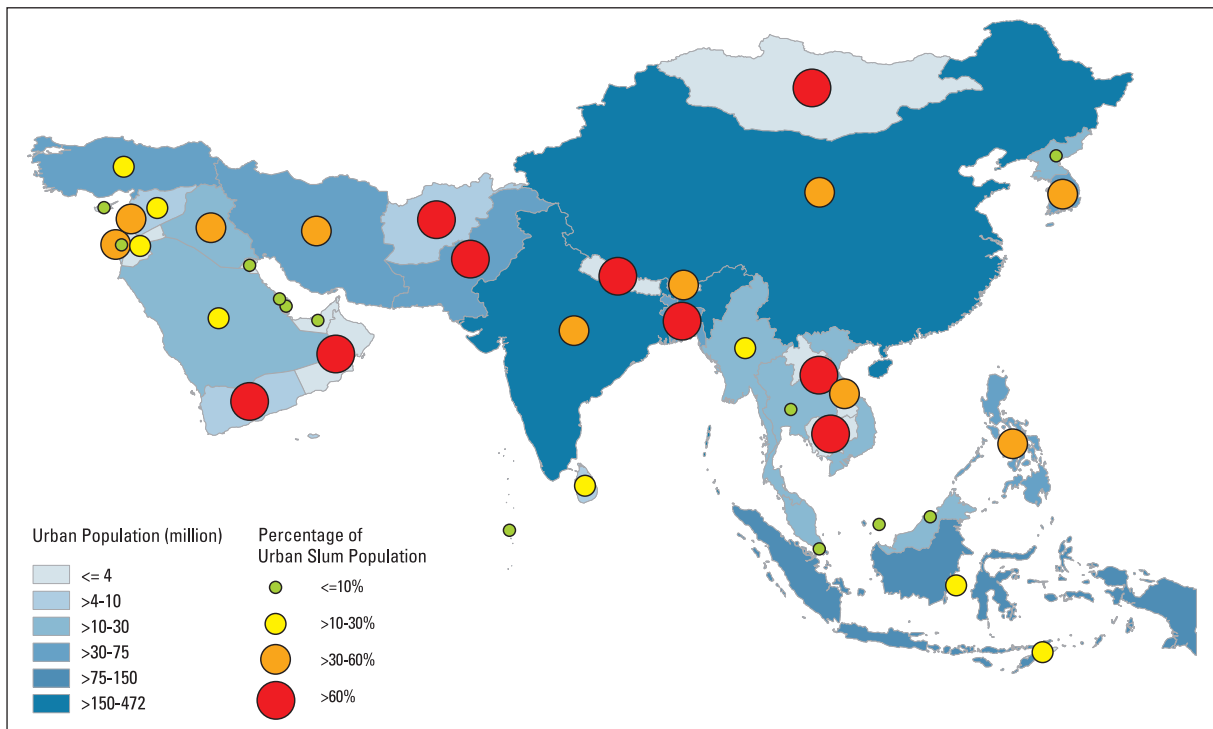




Slum trends in Asia



Source: UN-HABITAT, Global Urban Observatory 2005

In absolute numbers, Asia has the largest share of the world's slum population – in 2005, the region was home to more than half the world's total slum population, or about 581 million people. Some sub-regions within Asia are faring worse than others. Eastern and Southern Asia harbour 80 per cent of the slum dwellers in the region, with Southern Asia hosting nearly half the region's slum population. These figures are largely attributable to China and India, which are the most populous countries in the world and have significant proportions of their urban populations living in slum conditions. Although China hosts the world's largest slum population – almost 196 million people – its slum prevalence in 2001 was lower than that of India; UN-HABITAT estimates that 38 per cent of China's urban residents lived in slum conditions that year, compared with India's 56 per cent.

Most of the slum dwellers in **Southern Asia** – 63 per cent, or almost 170 million people – reside in India. The share of Southern Asia's slum dwellers constitutes 27 per cent of the global total; India alone accounts for 17 per cent of the world's slum dwellers. India has pioneered many best practices and good policies in recent years that are having some impact on the lives of slum dwellers, but they have not reached a sufficient scale to ameliorate the proliferation of slums. Although the country has seen remarkable economic growth rates in recent years and has managed to reduce extreme poverty by 10 per cent in the last decade, the impact of poverty reduction is still not being felt in cities. Unless more radical policies are pursued in India, the global target for improving the lives of slum dwellers will not be reached.

Other countries that need to address this challenge urgently are Bangladesh and Pakistan which, along with India, have among the highest urban poverty rates and the largest urban populations in the sub-

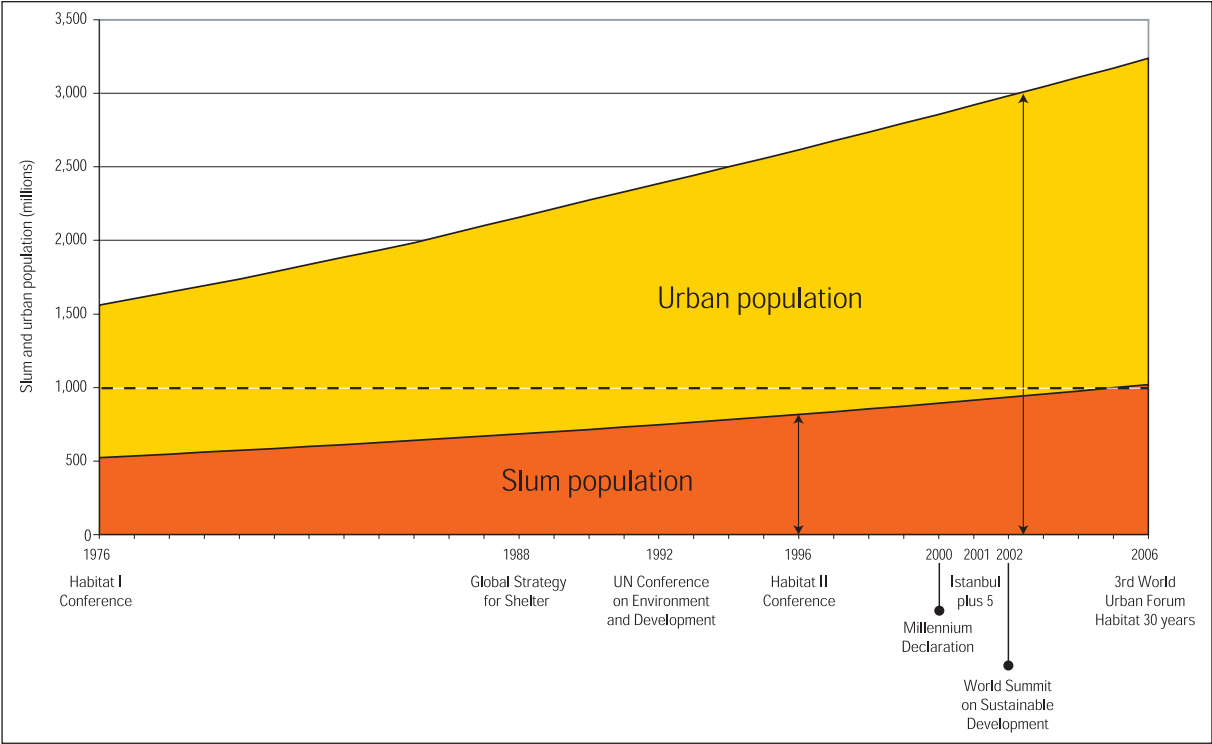
region. UN-HABITAT data shows that Bangladesh was home to 30 million slum dwellers in 2001, and 85 per cent of its urban population lived in poverty that year; 74 per cent of Pakistan's urban population lived in poverty in 2001 – more than 35 million people. Through successful initiatives such as the Orangi project, Pakistan has demonstrated how the lives of slum dwellers can be improved at the local level. Three decades on, however, the project has not been able to scale up its interventions to have a national impact. Bangladesh's development campaigns through the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Corporation and its Grameen Bank initiatives have focused on alleviating rural poverty, so have had negligible impact in urban areas.

Ninety per cent – or 195.7 million people – of **Eastern Asia's** slum dwellers live in China. Chinese slum dwellers account for 20 per cent of the world's total. It is important to note that since 1990, China has been held up as a success in increasing the scale of low-cost housing schemes, thus preventing slums before they even form. Despite such measures, the country suffers from high levels of slum prevalence. There could be two reasons for this, other than the fact that the total population of China constitutes one fifth of the world's population. One is the need for a lapse in time for slum prevention policies to have an impact on the ground. The other could be the mismatch between UN-HABITAT and national definitions of what constitutes a slum. While UN-HABITAT considers the de facto status of dwellings in the cities of China, irrespective of their legal status, national authorities do not consider people who live outside the de jure residential area or those who do not possess residency permits as bona fide residents of a city.

It is interesting to note that real success stories in the region, in terms of decreasing slum growth significantly, have occurred in **South-Eastern Asia**, in countries such as Thailand, where policies implemented even before the 1990s have had a strong impact on both the magnitude and the proportion of slums. The main reasons behind Thailand's ability to reduce slum growth are a strong political commitment by its leadership, accompanied by a tradition of strategic planning and monitoring development efforts, which have been an integral part of the development tradition for the last 30 years. Many of the sub-region's countries also have an active civil society. Although the high slum growth rates in Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic suggest a less optimistic future, there is evidence that they might be able to curb slum growth, as they have recently initiated slum prevention policies.

Western Asia, on the other hand, lags far behind the other sub-regions in terms of slum prevention. Slum and urban growth rates in the sub-region are almost the same, reaching nearly 3 per cent per year. The countries of Western Asia have made little progress on any of the Millennium Development Goal indicators and have not been able to sustain the momentum of development they gained between 1980 and 1990, as the region has in recent years been engulfed in political turmoil that has exacerbated the refugee crisis and worsened conditions in cities. In countries such as Jordan, slums have grown at the rate of 4.3 per cent per year, and Lebanon has also experienced an increase in its slum population. Both countries have relatively small populations, so the reduction or increase in slums there might not make a dent in the overall slum figures by 2020, but progress is still important, as it would indicate greater stability in the sub-region, accompanied by better social indicators. Slum growth in the largest country of the sub-region, Turkey, declined radically between 1990 and 2001, from 23.3 per cent to 17.9 per cent, primarily because of an effective policy of decentralization, which empowered the municipal governments to borrow directly from international financial institutions to build or upgrade water and sanitation networks.

Slum Population and the Urban Population Growth in the world (1976 – 2006)



Source: UN-HABITAT Global Urban Observatory 2005 and UN Population Division

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