

# Reflections on Knowledge and Learning

## Diana Mitlin



# Whose knowledge? Whose learning ?

- Talk about working with social movements
- The ways in which they have developed their learning
- The ways in which this learning is developing
- The ways in which learning is co-produced with academic institutions
- What might this mean for academics in the future

# Learning as a process

- Process of acquiring information and turning it into knowledge and the ability to use knowledge
- Process of building relationships that enable this process to move forward urban development to be inclusive and pro-poor
- Partly a process of defining what is visible (as defined by grassroots groups...),
- But also a process of identifying what is possible... the action/reflection iteration

# Central to what I talk about is

- The problems with poor quality information and knowledge
- The problems with the professionalization of knowledge (knowledge segregation and stratification)
- The problems arising from social stratification, and the de-legitimation of low-income and informal

# The context

- One in seven living in informal settlements without adequate access to basic services, safe and secure housing, and/or secure tenure
- Very significant resources and policies to address this – but limited success
- Many policies unhelpful – even if well-intentioned
- Major shortcomings in our understanding about what might address this situation (evidenced by continuing poverty and inequality in the global North)

# SDI introduction

- Network of savings groups, federations at the city and national level. From 1996 linked at the international level as well.
  - Learning a critical component from the beginning
  - Learning about the scale of problems
  - Learning about the nature of solutions
  - Learning as empowerment – “fuelled” by community to community exchanges
  - Strategy one: knowledge as process - community exchanges, alliance building
  - Strategy two: knowledge content (next slide)
- \* [www.sdinet.org](http://www.sdinet.org)

# Problem 1: the need to know

- Knowledge about the situation in their settlements and cities
- Knowledge about the priorities of local residents
- Knowledge about the kinds of solutions that work for them, and how they might be scaled up
- Knowledge about the agencies involved and their relationships
- Knowledge about the processes involved in such solution scaling



**DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION**

VINEBEEK  
GREENWELL MATONS 2  
DATE: 23.05.2010

HOUSEHOLDS SURVEYED: 37  
 GENDER OF THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD: 19  
 FEMALE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD: 28  
 MALE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD: 19  
 TOTAL: 37

POPULATION  
 AVERAGE NO. OF PERSONS PER HOUSEHOLD: 91.57  
 MEMBER OF POPULATION: 3365

EMPLOYED: 103 (27.8%)  
 UNEMPLOYED: 18 (4.9%)  
 PENSIONERS: 1 (0.3%)  
 STUDENT / CHILDREN: 83 (22.2%)  
 TOTAL: 107 (28.9%)

AVERAGE INCOME  
 UNEMPLOYED: 20.00  
 EMPLOYED: 41.25  
 PENSIONERS: 4.00  
 STUDENT / CHILDREN: 0.00  
 TOTAL: 25.29

SERVICES  
 ELECTRICITY: 100%  
 WATER: 100%

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**COMMUNITY ORGANISATION**

HEALTH: 100%  
 FEDERATION SAVING: 100%  
 ENVIRONMENTAL: 100%  
 OTHER SAVING: 100%

AFFORDABILITY (AVERAGE): 164

MEMBER SAVING GROUPS: TOTAL 36, 100%

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# Problem 2: specialise and order

- Professionalization long recognised to be disempowering
- This problem particularly acute in urban areas because of the density of state agencies and standard setting models of local authority actions
- Despite this, the longstanding practices both civil society and local authorities reinforce this
- Processes reinforce knowledge stratifications
- SDI modality of agencies recognises this but sets up a permanent tension
- Counteracted by federating, networking and exchanges

\* Mitlin (2013) A class act: professional support to people's organizations in towns and cities of the Global South, *Environment and Urbanization* 25(2): 483-499

# SDI and professional alliances

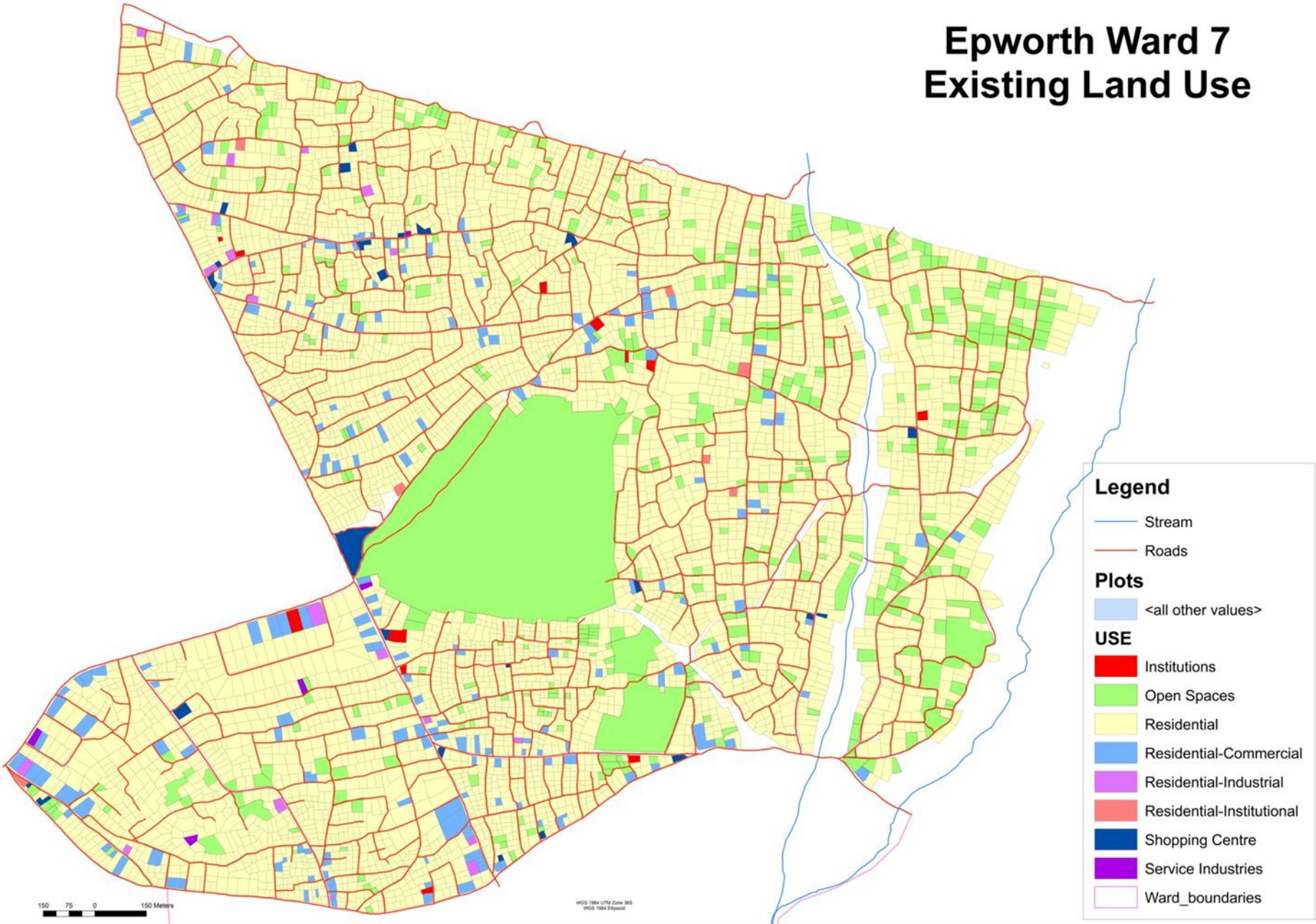
Five strategies (not exclusive) – all based on the simple reality that professionals do not have the solutions (reverse perspective, do not need to know)

- Keep professionals at a distance
- Better training and selection
- Keep professionals focussed on particular areas
- Hold professionals to account
- Transform professional education

# Problem 3: legitimate new knowledge agencies

- Collect basic data - “Know your city”
- Use the data collection to build alliances WITHIN low income settlements, and establish priorities
- Use the data collection to legitimate contribution of the urban poor – DRAW in local authorities
- Deepen alliances with local authorities

# Epworth Ward 7 Existing Land Use



# Also through knowledge coproduction

Also with academic agencies – why?

- Quality: Improves quality of work and therefore acceptability
- Legitimation: of the work of the urban poor – insufficient on their own
- Amplifies voices through knowledge aggregation: validation of concerns and responses
- Improves quality of next generation of professionals

# Knowledge aggregations: international legitimation

Process now of standardizing templates to produce consistent global knowledge base. All SDI profiles will follow a core set of questions. Why?

- To address global practices and enable the legitimation of the urban poor to enter a new level
- To address invisibility and practices that reinforce it at scale
- To increase the scale of collectivity AND critical mass
- Know Your City: a global campaign (with UCLG – A) for gathering citywide data on slums as the basis for inclusive partnerships between the urban poor and local government

# (KNOW) YOUR CITY

A GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR GATHERING CITYWIDE DATA ON SLUMS AS THE BASIS FOR INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE URBAN POOR AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.



SDI URBAN POOR FEDERATIONS HAVE A PRESENCE IN 450 CITIES AND HAVE COLLECTED DATA ON OVER 7 000 INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS ACROSS THE GLOBAL SOUTH

TODAY, OVER 1 BILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN SLUMS

2 BILLION BY **2030**

3 BILLION BY **2050**

**K(NO)W K(NO)W K(NO)W K(NO)W**  
**POVERTY EVICTIONS EXCLUSION INEQUALITY**  
**(KNOW) (KNOW) (KNOW) (KNOW)**  
**WATER LAND SANITATION RESILIENCE**

**IN YOUR CITY**



If the increasing majority of slums remain unaccounted for there can be NO INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT planning or investment and NO EFFECTIVE CITY GOVERNANCE

Every household, neighbourhood and informal settlement has to be counted.

## (KNOW) YOUR CITY

KNOW YOUR CITY IS A CALL TO ACTION FOR CITIES TO KNOW THEIR PEOPLE AND THE PLIGHT OF THEIR POOR. A CALL TO WORK TOGETHER TO BRING ABOUT AN END TO POVERTY.



DATA COLLECTION IS THE FIRST STEP IN DEVELOPING POWERFUL NEGOTIATION TOOLS THAT ENGAGE ALL TIERS OF GOVERNMENT TO ADDRESS: HOUSING BASIC SERVICES LAND TENURE AND ALTERNATIVES TO EVICTIONS.



WHEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND SLUM COMMUNITIES PARTNER TO COLLECT CITYWIDE DATA, THEY CO-PRODUCE DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES. RESIDENTS BECOME ACTIVE PARTNERS IN UPGRADING THEIR BUILT ENVIRONMENT, ALLOWING THEM TO REACH GREATER SCALE IN LESS TIME.



SLUM / SHACK DWELLERS INTERNATIONAL: GLOBAL NETWORK OF THE URBAN POOR  
[WWW.SDINET.ORG](http://WWW.SDINET.ORG)



# What are the implications for academics?

- Still relevant: Two contradictory processes: increasingly defined and constrained knowledge products vs growing sophistication of non-academic knowledge producers
- Former has multiple implications: less time to build relations, less time for multiple knowledge products, narrow range of possible questions = will academics be relevant?
- Changing knowledge capabilities: Consolidation of (co-productive) relations (at least in the global South). New forms of relationship with local authorities and Southern academics
- New demands for greater accountability. Should academics be accountable for what they write? And the processes by which they do research? And the policy direction they suggest?