



BUILDING **URBAN SAFETY** THROUGH **SLUM UPGRADING**



UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

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FOREWORD

UN-HABITAT's research shows that a total of 227 million people in the world have moved out of slum conditions since 2000. This means that governments have collectively surpassed the Millennium Development Goal on slums more than two times over.

Indeed it is commendable that 22 million people in developing countries moved out of slums each year between 2000 and 2010 as the result of slum upgrading. While this is welcome, the overall reduction in the world's urban divide still requires greater effort since the *absolute number* of slum dwellers has actually increased from 776.7 million in 2000 to some 827.6 million in 2010.

This means that 55 million new slum dwellers have been added to the global urban population since 2000. It is thus troubling to reiterate yet again that the progress made on the slum target has simply not been enough to counter the growth of informal settlements in the developing world.

This is unsatisfactory. It is inadequate, and it can lead to social danger.

Here we present an important collection of studies which clarify the enormity of this challenge. It is the product of critical reflection on current slum-upgrading projects in widely different cities from developing countries. Each piece seeks to understand a neighborhood and the way people live in it improves urban safety.

Far beyond overcoming spatial and legal obstacles, slum-upgrading must be about social change for the better. Smart cities offer everyone better opportunities and a better way of life.



Excluded from the city's opportunities, physically, politically and economically marginalized, slum dwellers are particularly vulnerable to crime and violence. They face an acute risk of becoming victims or offenders and live in a state of constant insecurity.

From the very start, these conditions should be the number-one concern of any upgrading project. Put another way, the safety of slum dwellers cannot be taken to be an *incidental consequence* of the upgrading of their neighborhoods. Rather, it must be considered an *explicitly planned outcome* of upgrading.

To date, few cities have incorporated a coherent component to prevent crime and mitigate violence in their urban development agendas. Impact on urban safety has occurred somewhat unexpectedly.

That is the main lesson to be drawn from the pages of this book: urban policy integration. Urban development emerges from prosperity, through adequate and sound planning, management and governance; it comes to be fully enjoyed once urban safety is guaranteed.

I wish to acknowledge the generous support of the Government of Italy and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency towards the preparation of this publication, which contributes to our quest for better, smarter, greener, and more equitable cities without slums.

Joan Clos
Under-Secretary General, United Nations
Executive Director
UN-HABITAT

PROLEGOMENA: URBAN DEVELOPMENT AS URBAN SAFETY

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Among the several forms of urban development interventions, slum-upgrading offers an incomparable opportunity to provide urban safety for the poor. Slum-upgrading, the orchestrated process to improve the built environment of a human settlement, could mobilize many different actors in diverse policy areas at various levels. And it could give momentum to the idea that improving a neighbourhood comprises an overhaul of all dimensions of its life, including the freedom of citizens from the occurrence or risk of injury, danger, or loss, that is, their safety. Contemporary crime prevention tools are up to the task. Progressively, the field has shifted its main concern from reducing measurements of either crime or violence to improving the quality of life. A holistic notion of “safety” has been brought into play and slum-upgrading interventions set a suitable scenario to realize its practical implications.

The Safer Cities Programme of UN-HABITAT has realized that policy makers and urban managers can avail themselves of these auspicious circumstances through a careful consideration of four key factors: the degree of

social cohesion, the extent of urban inequalities, the risks of the built environment, and the scope of inclusiveness in urban governance. Experience has shown that authorities are better equipped to build urban safety when they formulate inclusive urban upgrading policies, which in turn include project components that redesign the morphology of the urban environment to favor self-protection, that profit from and foster the increase of social links –reinforcing social cohesion–, and that reduce the various social inequalities, abating exclusion and bridging the gap of the *urban divide*. It is easier said than done, indeed. However, a good start is to bear in mind the impact that one would like the upgrading intervention to have in any or all of these four key factors.

The intervention has to consider, firstly, the necessity to strengthen social cohesion. The concept of social cohesion refers to the strength, or weakness, of the network of personal, familial, professional, and neighbourly relationships that characterizes urban life. It reminds of the importance of the inclusion of all the political, social, cultural, and community groups coexisting in the city.



A road network in Hangzhou, China © Shutterstock



Medellin, Colombia © Castilla Noche

Specifically, it evokes a myriad of dimensions such as the celebration of diversity, a sense of belonging and a shared future, as well as empathy, solidarity, and confidence between citizens. The concept points to the significance of social interaction and union, for atomized societies, where the value of persons crumbles, are more inclined to tolerate violence.

The second way to include a component of safety in urban development is to think about the importance of reducing the *urban divide*. It is not a problem of poverty, but rather of disparities between social groups and between neighbourhoods that could cause the frustration that influences the level of crime. Disparities concern incomes, access to basic services, and participation in political decisions. Cities of Africa and Latin America are significant examples. Even though there are exceptions, there is a strong correlation between urban disparities and criminal violence.

A third way to do it is considering the effects that the urban environment may have on citizens. The size, the morphology and the structure of cities can encourage violence, incivilities and deviant behaviours. Big cities, generally, are more violent than smaller ones insofar as the anonymity of big metropolises and the temptations they arouse are more propitious to delinquency, impunity and to the development of gangs and mafias. Simply put, some cities are more soothing than others, have more attractive public spaces, more lively streets and experience thus less segregation. A deleterious environment, characterized, for instance, by insufficient light-

ing and the destruction of public spaces, increases the possibility of committing a crime, according to research conducted by UN-HABITAT.

Most importantly, it becomes considerably easier to incorporate safety into urban development when it is accepted that urban planning is not only a technical matter, but one related to local governance, i.e., the political management of the city. In a city, priorities regarding the issues of development and safety cannot only be established. They need to be understood, agreed upon, sanctioned, and followed. This takes leadership and capacity. And it is a process that involves numerous actors, far beyond the governmental sphere. Understood in this fashion, local governance, based on solid and accurate information, permits to offer, for instance, better services, promote community life, develop effective public transports, and organise a better policing. Negotiation, steering and joint initiatives, in turn, support a long-term vision to construct urban safety and constitute thereby the core of responsible urban management.

The importance of considering these four factors has been well established by the latest findings of UN HABITAT regarding the pace of urbanization. The proportion of people living in slums around the world is declining. But more citizens live in them than 10 years ago. The figure is somewhere around the 828 million and augmenting, most of them living in developing countries. Even if Asia alone lifted 172 million people out of slum conditions in the same period, in the global South, rapid and unplanned urbanisation, along with poor, inequi-

table and exclusory urban governance and management, has resulted in the proliferation of informal settlements, where the urban poor experience the worst consequences of the economic, spatial, opportunity and social divides of contemporary cities.

Far from being an unfortunate consequence of some sort of linear development drama, that all human societies are due to reenact, slums are a byproduct of irresponsible policies, insufficient infrastructure and pressing rural-urban migration. Indeed, slums are severely neglected areas: housing is inadequate; services are deficient; facilities for recreation or capital investment, simply nonexistent. Additionally, when confined to remote locations, slum dwellers are impeded to access justice and security. The worst part is that these conditions cannot be terminated by decree; it is impossible to simply “clean” the city.

Furthermore, slum dwellers and urban poor face a particularly acute risk of crime and violence. They are defenseless, in outright vulnerability to these phenomena. Often, they rank either among the prime victims of urban crime or the common perpetrators. Authorities and popular depictions of slums tend to disregard this simultaneity. Crime in informal settlements may be pervasive. Yet, it is also important to acknowledge the deeper causes of insecurity and violence and take into account the incidence of poverty, economic inequality, social exclusion, gender prejudice, and youth unemployment. Moreover, it is essential to consider the responsibilities and failures of state institutions, not only to protect more favored citizens, but also to guarantee the safety of slum dwellers.

Several initiatives to upgrade these dwellings in cities around the world have acknowledged several of these facts. Rather than forced evictions or relocations, which have exhibited its limitations and undesired effects on livelihoods, cities as diverse as Medellin, Port Moresby, or Rio de Janeiro –and yet so similar, in so far as in all of them pockets of wealth and poverty co-exist in close proximity– have approached holistically to the upgrading of slums, with satisfactory results.

Similarly, urban development literature has progressively recognized that the material enhancement of a slum, for which institutional and regulatory changes must occur in the first place, is only part of the story. To unlock upgrading and inclusion of slums, there are other dimensions that need to be addressed focusing on a second area: governance. Social, cultural and economic conditions need also be upgraded along, with the active involvement of members of the community, lest the almost imminent failure of the project. Not only amenities are crucial, but also social cohesion and thus its *sine qua non*, urban safety.



Medellin, Colombia © Julián Roldán

During the past two decades crime prevention strategies have been increasingly integrated in comprehensive urban planning practices. Visible attempts to do so first appeared during the 1990's as government policies gradually shifted from repression, authoritarianism and neglect in dealing with the main challenges of rapid urbanisation, to more comprehensive and participatory approaches committed to involving local civil authorities and community based organisations in the progressive implementation of integrated slum upgrading programs that include law enforcement as well as social and situational prevention strategies.

Today, local authorities and urban planners have come to terms with the idea that urban crime prevention and reduction can be best attained by addressing specific demands of local residents for social inclusion, security and safety, through their direct involvement in planning integrated improvement of their neighbourhoods. Upgraded living conditions and empowered communities are the main outcomes sought by this type of integrated urban planning. This entails enhancing the ability of people to respond positively to problems of crime and violence. It means, as well, to allow their meaningful participation in planning and designing their urban public space, a more effective policing, and other features of the built environment that allow for self-protection.

The chapters that follow analyse experiences on this matter. They gather and comment the testimonies of project staff, practitioners and academics regarding the impact of slum upgrading initiatives in urban safety. They derive from six case studies that UN-HABITAT's Safer Cities Programme recently commissioned. Projects were thoroughly analysed in Dhaka, Bangladesh; Doula, Cameroon; Medellin, Colombia; Nairobi, Kenya; Port Moresby; Papua New Guinea; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Relevant project and national documents, together with field visits, interviews, and focus groups with community leaders provided the data.

As the aggregated reading of the chapters shows, many challenges still lay ahead. Appropriate and relevant indicators to assess security and safety baselines, prior to upgrading interventions, must be resourced. Moreover, these must reflect local concerns and expectations. Indicators allow managers to properly incorporate communities' voices into the objectives of integrated urban interventions. Information flowing from such sources will significantly contribute to engage stakeholder participation in local decision-making nodes regarding the planning and developing of urban interventions, enhancing in this way effective local governance.

In this same regard, many countries hold as a priority the enactment of modern national legal and institutional frameworks. The aim in these exercises is to establish functioning steering and coordination mechanisms between central, regional and local level government authorities, explicitly drawn to respond to the specific needs of urban poor and newly settled rural migrants. Institutional capacity building of local government agencies is another main concern. Many cities need to develop their capacity to prepare projects and allocate resources efficiently to address different scales of needs and types of interventions.

Furthermore, local security and safety conditions critically depend on developing sustainable community ownership of public spaces and service infrastructure delivered through urban improvement programmes. Fruit-

All these challenges, in conclusion, reiterate one main lesson: urban safety is a matter of urban managers and planners not just a matter of criminologists or criminal justice experts, while a slum-upgrading program is not a simple collection of technical actions to be performed independently of each other and of other elements of urban development. Both areas, safety and development, are integrated; one cannot be edified without taking an explicit foundation on the other. The corollary of their intertwining is a comprehensive intervention, better situated to improve the physical characteristics of a neighborhood and its inhabitants' quality of life.

If such is the case, it is possible to suggest the way forward. It is necessary to keep empowering the communities to face crime and violence, by providing educational, cultural, and sportive services, contributing to create decent jobs, and promoting a non-violent resolution of conflicts. Their resilience has to be strengthened; and vulnerability, kept at bay, especially of unemployed youth and women. It is also necessary to keep improving the physical space, with proper street illumination, accessible bus stations and markets, adequate public spaces –just to mention a few instances. The bulk of these tasks, however, can only be pursued through a carefully crafted process of steering and involving of the social actors that have a stake, whether they know or ignore it, in building urban safety. This could be done mastering that tool that will become crucial to face our inexorable urban future: inclusive urban governance.

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