

WHD FEATURE



Make women in slums the Millennium target goalkeepers.

It is a very welcome commitment that world leaders have made in signing up to the Millennium Development Goals as the new blueprint in the fight against poverty. But like all good ideas, translating this commitment into reality in a practical and workable way is the real development challenge.

Talking about poverty without creating space and scope for poor people to participate in the process of change is the biggest mistake all governments make. They assume that if the political leaders of that area agree, people agree. But that is never the case.

How many development planners and managers actually know how to involve poor women in creating a way forward? How many experts acknowledge that it is poor women who are the real safety net today when the government abandons the poor? Yet the only role we locate for women is as victims. As though that is not enough, whenever any development investment comes in that locality, women who managed the survival process to survival become invisible.

My co-convener of Slum Dwellers International, Ms. Rose Molokwane from the South African Homeless Federation put a very pertinent question to Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, the former Executive Director of UNDP and Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka when they met in 2003 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg to launch their partnership to work together on the MDGs: “Why are you asking professionals and consultants and NGOs to be your goal keepers for the MDGs? Why don’t you ask poor women in cities and rural areas to be your official goal keepers”.

The global commitment to governance is still to trickle down. What is the use of large amounts of money allocated to poverty reduction if it does not reach the poor or have an impact on their poverty. Many aspects of how the world manages business hurt the poor.



How are those of you who champion MDGs going to deal with demolitions? Poor people are coming to cities to survive, to get two meals a day, to seek health care and education for their children. For that they work informally, never getting even minimum wages, and when cities don't recognize their need for housing, they build their own homes.

The same State that talks about MDGs then demolishes their homes. In cases like Mumbai, India, where so many lost their homes in December, at least there was some pressure on the city to stop and examine alternatives. But what about the urban poor in the other cities of Africa? What will the world committed to addressing poverty do for these poor people who have lost work and livelihood through demolitions? The development community has abandoned the state, but what about the poor?

Those of us who live in slums in the cities of world want to see this change happening in a way that involves us. It helps us change the mindset of our brothers and sisters who have begun to despair.

We want to work in collaboration and partnerships with city and national governments and international aid organizations – not as beneficiaries and consumers – but as partners working shoulder to shoulder. Having the right to challenge the conventional development wisdom, of being able to explore innovative ways to bring change, and most importantly to show the change on the ground because that change felt by the poor is the real litmus test of the MDGs.

This article is written by Jockin Arputham founder of the National Slum Dwellers Federation in India. He holds the prestigious Magsaysay Award for selfless service to the people of Asia, and was recently awarded the French Order of Merit for his work among those most destitute. Please feel free to publish or quote from this article provided UN-HABITAT Features is given credit. Suitable photographs are available on our website.

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

For further information, please contact: Mr. Sharad Shankardass, Spokesperson, Ms. Zahra Hassan, Press & Media Liaison, Tel: (254 20) 623153/623151/623136, Mobile: 254 733 760332: Fax: 254 20 624060, E-mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org, Website: www.unhabitat.org

or

Ms. Elis Nurhayati Chief, Communication, United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, Jakarta, Indonesia, Tel: 62 21 3141308 Ext 183, E-mail: elis.nurhayati@undp.org