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Urban safety and slum upgrading

I. Challenge

1. Slum-dwellers worldwide now number more than 1 billion (one in six people) and trends indicate that that figure will increase to one in three by 2031. In developing regions, slum-dwellers account for 43 per cent of the population, in contrast to some 6 per cent in more developed regions. Although the concentration of slum-dwellers is highest in African cities, where 61 per cent of urban residents were living in slums in 2001,¹ mainly in sub-Saharan countries, Asia accounts for some 60 per cent of the world's urban slum residents.²

2. Slum-dwellers are exposed to various forms of insecurities, including poverty, employment, and health, food, personal and environmental hazards, meaning that efforts to improve their lives must include dealing with their security issues. As slum upgrading is a key tool in attaining target 11 of Millennium Development Goal 7, on improving the lives of slum-dwellers significantly by 2020, the key issue for discussion is how slum upgrading initiatives can work to extend the right to security and security services to slum-dwellers.

A. Slums and insecurity: a controversial relationship

3. Slums are urban areas particularly vulnerable to crime and violence. Given the slums' physical nature, their inhabitants enjoy scant protection. Because of poverty, they have little resilience to loss or injury and, because of the lack of institutions and service delivery, there is little option to deal with issues through due process.

4. Marginalization, lack of access to and ownership of the city, inappropriate urban policies, regulations and planning, design and management approaches that hinder integration and participation all increase the exposure of the poor and slum-dwellers to insecurity. Nevertheless, while slums are characterized by appalling living and environmental conditions and are stricken by exclusion, insecurity and poverty, their physical and social reality also reflects their residents' capacity to mobilize resources, devise survival strategies and build social organizations, even in the presence of enormous constraints.

B. Better understanding as a first step in tackling insecurity in slums

5. Poverty, inherent to slums, is often cited as a cause of crime and violence, but increasing evidence suggests that that is not the case. Rather, crime and violence occur more frequently in settings

¹ *Slums of the world: the face of urban poverty in the new millennium?*, UN-Habitat, 2003.

² *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements*, UN-Habitat, 2003.

in which there is an unequal distribution of scarce resources or power coupled with weak institutional controls. For instance, Africa and Latin America – the regions with the highest levels of income inequality – record high levels of homicide, which is often used as a proxy for the broader category of violent crime. Cities in which inequalities are most stark also appear more vulnerable to insecurity.³ Communities in which an increasing proportion of the population is excluded from opportunities also suffer from higher levels of crime and violence than those connected to mainstream networks and power structures.

II. Responses: an evolving field of concepts and policies

6. Public policies have in the past responded in rather irrational ways to the challenge of slum proliferation – with demolitions and evictions, which often not simply displace problems, but compound them. Efforts to tackle crime, violence and insecurity have long been excluded from interventions to improve living conditions in slums and housing infrastructures, among other things. Slum upgrading initiatives and communities have, however, been confronting insecurity, providing responses and creating mechanisms to meet the challenge that it poses, but often in a rather ad hoc way, without correctly integrating such interventions into slum upgrading or community development work.

7. Since the 1960s and early 1970s, when urban policies in many countries were characterized by a non-acceptance of slums, to the twenty-first century, which has seen non-traditional or newer approaches to slum upgrading, concepts have shifted in regard to insecurity and crime prevention, such as:

(a) Evolution of concepts and policies: from non-acceptance and negligence to recognition and integrated approaches;⁴

(b) Evolution of concepts and policies: from repressive and control-oriented approaches to preventive and integrated policies;⁵

(c) Evolution of practices: from one single entrance to multidimensional interventions, from national programmes to local-national partnerships;

(d) Evolution of practices: from police-centred national programmes to public sector-civil society partnerships with local-level leadership in urban planning and design.

8. Recent research by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has highlighted the plurality of interventions, modalities and linkages with slum upgrading initiatives and a number of avenues for more effectively dealing with the urban safety issue within a slum upgrading framework.

III. Principles of sound urban safety improvements within slums

9. UN-Habitat, through research and experience on the ground, has identified that tackling safety issues in slums, as with other areas, requires a holistic approach that combines spatial, institutional and social aspects. In addition, it recognizes that insecurity cannot be dealt with merely within a single community – a city-wide approach should provide the adequate context for localized interventions. In particular, crime prevention strategies need to be integrated into comprehensive city planning practices as physical planning can make a difference in terms of crime prevention and reduction, more effective policing, informal surveillance and the protection of persons and properties. More important than these positive effects of the physical improvement elements of urban policies, however, are the impacts of their social and participatory governance components, particularly if urban safety becomes an explicit issue around which decision-making is focused. Within a democratic framework, tackling crime and violence is based on the principles of law enforcement, solidarity and crime prevention. Crime prevention involves dealing not only with the symptoms but also, more importantly, the causes of urban crime and violence from an interrelated social, spatial or situational and institutional perspective.

3 *State of the World's Cities Report 2006–2007: The Millennium Development Goals and Urban Sustainability – 30 Years of Shaping the Habitat Agenda*, UN-Habitat, 2006.

4 As adapted from the concept paper on pro-poor land and housing and housing strategy, expert group meeting on housing and land policies, UN-Habitat, 2008.

5 Based mainly on two documents: *Enhancing Urban Safety and Security: Global Report on Human Settlements*, 2007, UN-Habitat; and the *International Report on Crime Prevention and Community Safety: Trends and Perspectives*, International Centre for the Prevention of Crime, 2008.

10. The UN-Habitat approach to urban planning, management and governance recognizes cities as sites of opportunities and spaces of hope for improved incomes and opportunities, as loci of increased poverty, deprivation, vulnerability and conflict and as contributors to the most pressing global problems. The poor performance of cities, including poor delivery of safety, is attributable to poor practice of planning, management and governance. Urban safety improvements are rooted within the social and equity dimension of sustainability and represent a key entry point for UN-Habitat to sustainable social development in the framework of sustainable urbanization. Urban safety, and the tool of choice for its promotion (violence and crime prevention), build more equitable cities based on solidarity and human rights. Insecurity has strong and crucial relations with sustainable urban development. The following principles have been identified with a view to achieving safety through urban planning, design, and management: integration and desegregation (where efforts to combat crime assume a common responsibility for all, and not simply the police); participation and ownership (where community participation in crime prevention initiatives fosters a sense of solidarity, collective social development and provides a more sustainable response to insecurity); and conflict and risk management (which seeks to reclaim space and offers tools to mediate in conflicts of uses and functions, in addition to advocating inclusive approaches to the management of urban spaces and neighbourhoods).

IV. UN-Habitat promoting capacity for safety-conscious slum upgrading

11. Cities and slum upgrading initiatives have the potential to improve urban safety within slums and for slum-dwellers. The UN-Habitat Safer Cities Programme, as part of the Sustainable Urban Development Network, has developed a specific programme component to build capacity for such concerns to be addressed through and within slum upgrading initiatives. One key partner in this is rapid urban sector profiling for sustainability, which has provided the framework for the integration of safety into the slum upgrading approach. Further links with major slum upgrading work by development banks and bilateral donors, in addition to national Governments, are envisaged.

12. The initiative builds on 15 years' experience in urban crime and violence prevention at the city and community levels by the Safer Cities Programme, and on research and monitoring conducted by UN-Habitat Monitoring and Research Division, in addition to the tool development capacity established within the organization and with partners. It is further guided by the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan on Safer Cities (2008–2013), which focuses on the promotion of prevention approaches and tools through normative and operational activities, concentrating on:

- (a) Governance of safety at local level – i.e., support to local dialogue, integrated prevention, policy development and city-wide strategies;
- (b) Safety and security within urban public spaces and in connection with slum upgrading, urban renewal and urban development projects in general.

A. Approach

13. Targeting specific slum upgrading initiatives, the Programme will place emphasis on better understanding of security dimensions (manifestations, impacts and existing and possible responses) and in the promotion of improved governance of security issues within slum upgrading initiatives, in addition to orientation of investments towards supporting critical urban safety outcomes.

14. The Safer Cities approach will be adapted specifically to tackle slum communities' needs and develop targeted tools and support mechanisms. Key activities being undertaken include:

- (a) Gathering of case studies and good practices (six case studies assessing safety and security in slum upgrading initiatives in Africa, Asia and Latin America);
- (b) Policy concept development (global paper on safety and slum upgrading);
- (c) Development and testing of tools (through pilot activities and manuals);
- (d) Capacity-building (through partnerships at the project level and systematic curriculum development);
- (e) Advocacy and networking (on the security plight of the urban poor with crucial partners, e.g., planners and donors);
- (f) Development of strategic partnerships (such as a platform for young people, the police and development banks).

B. Current and future prospects

15. The Programme is engaged in urban centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Safer Cities strategic plan priority countries include Burkina Faso, Burundi, Haiti, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. With regard to upgrading interventions in slum and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the Programme has already engaged in Nairobi and Douala, Cameroon, together with Cambodia and Nicaragua (under formulation).

16. Within the context of rapid urban sector profiling for sustainability and the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme, the Safer Cities Programme has worked collaboratively in developing assessment tools and in an urban profiling workshop aimed to build the capacity of national teams to undertake independently rapid urban sector profiling in various cities and to be able to use and adapt various methodologies and guidelines at the city, national, and regional levels. To date, through the rapid urban sector profiling process, a number of countries – Burundi, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea – have cited urban safety as an area of interest and concern in their cities. The Programme has also widely employed safety audits as a tool to assess insecurity in slums and disadvantaged neighbourhoods in various cities, including Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Douala.
