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Defining their real problems, getting public and policy attention: Global struggles of deprived communities for sustainable development

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Abstract

Agenda is the list of issues or problems that policymakers agree to consider. Agenda setting is a struggle between stakeholders to define these issues. Communities suffering from pollution, homelessness, unemployment, and other unsustainabilities have the best science and most legitimate interest to define these problems for policymakers. However, our knowledge about bottom-up agenda setting is limited. This study is an original, first-time investigation to explore and conceptualize how deprived communities engage in the competition to set policy agendas. The findings from analyzing secondary evidence indicate that deprived communities engage in agenda-setting competition in a three-step process of (i) defining their problems; (ii) seeking public attention to their problems; and (iii) demanding policy attention to their problems. Strategies that deprived communities use in these steps are identified and illustrated. The study produces a conceptual toolkit to research and map bottom-up agenda-setting. The toolkit might be further tested and refined, including in environmental studies. Bottom-up agenda setting is fundamental to sustainable development by ensuring that framing of social and environmental problems comes from their sufferers so that policymakers rather provide solutions.

KEYWORDS

agenda, community, deprivation, government, policy, poverty, sustainable development

1 | AIM OF THIS STUDY

In 2015, the United Nations' *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* committed governments to achieve 17 goals, including the goals of no poverty, zero hunger, and reduced inequalities by 2030. However, global estimates for 2022 suggest that 46 million more people fell into poverty compared to 2019 figures (Christensen, 2023). Governments set the economic, legal, and policy parameters for poverty relief (Mueller, 2006). Some government programs of poverty relief help large numbers of people escape from poverty. However, larger

numbers fall into poverty simultaneously. Many of these programs are unsustainable (Ippinaiye & Olaniyan, 2023). They do not target poverty reasons because governments tend to have a stake in poverty-producing mechanisms, such as labor and land use conditions that drive people to poverty (Brady, 2023; Krishna, 2007). Meanwhile, there is a tendency in the literature to escape this reality of systematic mal-targeting in poverty programs (Mueller, 2006).

Do deprived communities have possibilities to impact poverty policy targeting? The answer might be in agenda-setting. An agenda in public policy is defined as the issues or problems that policymakers

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agree to consider (Kingdon, 2014). Agenda setting is a struggle over the definition of these issues between different stakeholders. The reason for this struggle is that an agenda contains within it actions and solutions that are expected (Atkinson, 2000). It navigates what can and cannot be thought about and delimits the range of decision options (Hajer, 2002). Or as in the words of Rein and Schön (1977) “the questions we ask shape the answers we get” (p. 236).

Agenda setting is the most embryonic stage in the policymaking process in which communities and grassroots have the highest chance to impact policy directions, but we know little about bottom-up agenda setting. This is an original, first-time study that aims to explore and conceptualize how deprived communities engage in the competition to set policy agendas. Bottom-up agenda-setting in social and environmental policies is fundamental to achieving sustainable development (Nwankwo et al., 2009). Communities suffering from pollution, homelessness, unemployment, and other unsustainabilities have the best science and most legitimate interest to define these problems for policymakers.

-Wider output of this study.

The study generates a conceptual toolkit to research and map bottom-up agenda setting. Future studies can test and refine this toolkit for application in environmental fields.

2 | MAL-TARGETED POVERTY RELIEF POLICY

Government welfare support is the biggest determinant of the amount and intensity of poverty. However, this support is often not provided to the right extent and direction (Brady, 2009). As such, government programs for poverty relief keep failing to reduce overall poverty (Saefullah, 2019). For example, the government of Sri Lanka has been implementing the Samurdhi program as a major poverty relief program since 1995, but it has been unable to satisfactorily reduce poverty levels. A main criticism about the program is that it mal-targets poverty issues and the poor (Madduma Bandara, 2016).

In India, despite a set of measures to consult slum communities in poverty relief programs, their underlying problems, such as insecure work and land tenure, are not often truly reflected in these programs (Harriss, 2006). In Chennai, the problem of insecure work of slum settlers was defined by policymakers, rather than the slum settlers, in terms of the “physical distance of the slum to available employment centers.” This helped policymakers to implement their desired relocation solution (Coelho et al., 2012). However, in Odisha—one of India’s poorest and most rapidly urbanizing states in India—the government acknowledged that the lack of land ownership titles is a poverty reason that needs to be solved. This resulted in a program of “intermediate” tenure in which land titles were provided to slum settlers. The land titles could be inherited and mortgaged for finance but could not be sold (Rao et al., 2022).

Based on studies undertaken in India, Kenya, Peru, and Uganda, considering 223 villages and over 25,000 households, Krishna (2007) argues that the failure of poverty relief programs is because they do not target poverty reasons. This is explained by Musa et al. (2016)

from their study in Nigeria. They note that the agendas of poverty relief programs are set by elites who might be involved in poverty-producing activities, such as overexploiting natural resources. Evidence from Mexico further suggests that these poverty relief programs might help some people escape poverty but would not prevent more people from falling into poverty (Castillo Fernández & Arzate Salgado, 2014).

In rich democracies, as Brady (2019) notes, governments should do better in poverty relief. Meanwhile, data collected from around 140 countries in a period from 1980 to 2018 suggest that democracy does not have a clear-cut effect on poverty (Dörffel & Freytag, 2023). Issues of the voting poor may require fundamental solutions, such as resource reallocation and institutional reform (Briassoulis, 1997; Roy, 2013; Syssner & Meijer, 2017). Politicians may define these issues in a way that supports their own agendas. They may use voices of expertise to misrepresent the voices of the poor (Mitlin, 2004) and exercise their art of paradigm maintenance (Cornwall & Fujita, 2012). Mitlin (2004) provides examples that statistics are used by policymakers to play down the nature and scale of urban poverty.

After the UK Labour government was elected in 1997 with support from the poor, Mooney (2007) noted that “*Poverty is back on the agenda, but back on it in particular and very worrying ways. ... how poverty is defined, understood and talked about says much about the shape and nature of any policy and political response to it.*” Marron (2013) observes that the UK Labour government focused its poverty discourse on “financial exclusion.” In 2004 the government, in conjunction with academic experts, financial institutions, and other organizations, launched a project of financial inclusion about three key domains: banking, affordable credit, and financial capability. The consequence has not been so much to alleviate poverty (Marron, 2013).

In the United States, despite a myriad of federal, state, and local programs to relieve poverty, in 2014, the U.S. Census Bureau reported an estimated 14.8% poverty rate. These programs do not usually address inadequate wages, unstable working conditions, and other poverty reasons (Varghese, 2016). In Ireland, the unfairness of the income tax system has long been known to produce poverty traps. This problem sometimes comes on the government agenda but then is pushed away before decision-making. Overall, the tax situation of the least advantaged has attracted little political attention for a long time, and, in effect, governments have been content to “tax the poor.” (Hardiman, 2000). As Ireland entered the coronavirus pandemic, the government decided to deal with the resultant food poverty and ease pressure to address the structural issues leading to food poverty (Drew, 2022; King, 2021). Brady (2009, 2023) concludes that programs of poverty relief in some rich democracies choose to not deal with structural issues that drive people into poverty. Rank et al. (2003) explain that these programs provide short-term and limited benefits to the poor, or in Seibel’s (2000) term, they provide unsustainable poverty relief. Given these outcomes, research shows that low-income groups in democratic societies feel that their voice is excluded from policymaking (Lierse & Seelkopf, 2022).

In a study of 750 squatter community (favela) residents in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 79% of them said that despite poverty on the agenda

of elected officials, “the end of the dictatorship had no significant impact on their lives.” (Perlmán, 2010, p. 203). Shepherd (2000, p. 270) notes that “it seems logical that sustained poverty reduction is likely to require a framework of good government. However, it may not be the optimal short-to medium-term strategy to achieve poverty reduction.” Auerbach (2017) notes that the poor have their politics of engagement with *bad government* for poverty relief, but this politics of the poor is understudied (Auerbach, 2017). Most direct politics of the poor is their struggles for agenda-setting. To understand this, the next section provides an overview about agenda-setting.

3 | AGENDA SETTING

Agenda setting is a process. It is an ongoing competition in four levels among issue proponents (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). As Figure 1 illustrates, successful agenda setting needs to pass through these levels to reach the “decision agenda” at the center. If some actors manage to push their issues to the decision agenda, they govern available decision options of policymakers (Schatz & Rogers, 2016). The four levels of agenda include (a) agenda universe, (b) systemic agenda, (c) institutional agenda, and (d) decision agenda. The agenda universe contains all issues that could be morally and rationally brought up and discussed in a society or a political system (Birkland, 2007). In other

words, the agenda universe contains issues legitimate for public attention (Bali & Halpin, 2021). The systemic agenda consists of all issues that are commonly perceived as meriting public attention and as involving matters within the jurisdiction of governmental authority. In other words, the systemic agenda contains issues in public attention. If an issue is successfully elevated from the systemic agenda, it moves to the institutional agenda. The institutional agenda is the list of issues explicitly up for the active and serious consideration of government decision-makers. In other words, the institutional agenda contains issues in government attention. However, relatively few issues will reach the decision agenda. The decision agenda contains issues that undergo solution exploration by government decision-makers. In other words, the decision agenda contains issues for government action (Birkland, 2007). The original contribution of this study is about the struggles of deprived communities to push their issues through the four levels of agenda. This struggle for bottom-up agenda-setting is discussed from the next section.

4 | RESEARCH METHOD

Synthetic analysis of secondary studies was carried out to conceptualize the steps and strategies of deprived communities in their competition with other stakeholders to impact policy agenda. To undertake

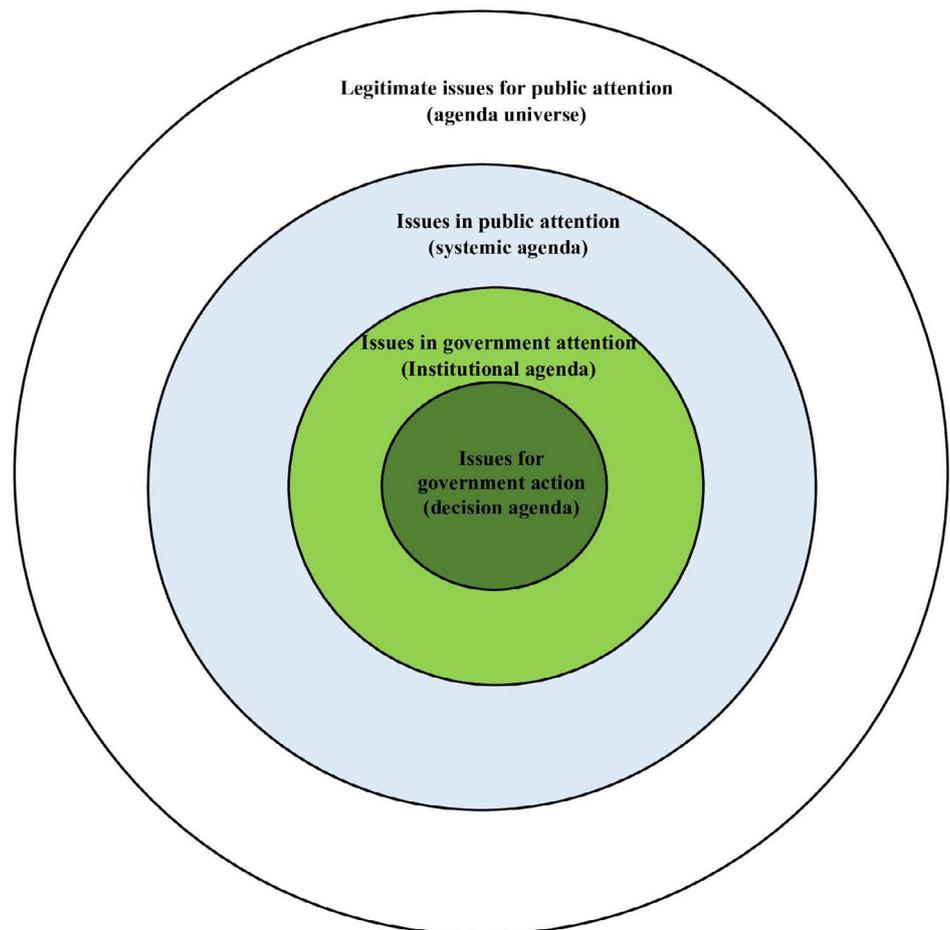


FIGURE 1 The four levels of agenda (author's illustration. Based on: Birkland (2007); Kingdon, 2014; Majone, 2006).

this research, first, there was a comprehensive search of studies about the politics and tactics of the poor to impact policy. From the studies identified, 218 were selected for full-text qualitative analysis. This selection was based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) relevance to agenda setting, (b) case studies, and (c) peer-reviewed status. An information extraction table was then designed for inductive content analysis. The analysis resulted in conceptualizing three steps of agenda-setting which consist of seven strategies. Second, there was a complementary search to explore more targeted and recent evidence about these steps and strategies. In this round, 34 studies were selected for full-text analysis.

5 | THE STEPS AND STRATEGIES IN BOTTOM-UP AGENDA-SETTING: HOW DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES PUSH THEIR ISSUES TO POLICY-MAKING

This section maps from real examples three steps of deprived local communities to push their problems as policymaking agenda. These

steps include: (i) defining their problems; (ii) seeking public attention to their problems; and (iii) demanding policy attention to their problems. The strategies that deprived local communities applied in each step to push their issues through the four levels of agenda and reach the decision agenda (Figure 2) will be explained with real case illustrations from different contexts.

5.1 | Defining poverty problems

Policymakers may not chase citizen problems but instead define problems to match their desired solutions (Béland & Howlett, 2016). Problems as defined by policymakers tend to mismatch with problems as actually sensed by their sufferers (Bacchi, 2009; Jørgensen, 2012). Problem sufferers might interlink their worrying experiences in a whole life sense-making process that provides awareness of problems in their wider context (Turnbull, 2006; Turnbull & Hoppe, 2019). In the city of eThekweni/Durban, South Africa, the slum community interconnected their whole negative experiences about unsafe housing, insecure tenure, withheld subsidies, and inadequate services. A

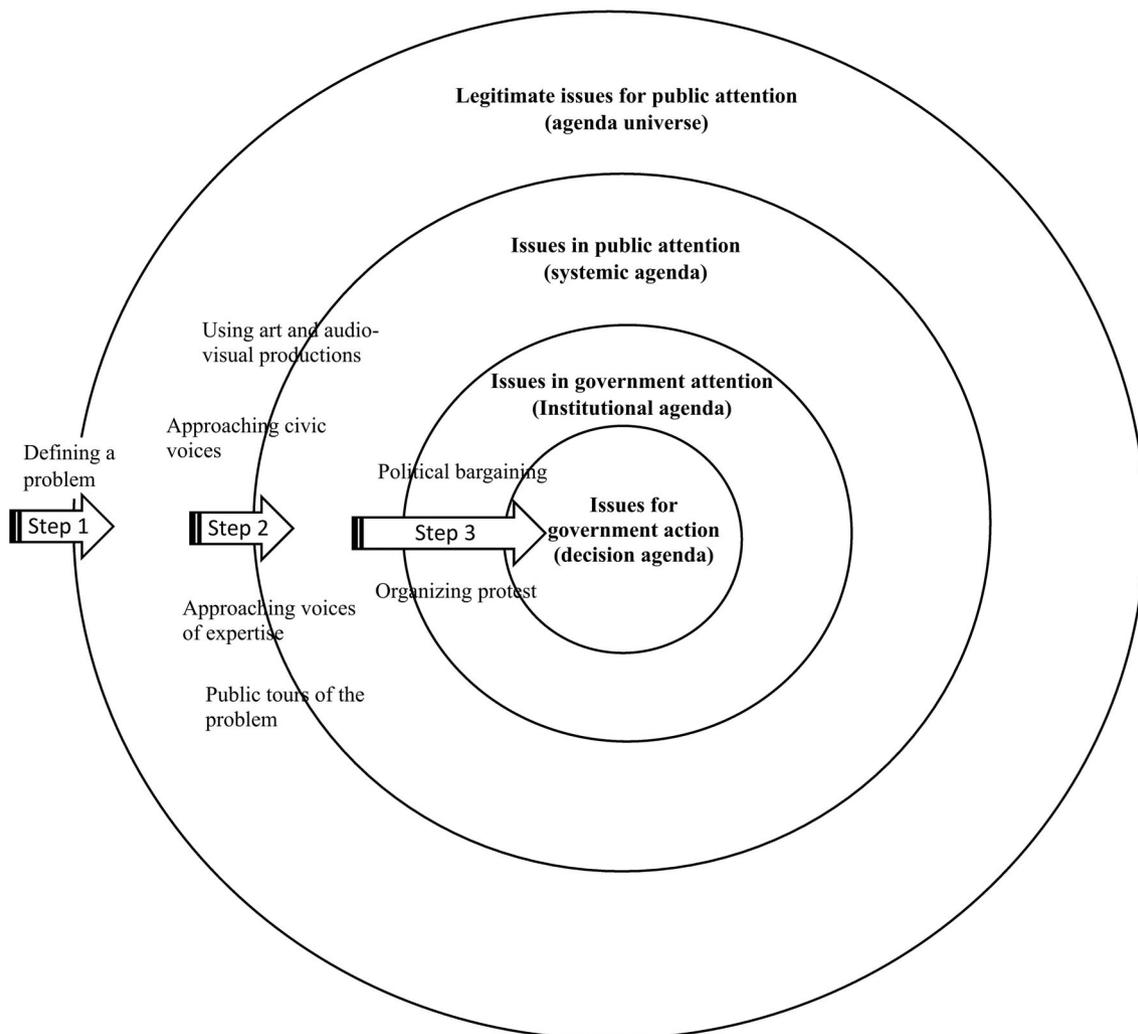


FIGURE 2 Bottom-up agenda-setting (author's synthesis of case examples).

slum community member described these as a problem of human dignity: “As we began to proceed with our struggle, we realized that many of those in the Council [local government] thought that people in shacks could not think for themselves... This became a fight for recognition. In a way, we have been diverted from the fight for land and housing into a fight for human dignity.” (Mitlin & Mogaladi, 2013, p. 22). As implied by this example, in their systematic experiences deprived communities might sense problems that are unseen and unspoken in the society. They might create normative discourses to define these as legitimate problems for public attention. Figure 3 illustrates this process which is discussed in more detail below.

Problem sensing means noticing of undesirable situations by their sufferers (Hoppe, 2010). Some researchers have attempted to understand when problems are noticed and why problems go unnoticed. Most work on the circumstances in which problems are noticed focuses on aspiration-level triggers, that is those points at which circumstances fall below some level defined as satisfactory or acceptable (Kiesler & Sproull, 1982). The satisfactory or acceptable level might be defined for deprived communities by “others” (e.g., the media, public culture, government) at a very low level and taken for granted by these communities. Lingering and deep poverty may naturally lower the aspiration level of the poor and their noticing of underlying issues. For example, when asked about the biggest problem he is facing, a favela resident in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, answered, “Getting milk for my grandson.” (Perlman, 2010, p. 321). If the aspirations of deprived communities grow higher, the meanings that they give to their life experiences will change in a way that some acceptable circumstances become unacceptable and problematic (Alinsky, 1941; Cobb & Ross, 1997). This often occurs in a collective process. One example is collective sensing of the problem of ‘insecure land titles’ in slum community meetings in the north Indian cities of Jaipur, Rajasthan and Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh (Auerbach, 2017). Sometimes activists support problem sensing of communities (Webb, 2012). For example, when a slum community in Delhi held a meeting that included activists, the slum community noticed that “it was unjust to demolish a poor man’s hut; that it was illegal to do this without giving any formal notice to those affected...”, and then in the meeting “a few more men picked up the microphone to denounce the government for criminalizing the

poor. They challenged the procedures of law... and its enforcement as violations of the state’s legal duty of care towards those most vulnerable (women and children).” (Datta, 2012, p. 1).

Problems sensed by their sufferers involve two broad categories: (i) structured problems and (ii) unstructured problems (Smith, 1988). Structured problems are well-defined. They have formal routes of resolution (Hoppe, 2018). Two examples of structured problems are the school access problem in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro (Perlman, 2010) and the water access problem in the slum community of Saraswati, India. The slum community of Saraswati raised the water problem with officials by writing a petition letter that said: “The people of Saraswati have, since last year, been suffering from a scarcity of water...When we go to the water works department, they tell us that the level of water in the ground is very low ... We have been neglected ... we request you to please solve this problem of ours”. (Auerbach, 2017, p. 127). Unstructured problems are obscure. They may not be sensed by some sufferers. They are usually underlying problems that lack standard procedures or formal routes for their resolution (Hisschemöller & Hoppe, 2018). Two examples of unstructured problems are criminalizing the poor in Delhi’s slum case (Datta, 2012) and excluding favela residents from secure jobs in the employment structure of Rio de Janeiro (Perlman, 2010).

Unstructured problems need to be defined with normative discourses before they can be morally and rationally brought up and discussed in society (Carey et al., 2022; Rochefort & Cobb, 1993). For example, slum communities in Nairobi, Kenya, with coaching support from NGO Pamoja Trust, noticed that their real problems were about land and structure entitlements (Weru, 2004). These were unstructured problems in Kenya with no official routes to seek their resolution. As a first step to try to change this, the slum communities created a definition of “limited structure of opportunities in Kenya” for their problems. This discourse, which aimed to legitimize the problems of slum communities, came in a clash with the dominant discourse of “economic inactivity of the poor” in public and political discussions (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2011). In Jakarta, Indonesia, slum dwellers created normative discourses about their problems of deprived citizenship rights, tenure insecurity, and withheld access to basic services in order to counter the existing discourses which

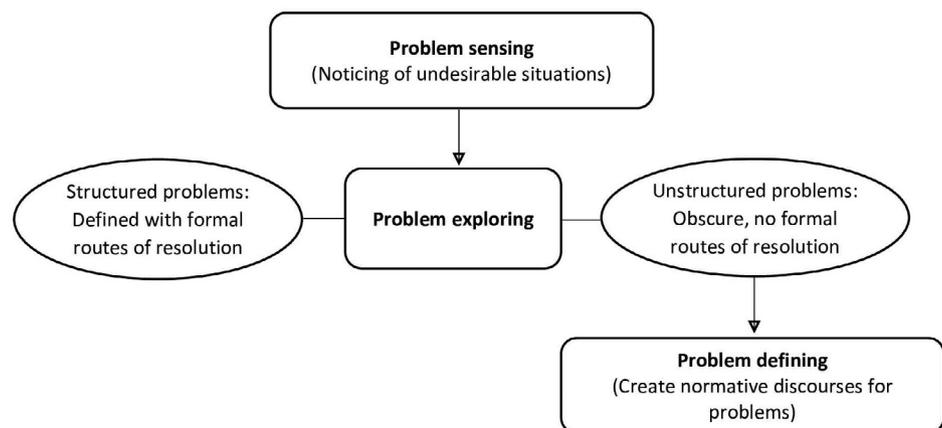


FIGURE 3 From problem sensing to problem defining (Author’s illustration. Based on: Hoppe, 2018; Mitlin & Mogaladi, 2013).

labeled them as “wild residents” and “destroyers of the Cipinang River bank environment” (Winayanti & Lang, 2004).

The 1990 “tents movement” of self-declared homeless in Israel did not involve a proper definition of their problem. Although the idea of a tent protest spread rapidly and was supported by local communities and political actors who decided to ride this big wave, five months later, one reporter pointed to a movement “which had evaporated.” Out of the 2000 families, 234 families were left in 12 encampments, 719 families received rent subsidies, 318 families were given social rent, and 34 families were granted increased loans. The rest were sent to hotels or left the encampments of their own free will. Given that housing policy remained intact, “the problem” as understood by protesters did not vanish. ‘The problem’ as understood and defined by government officials was effectively resolved (Dery, 2000).

5.2 | Seeking public attention

The ability of the poor to make their voice heard, and the willingness of the government to respond, have much to do with the views of the public, the middle classes, which are social bases of mainstream politics (Chwieroth & Walter, 2019; Devas, 2001; Fairclough, 1989). Brady (2019) reflects on power resources theory to suggest that it is essential for the working class and poor to gain the attention of the middle class to gain any real impact on government agendas. In a study “Negotiating marginalities: right to water in Delhi,” Roy (2013) observes that slum settlers in Delhi, India, used public attention strategies to push their water issue on the agenda of urban policy. Slum settlers were aware that the public would show sympathy toward their water issue even if divided on slum solutions (Roy, 2013). The public may know little about poverty issues. There are ways for deprived communities to change this and connect their issues with public concerns. Some of these ways are simple but their reach is small. For example, Transforming Poverty Partnerships in the USA run monthly discussion meetings between people in poverty and people from the middle class (Lawless, 2016). Three strategies deprived communities use to get public attention to their issues are discussed below.

5.2.1 | Approaching voices of expertise

As Narayan et al. (2000, p. 2) note in *Voices of the Poor: Crying out for Change*, “There are 2.8 billion poverty experts, the poor themselves.” However, the public tends to give more credibility to professional voices of expertise, including about poverty issues. This bias is exploited by political leaders who operate more and more independently of grassroots problems by commissioning experts’ ‘evidence base’ (Fischer, 2002). Deprived communities sometimes use voices of expertise or even work with researchers to validate their poverty discourses (Mitlin, 2014). For example, in the context of plans to upgrade and expand the Karachi Circular Railway in Pakistan, about 20,000 households living in informal settlements along the railway tracks

were intended to be evicted as ‘encroachers’. The residents of the informal settlements organized themselves as the Network of Railway Colonies. They approached the Orangi Pilot Project–Research and Training Institute and the Urban Resource Centre which surveyed the “encroachments” along the railway tracks and documented the histories of the different informal settlements as early as 1956 mainly through the expansion of old villages. The survey revealed that 72% of the space required for expansion was occupied by formal sector construction (apartment complexes, commercial plazas, etc.) that was more recent but not on the demolition list. As a result of the findings, which were published and circulated, the discourse of the Network of Railway Colonies about “government encroachment on their settlements” was strengthened in public opinion (Hasan, 2009).

In most cases, deprived communities cannot afford to commission poverty research to exert extensive influence on its direction. However, sometimes they work with poverty researchers to try to define the issues to be researched, contribute to deciding how the topic should be researched, participate in collecting the research material, and contribute to interpreting the findings. There are examples of UK cities such as Brighton, Edinburgh, Bath, and Birmingham in which deprived communities had some success in impacting poverty research. In research about damp council houses in Edinburgh, the tenants took part in training, providing evidence, and group analysis sessions. This had implications for the findings of the research, such as the tenants had not exaggerated the issues of dampness, and they could not be blamed for it! (Holman, 1987). There are also international examples of “barefoot surveyors” (e.g., *Kalijawi* community in Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Roitman, 2019) who are deprived communities trained by researchers to map and document local data and flag up their poverty problems in collaboration with researchers (Totaro, 2016).

5.2.2 | Approaching civic voices

Deprived communities sometimes approach activists and artists to publicize their issues and gain public attention to their discourses. In Mumbai, settlers of Golibar—a slum between two of the city’s transport arteries, the airport, and a fashionable neighborhood—noticed they were put inequal before the law that supports the right to housing. Developers demolishing their houses had allied with elected leaders, bureaucrats, private capital, NGOs, and even organized crime syndicates demolishing the houses of slum dwellers without building new houses for them. The police refused to proceed in cases of fraud filed against the developer. The slum dwellers sought their own allies and reached out to NAPM—a nationwide umbrella organization for activist groups—to bring public attention to their situation. NAPM’s most prominent figure, the white-haired Patkar, best known for her work with tribal residents of the Narmada Valley who were to be displaced by a massive dam project, went on hunger strike in support of slum dwellers. For 9 days, national TV crews crowded Golibar’s narrow main street as the Gandhian activist stopped eating. Sympathizers from across the city—trade union members, residents of other slum

pockets, and students—gathered to show their support. This brought Golibar and their problem to national attention. It made the prime-time news on several channels and found prominent mention in most newspapers (McQuarrie et al., 2013).

Residents of urban informal riverside settlements in Kathmandu, Nepal, are regularly facing floods and potential eviction. The Bagmati Action Plan, prepared with the aim of restoration and conservation of the Bagmati river ecosystem, claims illegal settlements along the banks have deteriorated the river environment and the water security of the citizens. In the context of these discourses, many evictions took place without attention from the mainstream media. However, some of these informal communities made voices about their “unsafe housing” and “lack of urban sanitation services.” They worked with figures from the *Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj*—an NGO advocating for the rights of landless women in Nepal—to get gendered public attention to their alternative discourse (Carrasco & Dangol, 2019).

5.2.3 | Using art and audiovisual productions

Deprived communities sometimes use art and audiovisual productions to get public attention to their issues. Examples include live street performances, public space painting, and making documentaries and films and publishing them on the internet. A resident of *Bairro da Torre*, a social housing neighborhood in Cascais, Portugal, for example, highlighted the desire in his deprived community to seek help from art professionals to get their discourse across: “*There are so many artists out there, in Europe, in Portugal, they are super capable, so why don't they go and work with us, why don't they come and paint the walls?*” (Sonntag, 2020, p. 74). Meanwhile, Brazil's favelas have gained public attention because of the media contents and public art produced by favela settlers about their struggles (Levy, 2021). Most notably, with technical support from NGOs, favela settlers turned into digital activists producing content about their inequality discourses and sharing them in small media outlets to tackle the public normalization of their poverty (Levy, 2018, 2021). Art and audiovisual productions of favela settlers helped stimulate commercialized attention to their issues from artists, music and film industries (Levy, 2021).

In Rio de Janeiro's favelas, *Curta Favela* (Favela Shorts)—that was a project of the NGO *Viva Rio*—involved workshops to train favela settlers to use audiovisual production as a tool to get public attention to their poverty issues. As cameras were not affordable for favela dwellers, the workshops involved teaching them how they could use their mobile phones and compact cameras to take pictures and make movies, and afterward, how they could edit the contents using free editing video software programs and publish it on the Internet (Lima Baroni, 2013). *Curta Favela* workshops involved a few rules to better serve their training purposes. These rules, for example, included:

- A movie must be produced by workshop participants
- It must be a collaborative creation of favela settlers in their community about their issues (e.g., environmental discrimination)
- There should be an open-air screening of the movie

- The first screening always happens in the favela where the film was created (Lima Baroni, 2013).

One example of a *Curta Favela* production is a micro-documentary called *Vida de Cão* (Dog's Life) which was made collaboratively in the favela of Santa Marta. The name *Vida de Cão* referred to Boris, the favorite pedigree dog in the favela, but it also means hard life. The documentary is a political protest against the unequal opportunities that disadvantaged people face. The *Vida de Cão* group put the camera on Boris and let it capture images throughout the favela. Afterward, eight non-identified persons talk about what it means to live in the favela and the difficulties they face in their daily lives. The last person tells a story about the prejudice he and his cousin faced when they applied for a job in the south of Rio de Janeiro (Lima Baroni, 2013).

5.2.4 | Using poverty tourism

Public visits to impoverished urban areas—that is, poverty tourism or slum tourism, is on the rise, particularly across South America, Africa, and South Asia (Frenzel et al., 2015; Koens et al., 2012). In many cases, governments and private companies organize slum tours for their own interests, for example, for selective display of “happy” slums and government aid or for benefiting the hospitality sector (Frenzel et al., 2015). One example for the latter is that one of the main slum tour operators in Dharavi slum in Mumbai is not based in the area and only ropes in local agents to lead the tours (Ratho, 2019). In these “by the non-poor, for the non-poor” tours, benefits are not channeled to the local community other than selling small cultural items to tourists or receiving minor contributions from the tour operators (Frenzel, 2013). These tours limit the most sustainable benefit of slum tourism to deprived communities which is receiving recognition and voice and telling their poverty story to the public audience (Ratho, 2019). Other such examples are tours to Old Fadama slum in Accra, Ghana, and Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya (Aseye & Opoku, 2015; Chege & Mwisukha, 2013).

However, some poverty tours run by NGOs provide examples of “by the non-poor, for the poor” tours. They may not engage the poor in the decision-making and organizing of tours to their area, but they provide some scope for the poor to show their problems and explain their narratives to visitors. For example, in India, *Salaam Baalak Trust* organized tours to the slum community around New Delhi Railway Station—that is, Akanksha Colony. The tour planning, including routes and visit points, was undertaken by *Salaam Baalak Trust* without local community input. However, *Salaam Baalak Trust* had set up a contact point in the community where the tourists were invited to interact with whoever was around at the time. In these public interactions, the slum community shared their discourses about their settlement history, their plight, and the environmental pollutions that were blamed on them. Nevertheless, the Trust's organizing of the walking tours was subject to criticisms, for example, about consent and privacy of slum children, and the visit points covered in the tour (Holst, 2015).

Where deprived communities are better organized, there are examples of “by the poor, for the poor” tours in which decision-

making, planning, and running of the poverty tour are carried out by the deprived community for its benefit. One example for this is the social housing neighborhood *Bairro da Torre* in Cascais, Portugal. Here the neighborhood association *Somos Torre* initiated a tour of the neighborhood in which everyone, from tour guides to a team of translators for foreign visitors, was from *Bairro da Torre*. A community member involved in the tours highlighted the importance of this community-led design of the tour in getting public attention to community discourses and problems: “*it's the people of the neighborhood themselves who give the visits ... The very people who have experienced problems in the social neighborhood... I think that the relationship between the community's problems and the tourism ... they'll end up explaining their own lives and the stories they've been through*” (Sonntag, 2020, p. 74). Such poverty tours were also run in the social housing neighborhood of Quinta do Mocho in Loures, Portugal. A local guide described the role of these tours in amplifying the claims-making voice of the neighborhood residents on urban policy: “*One E-mail does nothing, two do nothing, but when it's 100 E-mails... I often say, the visits give the resident the power to put their word into the mouth of the tourist... Today the residents of Quinta do Mocho know that if someone makes a visit with 50 people and they go there during the visit, saying: 'It's a shame, and so on, there is a park missing...' ...it will be 50 people who are going to bother the municipality...*” (Sonntag, 2020, p. 86).

5.3 | Demanding policy attention

In Ram Nagar, India, slum settlers had a community organization with leaders who made connections with some politicians and demonstrated awareness of government programs. However, they did not take steps to get public attention before demanding policy attention to their issues. The slum leaders spent countless hours in government offices and sent dozens of letters to various departments without noticeable achievements, as described by one of these leaders in a letter to officials: “*We ... and many other poor people ... have to tolerate heat, cold, rain, and many other problems... We ... here for so many years, request the government for help. We do not get any attention and have been to offices many times and as a result, it has all become a headache.*” (Auerbach, 2016, p. 127).

Sometimes, deprived communities gain public attention to their issues—that is, their issues enter the systemic agenda. This may put them in the political position to ask the government to deal with those issues (Figure 2) (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Mitlin, 2014). Still, in many cases, issues of weaker stakeholders are blocked at this level (McClain, 1990). Policy-makers know that an issue may demise as a prominent public issue if not timely progressed to government agenda. Because of attention competition from other issues, it takes considerable time and effort for a deprived community to keep their non-moving issue in public attention (Kingdon, 2014). For example, in the case of the slum around New Delhi Railway Station—that is Akanksha Colony, the slum community could not use its public attention gained in poverty tourism to put officials under pressure to consider their insecure tenure and other issues. A few years later, in

2010, the government demolished the slum (Holst, 2015). Deprived communities sometimes use political bargaining and protest to get policymakers to address their issues before these issues fall off public attention.

5.3.1 | Political bargaining

In most cases studied, deprived communities used political bargaining to push their issues from public attention to institutional attention. As mentioned earlier, slum communities in Kathmandu, Nepal, received public attention to their housing and sanitation issues with the help of feminist voices—that is, *Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj*. In this context, slum community leaders and *Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj* made delegations to relevant ministries to have dialogs with ministers and bureaucrats requesting them to consider the rights and issues of slum communities. Slum community leaders used their connections with ruling political parties to further pressure officials in these negotiations to put slum issues on their institutional agenda (Carrasco & Dangol, 2019). In Quinta do Mocho social housing neighborhood in Loures, Portugal, the public attention that tourism brought to the issues of the neighborhood put them in the position to request from the local authority to address “their rights to the city.” They requested the local authority to hold assemblies with residents to discuss some of their historical problems. The local authority agreed to hold assemblies. Some of the issues raised in the assemblies were put on the agenda of the local authority. The local authority made decisions to resolve these issues by providing bus routes running through the neighborhood, installing doors at building entrances, providing ramps for disabled people, and cleaning services running more regularly (Raposo, 2019). In the case of Golibar slum in Mumbai, after the hunger strike of Patkar, the activist, brought public and media attention to the slum, there were negotiations between slum community leaders and the government. Patkar continued her hunger strike until the chief minister of Maharashtra agreed in these negotiations to set up two committees, one to investigate the contentious 3 K clause of the Slum Rehabilitation Act of 1995 under which Shivalik had been granted the redevelopment project, and another committee to investigate the cases of redevelopment in Golibar that do not consider slum dwellers' need for shelter (McQuarrie et al., 2013).

5.3.2 | Organizing protest

Deprived communities might use protest in various stages of their agenda-setting competition. However, their use of protest turns more strategic after their issues are in public attention. For example, slum communities in Kathmandu rallied along the main streets of the city to back their political bargaining with ignoring officials and push their issues onto the institutional agenda (Carrasco & Dangol, 2019). In some other cases, deprived communities used protest after their issues moved to the institutional agenda. In Golibar slum in Mumbai, 1 month after the chief minister of Maharashtra agreed to set up

committees to consider their issues of inequality and evictions, the government retracted its promise. In other words, slum dwellers' issues were on the institutional agenda for only 1 month before they were pushed back. In this case the politicians with connections to the slum were not useful, and, indeed, the slum community assumed that they had their own deals with developers. The slum community tried to push their issues again onto the government table before their public attention declines. They organized protests coordinated in a tent, called the Office, erected on a plot of land cleared in the demolition of several homes. The protests took different forms, from rallies to staging children theaters about the demolitions they had experienced. In doing so, they received considerable support, not least because of outrage caused by the failure of state institutions to abide by their own words and standards of conduct (McQuarrie et al., 2013). In the town of Piet Retief, South Africa, students and the youth supported issues of deprived communities about unaffordable housing, poor public service, misappropriation of public funds and lack of information sharing. The municipality had negotiations with deprived communities and agreed to consider their issues. However, these issues did not move from the institutional agenda to the decision agenda as the municipality did not take steps to explore solutions to these issues. This inaction resulted in widespread street demonstrations by deprived communities and their supporters. Before the demonstrations, a memorandum was formulated at a community meeting and delivered to the municipality, although it was addressed to the provincial premier given the municipality's failure to uphold its pledges. The memorandum complained that the poorest people in the community experienced discrimination, being subject to the worst service delivery and income inequality (Alexander, 2010).

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Of so many problems that policymakers can provide solutions on, some problems are given more importance and others simply fade away. Even the problems that receive policymaking attention may not be defined as sensed and lived by their sufferers. Communities suffering from pollution, homelessness, unemployment, and other unsustainabilities have the best science and most legitimate interest to define these problems for policymakers. Such bottom-up agenda-setting is fundamental to sustainable development, particularly in social and environmental policies. However, our knowledge about bottom-up agenda setting is limited.

This study was an original, first-time effort to explore and conceptualize how deprived communities engage in the competition to set policy agendas. An extensive and deep synthesis of secondary evidence was conducted to produce the findings of this study. However, the identified steps and strategies of bottom-up agenda setting are not meant to act as a concrete analytical toolkit. They are intended to act as a draft toolkit to help study the routes and possibilities of local communities to define issues for policymakers to address. The scope of this study was about deprived communities and poverty issues, but the toolkit might be further tested and refined, including in

environmental studies. With a surge in environmental policymaking, we need to explore if it is targeting real issues of environmental sufferers.

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