**Case Study 10. Urban slums: epicenters of deprivation and food insecurity**

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| **Abstract**  Urban slums are one of the unacceptable faces of the developing world, across all of its regions, representing a huge threat to the integrity of humankind. UN-Habitat estimates that nearly 1 billion people currently live in slums in cities of the world, one sixth of humanity. By 2020, there will be 1.5 billion, and by 2030, about 3 billion people, some 40 per cent of the world’s population by then. Slum residents live under appalling conditions of squalor and deprivation, where undernutrition and food insecurity are rife. The conditions for social revolution and insurgencies have their roots in such impoverishment, and the facilitating potential of slum conditions for the spread of deadly diseases has been demonstrated by the outbreak of Ebola in some countries in West Africa in 2014. Only in north Africa have significant inroads been made to actually reduce the size of slums by creating new homes with decent living conditions. |

UN-Habitat; squalor; poverty; undernutrition; disease; poor hygiene; MDG 7 target 11

**10.1. Introduction**

Millennium Development Goal 7 (ensuring environmental sustainability) target 11, articulates the commitment of participating States to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. It is a response to one of the most pressing challenges of our times, dealing with people living in the most depressed physical conditions in the world’s urban areas. The problem is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, where the proportion of slums amongst global urban housing is the greatest, according to UN-Habitat statistics and projections. Sub-Saharan Africa has an annual urban growth rate of around 5 percent (twice that of Latin America and Asia), and has the world’s largest proportion of urban residents living in slums, a staggering 72 percent of urban African citizens.

Studies suggest that even if MDG 7 target 11 is achieved, it may meet only 11 percent of existing needs and 7 percent of future estimated needs by 2020. Two related challenges are therefore clear. First, improvement of the living conditions of far more of the people already living in slums and various types of unauthorised settlements; and secondly, creating conditions in which all sections of urban society, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, can obtain access to legal, affordable and appropriate shelter in ways that prevent the need for *future* slums. Both of these imperatives need to be achieved in a way that provides for adequate levels of security and access to livelihoods, services and credit.   
  
Figure 10.1. Urban slum population of the developing world (2005)



From: UNEP and UN-HABITAT (2006). Background paper for AFRICITIES Conference, 18-24 September, 2006. Nairobi, Kenya. “Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability” (compiled by UNEP and UN-Habitat), page 11 (reproduced with permission from UN-Habitat).

UN-Habitat estimates that nearly 1 billion people currently live in slums in cities of the world, one sixth of humanity (Figure 10.1). By 2020, there will be 1.5 billion, and by 2030, about 3 billion people, some 40 per cent of the world’s population, will live in conditions of sub-standard housing and access to basic infrastructure and services, such as water and sanitation systems. This translates into the need to complete 96,150 housing units per day with serviced and documented land from now till 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2014). By 2014, fifty-five million new slum dwellers had been added to the global population since 2000. Sub-Saharan Africa has a slum population of 199.5 million, South Asia 190.7 million, East Asia 189.6 million, Latin America and the Caribbean 110.7 million, Southeast Asia 88.9 million, West Asia 35 million and North Africa 11.8 million.

Slums are a clear manifestation of a poorly-planned and -managed urban sector and, in particular, a malfunctioning housing sector. Estimates concerning total housing needs in Africa have been set at around 4 million units per year with over 60 per cent of the demand required to accommodate urban residents. Each day a further 120,000 people are added to the populations of Asian cities, requiring the construction of at least 20,000 new dwellings and supporting infrastructure, whilst in Latin America and the Caribbean current housing needs are estimated at between 42 million and 52 million dwellings, respectively.  
  
Slum areas are depressing indeed, around central Kabul, Afghanistan, for instance. Sanitation arrangements comprise a ‘long drop’ chute from the first floor of the mud brick houses, depositing in the alley way between houses. In the rainy season the excrement becomes mixed with the clay of the alley, the malodor of which from the soles of slum dwellers’ shoes can be strong. In the dry season, the clay dust blowing in the air of Kabul contains powdered faeces, together with inoculum from the intestinal parasites contained therein, a deadly mix to be inhaled. Once experienced by an outsider with a home in the developed world, just the thought of breathing in that dust again is enough to make the chest tighten, yet the 3 million Afghans in Kabul breath that air every day.

Unfortunately, especially in the developing world, the supply of good housing is often limited by inadequate governance systems and human resource deficiencies, as well as by poorly-informed and low-capacity institutions and obsolete regulations. So far, the failure of urban planning and the construction sector to match demand for homes has resulted in a huge and increasing housing backlog that has led to the development of slums.

**10.2. Slums in Africa**

In many cities in Africa, for instance, more than 80 per cent of the urban population lives in slums (Figure 10.2). Slums in African cities develop because of a combination of rapid rural-to-urban migration, increasing urban poverty and inequality, marginalization of poor neighborhoods, inability of the urban poor to access affordable land for housing, insufficient investment in new low-income housing and poor maintenance of existing housing stock. This is a reflection of the general failure of welfare-oriented and market-based low-income housing policies and strategies of many African countries (UNEP & UN-Habitat, 2006) *ibid*..

Figure 10.2: Urban and slum growth rates and proportions in Africa

 

Source: UN-Habitat (2006), State of the World’s Cities

From: UNEP and UN-HABITAT (2006). Background paper for AFRICITIES Conference, 18-24 September, 2006. Nairobi, Kenya. “Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability” page 12 (compiled by UNEP and UN-Habitat)(reproduced with permission from UN-Habitat).

Rapid urbanization places a remarkable strain on housing and serviced land. Around the fringe of Hargeisa town, the capital of Somaliland, slums are no more than tattered plastic sheets slung between thorn bushes, providing sparse shelter with no services to thousands of pastoral peoples who have finally given up struggling with the harsh hinterland, and gravitated to the capital with their small stock, hoping for a better life.   
  
Success stories coming out of African slums can be overpowering, showing how the human spirit can triumph against all the odds, a remarkable example of resilience and resolve being that of the *L’Orchestre Symphonique Kimbanguiste*, started by Armand Diangienda in 1994 when he lost his job as an airline pilot. The DVD film ‘Kinshasa Symphony’ made in 2010 by German film makers has become a worldwide sensation, resulting in both conductor and orchestra deserving and receiving huge acclaim and international requests for performances.   
  
In general, sub-Saharan Africa has been unable to manage or reduce slum growth, compared with the efforts of governments in North Africa to upgrade slums and actually reduce the absolute numbers of people living in them. Countries in Africa which have succeeded in good measure in their efforts to combat slum growth have some characteristics in common (Garau and Sclar, 2006):

* They have undertaken decisive action based on a clear vision, and have prioritized slum upgrading and prevention as a means to combat poverty;
* They have involved communities and local authorities in the design and implementation of slum upgrading strategies;
* They have implemented large-scale programs at city and national levels;
* The provision of security of tenure to informal dwellers was acknowledged as the over-arching condition for success and sustainability;
* Proper ways were found to make affordable land available to the poor

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| **Box 10.1. Life in a Kampala slum, Uganda**  As well as a lot of good quality housing recently built on the fringes of Kampala by the nouveau-riche, much of the city is characterised by slums, in areas such as Katanga, Bwaise, Wankulukuku and Kivulu, with some 60 percent of the inhabitants of Kampala living in such places. These built-up areas adjacent to low-lying malarial wetlands are characterised by over-crowding, flimsy housing units separated by narrow alleyways, inadequate drainage and sanitation, and standpipes for potable water with long queues of people with plastic jerry cans waiting in lines. When it rains, these alleys become streams, carrying the ubiquitous plastic and other litter along to the swamp at the lower margin of the settlement. The waterways also double as open sewers, such that almost all springs and wells in Kampala are badly contaminated.  70 percent of these housing units are constructed of temporary building materials which are not long-lasting – for instance, the corrugated iron roofs (*mbati*), which quickly rust and become perforated, in a city on the equator with two substantial rainy seasons per year. Only 3 percent of slum dwellers have access to electricity. At the perimeters of the shanty towns are bars with loud music, and small shops selling essential household goods – matches, paraffin for oil lamps, charcoal and possibly-fake pharmaceuticals.  Socially, there is a preponderance of noise, almost complete lack of privacy, theft, drug abuse, alcoholism, prostitution, domestic/ sexual abuse, inadequate health and education facilities, and the whole stalked by high rates of morbidity and death. The proportion of small coffins made by local carpenters is higher than that outside of the slums. The quality of life is dreadful, the hopelessness of impoverishment, unemployment and ignorance which prevails tempered with friendship through the informal support networks developed. Household pets in Europe enjoy a better quality of life than do shanty slum dwellers in Kampala today. Yet, for the moment at least, the residents have not taken to the streets in protest, for fear that their slums will be raised to the ground by the authorities.  In December 2008, with support from UNDP, the Department of Human Settlements of the Uganda Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development published a Situation Analysis of Slums in Uganda, together with the National Slum Upgrading Strategy and Action Plan. That report estimated that between 1.58 and 2.1 million people in Uganda live in slums, reflecting in part the rate at which rural dwellers have moved to cities, and renting what they can find and afford, with the attendant insecure residential status. The report further estimates that in Uganda as a whole in 2008 there were approximately six million households living in 4.5 million housing units, a telling statistic on slum over-crowding, especially given that the average Ugandan woman has seven children, and that the statistic includes rural areas. Results from the 2005/06 National Housing Survey indicate that single-roomed ‘tenements’ (*mzigo*) in urban slums accounted for 64.3 percent of all dwelling units in Kampala, not just in the slums.   Through implementing the Action Plan, the Government intends to uplift the lives of one million slum dwellers by 2020. This is not without its own challenges though. The original inhabitants of the slum in Katwe, for instance, displaced by the better houses being constructed there yet unable to afford them, are cursing Kampala City Council for allowing the upgrade ! A recent trend noted is that many people who had earlier flocked to the city in the hope of a better life, yet having experienced slum conditions and the dearth of jobs, are returning to the rural village whence they came. However, they have returned with their newly-learned artisanal skills, these both providing them with work and helping to raise quality of life in the villages.  Slum improvement is also ongoing through the agency of NGOs, such as the UK-based Hope for Children. Its work in Namuwongo slum, Makindye Division of Kampala, which has some 20,000 residents, is depicted in the two photographs below.  [The local community clean up Namuwongo slums](http://muzungubloguganda.com/2013/03/namwongo-kampala-slums/hope-for-children-start-work-removing-rubbish-from-namuwongo-slums-kampala/) Photo 10.1. Hope for Children has employed hundreds of people from the local community to help remove rubbish from Namuwongo slum, Kampala. A *Cyperus papyrus* swamp can be seen in the background (photo: Hope for Children)  [New concrete drainages in Namwuongo Kampala slums](http://muzungubloguganda.com/2013/03/namwongo-kampala-slums/new-drainage-in-namuwongo-slums-kampala/) Photo 10.2. The new lined drainage canal in Namuwongo slum, which replaced the old garbage-filled earthen drain, allows rainwater to pass through the slum without homes being flooded (photo: Hope for Children) |