



Introduction

The 2006/2007 edition of the State of the World's Cities marks two important milestones: the dawn of the urban millennium in 2007 and the 30th anniversary of the first Habitat Conference held in Vancouver in June 1976, which placed "urbanization" on the global development agenda. This publication also marks a less triumphant moment in history: thirty years after the world's governments first pledged to do more for cities, almost one-third of the world's urban population lives in slums, without access to decent housing or basic services and in neighbourhoods where disease, illiteracy and crime are rampant.

Since its establishment in 1978, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) has continued to highlight the important role and contribution of cities in fostering economic and human development. Understanding the complex social, cultural and economic dynamics of cities and urbanization is more important now than ever before as we strive to attain internationally agreed development goals. In a rapidly urbanizing world, attaining these goals will require policies and strategies based on clear and accurate data on the human settlements conditions and trends in each country.

This edition of the State of the World's Cities Report advances this objective by breaking new ground in the area of urban data collection, analysis and dissemination. For the first time in the history of the United Nations, urban data is reported here at slum and non-slum levels, going far beyond the traditional urban-rural dichotomy. UN-HABITAT's intra-urban data analysis – involving disaggregated data for more than 200 cities around the world – takes this work further and provides detailed evidence of urban inequalities in the areas of health, education, employment and other key indicators. The implications are significant for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals as we can no longer assume that the urban poor are better off than their rural counterparts, or that all urban dwellers are able to benefit from basic services by virtue of proximity.

UN-HABITAT has led the drive for urban indicators since 1991 by working with other United Nations agencies and external partners to consistently refine methods for data collection and analysis and to better inform our common quest for "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world" - the twin goals of the Habitat Agenda adopted by the world's governments in Istanbul in 1996. With the adoption of the Millennium Declaration by the world's leaders in 2000, much of this work is now focused on monitoring progress in attaining Millennium Development Goal 7, target 11 on improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. This task requires a deeper analysis of how well cities are doing and of the actual living conditions of the urban poor. Data for this Report comes primarily from Phase III of UN-HABITAT's Urban Indicators Programme that compiles global, regional, country and household level data of specific relevance to the Habitat Agenda and the Millennium Development Goals.

This Report clearly shows how shelter conditions have a direct impact on human development, including child mortality, education and employment. The correlation between a poor living environment, characterized by one or more shelter deprivations, and poor performance on key indicators of the Millennium Development Goals underscores the assertion that "where we live matters". The findings of this Report are unfolding a new urban reality that needs to be urgently addressed by pro-poor and gender-sensitive urban policies and legislation.

Finally, as the international community celebrates Vancouver + 30, it should also reflect on the important lessons learned in urban development and the need to reduce inequalities within cities. Cities present an unparalleled opportunity for the simultaneous attainment of most, if not all, of the internationally agreed development goals. Interventions in, for example, pro-poor water and sanitation, have immediate positive knock-on effects in terms of improved health, nutrition, disease prevention and the environment. However, unless such concerted action is taken to redress urban inequalities, cities may well become the predominant sites of deprivation, social exclusion and instability worldwide.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka".

Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka
Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director
UN-HABITAT