

WHD FEATURE



Global goals for local change

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Target 11 (*By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slums dwellers*) provides an unprecedented opportunity to get the issue of urban poverty onto the international development agenda.

Global reporting allows direct comparisons of progress to be made between countries and over time. But there has been criticism that these high level goals and targets lack national and local relevance.

The slum estimates produced by UN-HABITAT are a global public good. They allow the international community to monitor patterns and trends in the number and condition of slum dwellers. UN-HABITAT's projection that the slum population could double from 924 million in 2001 to 2 billion in 2030 shows how far we are from actually achieving cities without slums.

The national slum estimates for monitoring global progress towards MDG Target 11 need to be comparable. For this reason the definition of a slum household for global monitoring was agreed by an International Expert Group. UN-HABITAT continues to refine the methodology and strengthen the tools that are used to generate these numbers. For example, working with WHO and UNICEF to revise the definition of basic sanitation in urban areas. UN-HABITAT is also refining the tools and methods used for monitoring of secure tenure around the world.

This year, trends in globally comparable national estimates on the number and condition of slum dwellers will be available for the first time. These will be published on the UN and World Bank MDG monitoring databases and feed into the review of the Millennium Declaration in September. DFID and other donor agencies are supporting UN-HABITAT's global monitoring work. We believe that continuing to strengthen the global evidence base will advance the cause of urban poverty in international development.

But global reporting is just one part of the picture. The MDGs will only be achieved if they are relevant, realistic and resourced for each particular country and, within that, each sub-national level from provinces and states down to local communities. This means that the goals and targets need to be 'localized'. The United Nations Millennium Project Report defines localized as "translated into operational objectives for the level of government that will bear primary responsibility for their achievement". For real delivery on MDG Target 11, local stakeholders need to be involved in all stages of the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes.



The data needed to achieve local action are not always the same as those needed for global reporting although the purposes are often the same – to inform policy choices, to monitor impact, and as an accountability tool. The level of ‘local’ determines the types of data and analysis needed and the timing, definitions, methodology and tools to be used.

Monitoring at the local level needs to be based on appropriate indicators that address the goals and targets of local policies and meet the needs of local people. Local stakeholders need to both analyse and interpret official data based on their own experiences and collect their own supplementary data to support their policy needs.

If common definitions and methodologies are used then local level data may draw upon and contribute to national and global reporting. But they cannot easily be aggregated to serve these higher-level monitoring purposes unless they are statistically representative. While it is useful to triangulate between the various sources it should not be assumed that one could simply substitute for another.

Key policy issues can be masked by poor data comparisons – like comparing the health experiences of the urban poor with the rural average. This is not helpful to policymakers in deciding where resources should be prioritised. There is often a danger with statistics that competing data distract policymakers from taking action as ‘technocrats’ debate the ‘right’ estimate. Stakeholders at all levels need to work together to ensure that the data that will really have an impact on urban poverty are available to those who have the power to affect change. UN-HABITAT’s Monitoring Systems Branch and a number of donor agencies are working to increase the profile of MDG Target 11 and support monitoring efforts. We aim to ensure that the collection and analysis of data to support global and local monitoring of Target 11 are better harmonised and coordinated to minimise duplication of effort and maximise data utility.

While the MDGs and other international goals and targets may have been set at the global level, they will only be realised if action is taken to improve the lives of people at the local level. And, whilst we need to continue to monitor at the global, regional and national level if we want to see real progress, we need to ensure that local people are involved in setting and monitoring local targets that deliver on their priorities and needs. Only then can these global goals truly address local needs.

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Journalists around the world are encouraged to write similar stories about meeting the MDGs in their own cities and about slum upgrading.

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