existing and creating new spaces for civic participation throughout the master plan drafting process. Advocacy through the campaign opened up this top-down technocratic process and made it so that planners *had* to listen to workers' voices. The participatory space opened

up by MBD was under threat during the second wave of COVID-19, but still it successfully resisted the digital overhaul of participation proposed by the DDA.

The process was not designed for the large-scale participation of informal workers – from virtual requirements for filing objections, physical submissions not being advertised and allowed only at the DDA headquarters, to using web-based platforms that required a high level of digital literacy. Despite this, the campaign's on-the-ground efforts resulted in an unprecedented level of participation and the filing of approximately 25,000 objections and suggestions by informal workers and other marginalized urban-poor groups.

In terms of accomplishments relating to the content of urban planning and policy, as mentioned previously, some progressive language has been incorporated in the draft master plan. Just as important, working together on a campaign has created a strong coalition of allies who will continue to engage collectively in future urban struggles in Delhi. Within this struggle, “livelihood” has been taken up as a key entry point to achieve equity in urban policy. Since the multi-stakeholder MBD campaign began, work has become more central to coalition partners' advocacy of housing rights, gender rights, transport and other themes. MBD has also pushed the needle on alternative ways of evidence-building on informal work, including spatial mapping, visual representations, and new types of advocacy material that centre the role of informal workers in city making.

The challenges that persist will require long-term engagement to address. Significantly, more concrete allocations for informal workers in the master plan are missing because of the existing vision of the city and its political economy. The

economic vision laid out in the master plan is still divorced from the realities of urban employment in Delhi. Taken together with the measures facilitating the privatization of public land and leaving the provision of housing almost entirely to the private sector, the main aim of the master plan becomes quite clear: to create a market-friendly “world-class” city irrespective of whether the majority of Delhi's residents have any share or place in it. For these workers such strategies are at best irrelevant and, at worst, will further marginalize them. The question arises whether the real workers have any part to play in the unique economic role that is being envisioned for Delhi.

Finally, the future of MBD will remain tenuous once the master plan is notified. It would be both challenging and important to keep the coalition's momentum going and to keep the movement alive for further advocacy for the substantive inclusion and integration of informal workers. We hope that the strong base of critical knowledge resources, the presence of a public archive and coalition, and the strong network of partners that has been created will create a strong foundation for this to occur.

Reflections for Allies in Other Contexts

In conclusion, we offer the following suggestions for allies in other contexts embarking on similar processes of engagement with master planning, or city-planning processes more generally, that seek the inclusion of informal workers and other marginalized groups. While the specifics of the planning framework and regulatory environment may differ, we believe that some of the learnings and strategies used in Delhi may have value across contexts.

1. Start organizing early to enable a slow, collective process of demystifying the technical aspects of planning

Planning generally, and master planning in particular, is an inherently political exercise that has historically been identified as a technical one (Escobar 1995). MBD recognized that through demystifying the technical language of the plan, workers could engage directly with it and articulate their needs in a spatial way. However, this required allocating sufficient time for collective sense-making and mutual capacity building among actors with diverse sets of expertise – planners, activists, workers, academics and others – within a framework of knowledge co-production. Along with technical language, time has historically been used as a tool to limit dialogue and participation in planning. This was evident when the DDA released the massive draft master plan document with only 45 days for comment. By identifying the master plan as a policy window far in advance and starting to organize early, MBD used time in its favour to build up a robust knowledge base that later facilitated broad-based engagement in the process.

2. Centre the lived experience of workers in policy recommendations and offer solutions, not only a list of problems

MBD overturned planners' top-down approach by going *first* to workers and seeking their inputs, and allowing the most critical issues workers identified to set the campaign's agenda for future advocacy and action. Complementary data obtained through traditional research methods was also important in supporting workers' claims and showing

the systematic nature of the issues they identified (e.g. lack of sufficient infrastructure, lack of access to space) at the city scale. These approaches were combined not only to position the campaign and workers' groups as a resource for planners to better understand citizens' baseline needs, but also to offer solutions.

3. Create space to develop and sustain a diverse coalition with a mixture of skills and expertise

In every phase of MBD's work, having a diverse coalition of partners with different strengths in different themes and disciplines was key. The partners also brought with them diverse contacts and networks, enabling the campaign to reach a broad base of communities in Delhi and amplify its messages to diverse audiences through social media, writing in mainstream media, and public meetings with government officials. Using a combination of research inputs, capacity building and collective action, the campaign was able to enter the formal planning arena as a seasoned and organized actor.

This case study of Delhi nuances issues around the spatial organization of urban informal work, highlighting the relationship between urban poverty, decent work, and city planning. There is an urgent need for planning systems across the world to address informality and evolve a more pro-poor and inclusive approach. This paper has attempted to highlight the factors or conditions that might influence different outcomes and shifting circumstances. The extended trajectories of this collective action offer lessons in building democratic power and advocacy strategy, with the hope that their impact will go beyond immediate results to inform alternative approaches towards a just and fair city-planning process.

At its core, MBD held that a city plan that lays the roadmap for the future of Delhi cannot ignore the reality of the majority of its residents (Sinha et al. 2021). This reality – the depth of informal workers’ exclusion in Delhi – has been exacerbated through the COVID-19 crisis. Without supportive services and infrastructure in the city, poor workers were forced to migrate back to their villages, incur massive debts to meet their basic needs, and run the risk of exposure to the deadly virus while trying to earn a living.

Among the many critical lessons to come out of the COVID-19 crisis, one that stands out is that any policy that does not recognize and respond to the needs of the working poor can bring whole communities to the brink of starvation within days and the city to its knees within weeks (WIEGO 2022). The critical need to address the gap between city planning for the minority and the needs of the majority has never been more pronounced.

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About WIEGO

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, protection and voice. WIEGO promotes change by improving statistics and expanding knowledge on the informal economy, building networks and capacity among informal worker organizations and, jointly with the networks and organizations, influencing local, national and international policies. Visit www.wiego.org