

UN-HABITAT

STATE OF THE WORLD'S CITIES 2006/7



Press Release

Slum Dwellers suffer from an Urban Penalty: They are as badly if not worse off than their rural relatives according to UN-HABITAT's State of the World's Cities 2006/7

Nairobi/Vancouver, 19 June 2006 – It is generally assumed that urban populations are healthier, more literate and more prosperous than rural populations. However, UN-HABITAT's State of the World's Cities Report 2006/7 has broken new ground by showing that the urban poor suffer from an urban penalty: Slum dwellers in developing countries are as badly off if not worse off than their rural relatives.

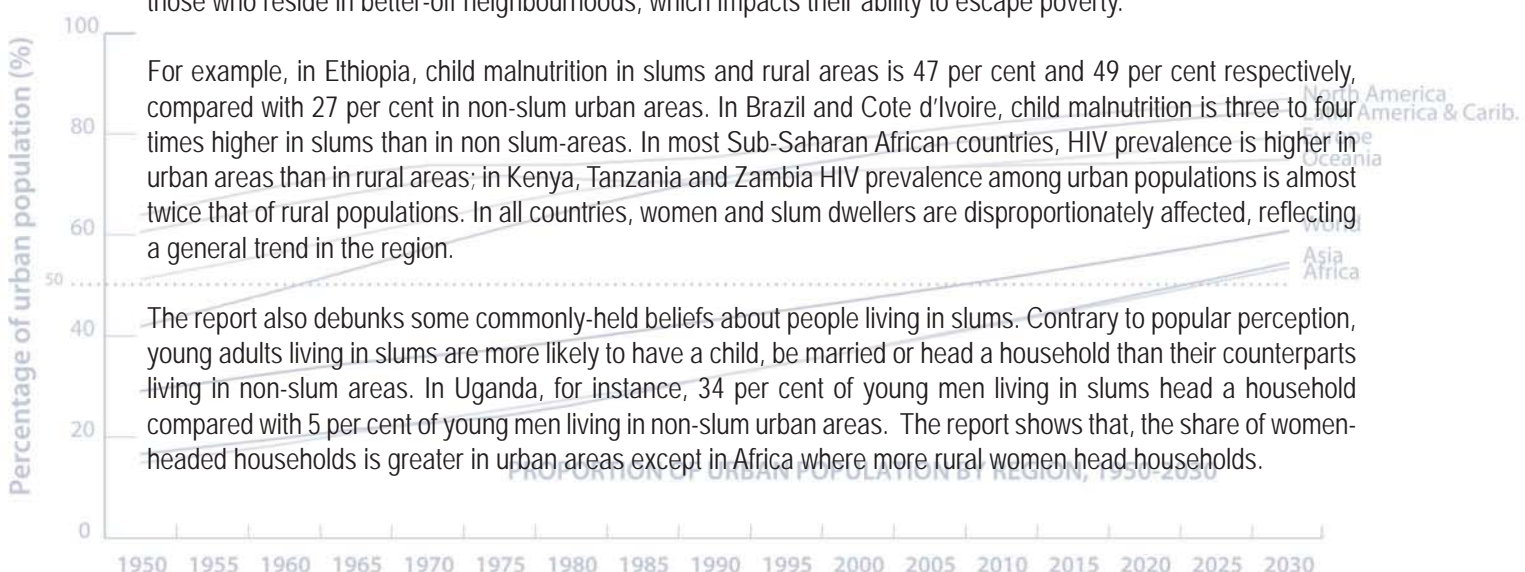
As the locus of poverty shifts from rural areas to urban centres, UN-HABITAT's report provides concrete data that shows that the world's one billion slum dwellers are more likely to die earlier, experience more hunger and disease, attain less education and have fewer chances of employment than those urban residents that do not reside in a slum.

"For a long time, we suspected that the optimistic picture of cities did not reflect the reality on the ground," said Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, UN-HABITAT's Executive Director. "This report provides concrete evidence that there are two cities within one city – one part of the urban population that has all the benefits of urban living, and the other part, the slums and squatter settlements, where the poor often live under worse conditions than their rural relatives. It is time that donor agencies and national governments recognized the urban penalty and specifically targeted additional resources to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers."

The Report shows remarkable similarities between slums and rural areas in health, education, employment and mortality. It shows how in countries such as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Haiti and India, child malnutrition in slums is comparable to that of rural areas. In many Sub-Saharan African cities, children living in slums are more likely to die from water-borne and respiratory illnesses than rural children. Women living in slums are also more likely to contract HIV/AIDS than their rural counterparts. These differences are attributed to the poor living conditions in slums, which expose women and children to a variety of health hazards and force girls and women to engage in sexually risky behaviour. The report also cites studies from both developed and developing countries which show that job applicants residing in low-income neighbourhoods or slums are less likely to be called for interviews than those who reside in better-off neighbourhoods, which impacts their ability to escape poverty.

For example, in Ethiopia, child malnutrition in slums and rural areas is 47 per cent and 49 per cent respectively, compared with 27 per cent in non-slum urban areas. In Brazil and Cote d'Ivoire, child malnutrition is three to four times higher in slums than in non-slum-areas. In most Sub-Saharan African countries, HIV prevalence is higher in urban areas than in rural areas; in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia HIV prevalence among urban populations is almost twice that of rural populations. In all countries, women and slum dwellers are disproportionately affected, reflecting a general trend in the region.

The report also debunks some commonly-held beliefs about people living in slums. Contrary to popular perception, young adults living in slums are more likely to have a child, be married or head a household than their counterparts living in non-slum areas. In Uganda, for instance, 34 per cent of young men living in slums head a household compared with 5 per cent of young men living in non-slum urban areas. The report shows that, the share of women-headed households is greater in urban areas except in Africa where more rural women head households.



Urbanization: An Historic Transition

The report comes at a time when the world is entering a historic urban transition; in 2007, for the first time in history, the world's urban population will exceed the rural population. Most of the world's urban growth – 95 per cent – in the next two decades will be absorbed by cities of the developing world, which are least equipped to deal with rapid urbanization. The majority of migrants will be moving to small towns and cities of less than one million inhabitants. Already, more than half of the world's urban population lives in cities of fewer than 500,000 inhabitants, and almost one-fifth lives in cities of between 1 and 5 million inhabitants.

As cities grow, so do their slum populations. In many Sub-Saharan African cities, the slum population accounts for over 70 per cent of the urban population. Slums in Southern Asia, Western Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are growing as fast as the urban population in general. Annual slum and urban growth rates are highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, 4.53 per cent and 4.58 per cent, respectively, nearly twice those of Southern Asia, where slum and urban growth rates are 2.2 per cent and 2.89 per cent, respectively. Northern Africa is the only region in the developing world where slum growth rates have declined significantly, largely due to the efforts of individual governments to upgrade slums or prevent their formation. Globally, the slum population is set to grow at the rate of 27 million per year in the period 2000-2020.

Not all slums are the same; some are much worse than others. The report shows that the most deprived slums – in terms of access to basic services and adequate shelter – are to be found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 51 per cent of the slum population lacks two or more of the following: access to water, access to sanitation, durable housing and sufficient living area. This is followed by Southern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Western Asia, where one third of the slum population lives in either overcrowded, poor quality housing or lacks adequate access to water and sanitation. Slums in South-Eastern Asia and Northern Africa are the least deprived, with only 26 per cent and 11 per cent of the slum population living in conditions of extreme shelter deprivation, respectively; countries in these regions are the “high performers” in terms of slum upgrading and prevention.

Meeting the Millennium Development Goals: Slum formation neither inevitable nor acceptable.

A global scorecard on slums developed by UN-HABITAT shows that countries such as Egypt, Thailand and Tunisia have not only managed to reduce slum growth in the last 15 years but have made considerable investments in improving slums. These countries developed either specific slum upgrading and prevention policies or have integrated slum upgrading and prevention as part of their broader poverty reduction policies and programmes.

The report notes that countries need not achieve significant milestones in economic growth before they tackle growing slum populations. Some low- or middle-income countries, including Brazil, Colombia, Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa and Sri Lanka, have managed to prevent slum formation by anticipating and planning for growing urban populations – by expanding economic and employment opportunities for the urban poor, by investing in low-cost, affordable housing for the most vulnerable groups and by instituting pro-poor reforms and policies that have had a positive impact on low-income people's access to services. Noting the success of these countries, Mrs. Tibaijuka said that the report offers hope and direction to other low-income countries by showing that it is possible to prevent slum formation with the right policies and practices.

What comes out clearly in this Report is that slum formation is neither inevitable nor acceptable. “Running the poor out of town” – through evictions or discriminatory practices – is not the answer: rather, helping the poor to become more integrated into the fabric of urban society is the only long-lasting and sustainable solution to the growing urbanization of poverty. Ultimately, as the developing world becomes more urban and as the locus of poverty shifts to cities, the battle to achieve the Millennium Development Goals will have to be waged in the world's slums.

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