



UN-HABITAT

MEETING DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN SMALL URBAN CENTRES



FOREWORD

At their core, the Millennium Development Goals are about bringing the vast majority of the world's population out of a poverty trap that robs them of their health, dignity and aspirations for fulfilling their human potential. While poverty is the underlying theme of all MDGs, water and sanitation provide a strategic entry point for action in battling poverty and achieving these goals.

Human settlements provide a concrete context for this action. The struggle for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and related targets for water and sanitation are being waged in our cities, towns and villages, where water is consumed and waste is generated. Here is where actions have to be coordinated and managed. It is at this level that policy initiatives become reality and an eminently political affair: conflicts have to be resolved and consensus found among competing interests and jurisdictions.



As this publication highlights, in the year 2000, around a quarter of the world's population - nearly 1.5 billion people - lived in small urban centres, with less than half a million inhabitants. Characterized by rapid unplanned growth, high concentration of low-income population, run-down and often non-existent basic infrastructure, most of these small urban areas serve as market centres for their rural hinterland, strengthen rural-urban linkages and contribute to national economic development. Often located on trading routes, these small urban centres experience huge population influxes during the day. Local authorities have little capacity to manage these influxes and their effect on urban service provision.

If these trends are allowed to continue, rapidly growing small urban settlements may pose a major challenge to achieving the internationally agreed targets for water and sanitation. *Achieving Global Goals in Small Urban Centres: Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities (2006)* provides a timely assessment of this looming crisis, identifies key challenges, and provides the key elements of a strategy for putting in place the requisite policies, governance frameworks and financing mechanisms for the sustainable provision of water and sanitation for one-quarter of humanity.

This publication also highlights some of UN-HABITAT's recent and innovative initiatives in small towns in two trans-boundary ecosystems, namely Lake Victoria and the Mekong river basin. These initiatives combine the agency's advocacy, capacity building and policy reform functions with follow-up investment by the international community. Effective participation of local communities and partnerships with key stakeholders provide a solid basis for sustaining results beyond the MDG target years.

I trust that this publication will help to bring a renewed awareness on the needs of small urban centres and their role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

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