



# World Urban Forum

## Cities: Crossroads of Cultures

### Architecture and Integration?

14-17 September 2008, Barcelona, Spain

## Dialogue On The Urban Poor

### ***Meeting the Millennium Development Goals: UN-HABITAT calls for increased political will***

The international community is already falling behind on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) aimed at urban poverty reduction in developing countries. The MDG committed to improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 is in jeopardy. If nothing is done to check the current trend, the number of people living in slums will rise from one billion today to some 1.5 billion by the year 2020.

Slum dwellers contribute a growing proportion of the world's urban population, especially in developing and transition countries. In the developing world, as many as 43 per cent of the urban population live in slums, compared to 6 per cent in developed regions. The situation is worse in the least developed countries where up to 78.2 per cent of the population live in slums without adequate shelter or basic services.

### **Urbanization & slum formation : Africa rates worst**

In 2001 and with a total of 187 million slum dwellers, Africa featured the largest proportion (60.9 per cent) of slum dwellers among its urban population. Sub-Saharan Africa will concentrate the bulk of the world's slum dwellers (in both absolute and relative terms) in the next decade or so.

Asia-Pacific comes next. Though the overall long term trend in the region is favourable, 42.1 per cent of the urban population live in slums. This decreasing proportion contrasts with an increase in the number (554 million) of informal settlers (excluding China).

Latin America and the Caribbean rank third with 31.9 per cent of slum dwellers in its population, or 128 million. The region manages to combine rampant urbanization and shrinking slums.

### **Making the Millennium target realistic**

These overall figures dwarf the commitments set out in the MDGs. In this dialogue, participants are expected to assess the existing tools programmes and policies to make this goal a reality.

To begin with the UN MDG Task Force (of which UN-HABITAT is a member) has already proposed to re-phrase the target as follows: "By 2020, reducing by half the number of slum dwellers by improving *substantially* the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers *while stopping new slum formation*."

### **Stop those slums!**

This is precisely the rationale behind UN-HABITAT policies and its paper for the WUF dialogue on the urban poor. As population increases and urbanization is irreversible, significant numbers will dwell in slums. Therefore, the priority must be to improve living conditions for slum dwellers. This includes provision of water and sanitation *before* the slums emerge.

UN-HABITAT already has in place a two-pronged strategy towards that goal. It involves its global campaign for security of tenure and its "water programmes" for improvements to water and sanitation services in informal settlements.



### **Housing rights are human rights**

Lack of legal documents or formal agreements giving the right to reside in a settlement only worsens poverty for slum dwellers. Insecure tenure also leaves people exposed to the ever-present risk of forced eviction. UN-HABITAT is currently looking into alternatives to eviction, which represents a gross and unacceptable violation of human rights.

Insecurity of tenure denies the basic human rights of large segments of the world's urban population. Apart from housing rights, the urban poor are denied the rights to organize, to make claims on public resources (including health and education) or to participate in decisions that have a direct impact on their living conditions. They are denied the right to citizenship.

Legislation against the practice of forced eviction and demolition without due process is essential for security of tenure. However, it is ineffective by itself where public officials, the courts and private developers fail to realize that eviction is unacceptable. Official behaviour and the law must combine with slum upgrading and better access to affordable land if secure tenure is to become a reality. This calls for political will and commitment from governments.

### **Close Links to the MDG Target on Water & Sanitation**

Lack of secure tenure discourages investment in water and sanitation services and it makes slum upgrading even more difficult. Improving security of tenure and slum upgrading are critical if the world is to meet the MDG target 7/10 to halve "by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation". Achieving this target will also require an integrated approach.

### **Water & Sanitation : Three priorities**

We need to monitor progress towards this second MDG target. This is why UN-HABITAT has carried out the first-ever assessment of basic services in the world's cities in its 2003 report, *Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities: Local Action for Global Goals* which highlights three critical areas for priority action:

- Policy-makers must urgently become better aware of the magnitude of the urban water and sanitation crisis.
- The urban water crisis is first and foremost a crisis of governance. For the time being at least, weak policies and poor management, not scarcity, are the main culprits.
- Most cities in developing countries are experiencing an alarming decline in per capita investment in water and sanitation.

### **UN-HABITAT's Water & Sanitation programmes**

To support slum upgrading and the the MDG on water and sanitation, UN-HABITAT has three ongoing programmes to help enhance institutional and human resources:

- The Water for African Cities Programme, launched in 1999, has attracted a total financial contribution of more than \$10 million in the 8 participating countries. Others are about to join in and Phase II will serve another 16 countries.
- The Water for Asian Cities Programme, launched in 2002 along the same lines as its African counterpart. Participating countries improve the productivity of existing investments through demand management. The programme has already started in several Asian countries, including the People's Republic of China and India.
- UN-Habitat's Water and Sanitation Trust Fund is similar to the African and Asian programmes, but focuses on specifically pro-poor investment in water and sanitation and overseas development aid (ODA) flows in this type of utility.

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