



THE CHALLENGE OF **SLUMS**

GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2003



• United Nations Human Settlements Programme

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FOREWORD

Almost 1 billion people, or 32 per cent of the world's urban population, live in slums, the majority of them in the developing world. Moreover, the locus of global poverty is moving to the cities, a process now recognized as the 'urbanization of poverty'. Without concerted action on the part of municipal authorities, national governments, civil society actors and the international community, the number of slum dwellers is likely to increase in most developing countries. And if no serious action is taken, the number of slum dwellers worldwide is projected to rise over the next 30 years to about 2 billion.

In the United Nations Millennium Declaration, world leaders pledged to tackle this immense challenge, setting the specific goal of achieving 'significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020'. This means addressing not only the needs of slum dwellers for shelter, but also the broader problem of urban poverty, especially unemployment, low incomes and a lack of access to basic urban services.

The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003 presents the results of the first global assessment of slums by the United Nations since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration. The report proposes an operational definition of slums and, on this basis, provides the first global estimates of the numbers of urban slum dwellers. It discusses the local, national and international factors underlying the formation of slums. It analyses the social, spatial and economic characteristics and dynamics of slums. And it assesses the impact of the main policies towards urban slums adopted by governments, civil society groups and international organizations.

Slums represent the worst of urban poverty and inequality. Yet the world has the resources, knowhow and power to reach the target established in the Millennium Declaration. It is my hope that this report, and the best practices it identifies, will enable all actors involved to overcome the apathy and lack of political will that have been a barrier to progress, and move ahead with greater determination and knowledge in our common effort to help the world's slum dwellers to attain lives of dignity, prosperity and peace.



Kofi A Annan
Secretary-General
United Nations

INTRODUCTION

The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003 is mainly concerned with the shelter conditions of the majority of the urban poor. It is about how the poor struggle to survive within urban areas, mainly through informal shelter and informal income-generation strategies, and about the inadequacy of both public and market responses to the plight of the urban poor. But the report is also about hope, about building on the foundations of the urban poor's survival strategies and about what needs to be done by both the public and non-governmental sectors, as well as by the international community, if the goal of adequate shelter for all is to have any relevance for today's urban poor.

Efforts to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers (especially within developing countries) have been feeble and incoherent over the last decade or so, having peaked during the 1980s. However, renewed concern about poverty has recently led governments to adopt a specific target on slums in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which aims to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. As this report emphasizes, slums are a manifestation of the two main challenges facing human settlements development at the beginning of the new millennium: rapid urbanization and the urbanization of poverty. Slums areas have the highest concentrations of poor people and the worst shelter and physical environmental conditions.

Among the most important findings of *The Challenge of Slums* is the global estimate of the magnitude of the challenge of slums. The total number of slum dwellers in the world stood at about 924 million people in 2001. This represents about 32 per cent of the world's total urban population. At that time, 43 per cent of the combined urban populations of all developing regions lived in slums, while 78.2 per cent of the urban population in least developed countries were slum dwellers. In some developing country cities, slums are so pervasive that it is the rich who have to segregate themselves behind small gated enclaves.

This report explores both the negative and positive aspects of slums. On the negative side, the report shows that slums have the most intolerable of urban housing conditions, which frequently include: insecurity of tenure; lack of basic services, especially water and sanitation; inadequate and sometimes unsafe building structures; overcrowding; and location on hazardous land. In addition, slum areas have high concentrations of poverty and of social and economic deprivation, which may include broken families, unemployment and economic, physical and social exclusion. Slum dwellers have limited access to credit and formal job markets due to stigmatization, discrimination and geographic isolation. Slums are often recipients of the city's nuisances, including industrial effluent and noxious waste, and the only land accessible to slum dwellers is often fragile, dangerous or polluted – land that no one else wants. People in slum areas suffer inordinately from water-borne diseases such as typhoid and cholera, as well as more opportunistic ones that accompany HIV/AIDS. Slum women – and the children they support – are the greatest victims of all. Slum areas are also commonly believed to be places with a high incidence of crime, although this is not universally true since slums with strong social control systems will often have low crime rates.

On the positive side, the report shows that slums are the first stopping point for immigrants – they provide the low-cost and only affordable housing that will enable the immigrants to save for their eventual absorption into urban society. As the place of residence for low-income employees, slums keep the wheels of the city turning in many different ways. The majority of slum dwellers in developing country cities earn their living from informal sector activities located either within or outside slum areas, and many informal entrepreneurs operating from slums have clienteles extending to the rest of the city. Most slum dwellers are people struggling to make an honest living, within the context of extensive urban poverty and formal unemployment. Slums are also places in which the vibrant mixing of different cultures frequently results in new forms of artistic expression. Out of unhealthy, crowded and often dangerous environments can emerge cultural movements and levels of solidarity unknown in the suburbs of the rich. Against all odds, slum dwellers have developed economically rational and innovative shelter solutions for themselves. However, these few positive attributes do not in any way justify the continued existence of slums and should not be an excuse for the slow progress towards the goal of adequate shelter for all.

Many past responses to the problem of urban slums have been based on the erroneous belief that provision of improved housing and related services (through slum upgrading) and physical eradication of slums will, on their own, solve the slum problem. Solutions based on this premise have failed to address the main underlying causes of slums, of which poverty is the most significant. The report therefore emphasizes the need for future policies to support the livelihoods of the urban poor by enabling urban informal-sector activities to flourish and develop, by linking low-income housing development to income generation, and by ensuring easy geographical access to jobs through pro-poor transport and more appropriate location of low-

income settlements. Slum policies should in fact be integrated within broader, people-focused urban poverty reduction policies that address the various dimensions of poverty.

The report identifies participatory slum upgrading programmes that include urban poverty reduction objectives as the current best practice. It emphasizes the need to scale up such slum upgrading programmes to cover whole cities, and to be replicated in all other cities, as well as for sustained commitment of resources sufficient to address the existing slum problem at both city and national levels. It also emphasizes the need for investment in citywide infrastructure as a pre-condition for successful and affordable slum upgrading and as one strong mechanism for reversing the socio-economic exclusion of slum dwellers. In this context, the report highlights the great potential for improving the effectiveness of slum policies by fully involving the urban poor, as well as the need for the public sector to be more inclusive in its urban policies.

The Challenge of Slums further recognizes the increasing emphasis, mainly by civil society and international organizations, on security of tenure (for both owner-occupied and rental accommodation) and on housing and property rights for the urban poor, especially their protection from unlawful eviction. For slum dwellers, security of tenure opens up possibilities of raising credit for livelihood related activities. The report emphasizes the need for governments and local authorities to build on these recent positive developments.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the focal point, within the United Nations system, for the implementation of the Millennium Declaration target on slums, as well as for global monitoring of progress towards this target. Slum upgrading has therefore become a very important area of focus for the organization, with increasing emphasis being placed on policy and operational support to the following areas: scaling up of slum upgrading projects and programmes, within the context of city development strategies and through more innovative international and national financing mechanisms; urban water supply and sanitation, mainly through region-wide operational programmes; and pro-poor planning and management of the urban economy, so as to enhance income-generation opportunities for the urban poor.

The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003 provides a new impetus to all of these efforts. More importantly, it provides directions for the future that are worthy of consideration by national governments, municipal authorities, civil society organizations and international organizations concerned with improving the lives of slum dwellers. The report also provides a baseline for the long journey towards cities without slums, and should therefore be seen as the starting point of the task of global monitoring of the United Nations Millennium Declaration target on slums.

Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka

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