

## World Habitat Day 2014 – ‘Voices from Slums’

This document provides key information to better gauge the dimension of the urban poverty problem represented by slums during the celebration of this year’s World Habitat Day (WHD). Any of this information can be used across media channels to help provide an accurate picture of life in slums.

To contribute to the understanding of the extreme living conditions of the hundreds of millions of slum dwellers in the world, the theme of WHD 2014 is ‘*Voices from Slums*’, and audio life stories will be recorded and broadcasted worldwide, giving voice to current and former slum residents and other vulnerable urban dwellers to better portray the social, economic and human aspects of slum life, providing a unique opportunity to hear directly how they improve their living conditions. Personal stories build the collective memory that allows us to discover successful past experiences that can still be beneficial for the future.

Often in slums, people live in anonymity, regarded with a ‘*that’s life*’ eye by better off fellow citizens. However, day by day, many slum residents fight for a better quality of life. Their stories are real and powerful for raising awareness around the world. WHD 2014 will spread them, and a ‘Voices from Slums’ Audio Library will be established online to preserve these experiences, accessible for everyone.

Placing slum dwellers as protagonists of WHD 2014 aims to encourage Governments, NGOs, the private sector, academia and other concerned institutions to give a human face to the urban poverty problem, thus triggering sustainable solutions for disadvantaged citizens that have the right to live in adequate housing conditions. As the world defines the *Sustainable Development Goals* and the *Habitat III* agenda, humankind faces a generational opportunity to bring justice to the urban poor.

### 1. Slum Demographics

#### Global

For the first time in history, and irreversibly, **more than half the world’s people live in cities: 54% in 2014**, a proportion that is expected **to increase to 66% by 2050**. An additional **2.5 billion** people are predicted to live in urban areas by that year (World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, Population Division of **UN DESA**).

According to the **World Bank**’s 2011 estimates, over **90%** of urban growth is occurring in the developing world, adding an estimated **70 million new residents to urban areas each year**. During the next two decades, the urban population of the world’s two poorest regions — South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa — is **expected to double**.

Approximately **a quarter of the world’s urban population lives in slums** (UN-Habitat, 2013).

In the **State of the World's Cities 2012/2013**, UN-Habitat estimated the number of people living in the slums of the world's developing regions as **863 million**, in contrast to 760 million in 2000 and 650 in 1990. Given current urbanization trends, this figure is likely to have increased by 2014. These estimates suggest that **one third of the developing world's urban population is living in slums** (UN-Habitat, Global Urban Indicators Database, 2012), representing **15%** of all the people living in those regions.

#### Regional

In **Africa**, **over half of the urban population (61.7%) lives in slums** (UN-Habitat, 2013).

In **Asia**, **30% of the urban population also resides in slums** (State of the World Cities Report, 2012/13), and this continent is currently home to **half of the urban population of the world**.

In the **Latin America and Caribbean** region, a region where slum upgrading and housing strategies have historically contributed to provide housing solutions to its citizens, still the problem prevails with a **24%** rate of urban slum dwellers (UN-Habitat, 2013).

#### Country-level

In absolute numbers, **China** is the country with the most slum dwellers in the world (**180 million**), followed by **India (104 million)**, while the highest proportion of urban population living in slums belongs to **Central African Republic with 96%**, (State of the World Cities Report, 2012/13).

**Haiti**, the poorest country in the Latin America and the Caribbean region and one of the poorest in the world, has a **slum prevalence of 70% among its urban population**.

## **2. Slum Formation Trends**

#### Global

Over the past 10 years, the proportion of the urban population living in slums in the developing world has **declined from 39% in the year 2000 to 32% in 2010**, showing that a number of countries and cities are taking seriously the achievement of the **Millennium Development Goal 7 (MDG 7), Targets 7c and 7d**; to improve the lives of the urban poor of the world. However, the urban divide endures, since, in absolute terms, the **number of slum dwellers has actually grown considerably**, and will continue to rise in the near future (State of the World's Cities Report 2010/11).

#### Regional

**Slums are spontaneously emerging as a dominant and distinct type of settlement in the cities of the developing world.**

According to the **State of the World's Cities Report (2010/11)**, every year, **10 million more people are added** to the urban population of **Sub-Saharan Africa**; approximately one-third of these, or 3 million, move to 'formal' urban areas and act both as agents and beneficiaries of formal urban and economic

growth. The remaining two-thirds, or **7 million, move to informal settlements or slums**. Of these, only 2 million can expect to lift themselves out of slum conditions and the other 5 million will remain confined on the wrong side of the urban divide.

In **Pacific countries** such as Papua New Guinea, most of the city's poor live in informal settlements. However, this trend is changing, with **middle and high-income earners moving into informal settlements** because of the limited access to formal housing (UN-Habitat, 2012).

According to the State of the World Cities Report (2010/11), **Latin America and the Caribbean** experienced a significant **20% reduction** in the proportion of slum dwellers among its urban population over the last decade. However, slum incidence remains relatively high: **23 out of 100** urban residents in the region live in *tugurios, favelas* or *campamentos*, as the precarious settlements are locally known.

### 3. Slum Dwellers' Five Deprivations

UN-Habitat's operational definition for **slum dwellers** was reached through an Expert Group Meeting convened by UN-Habitat, the United Nations Statistics Division and the Cities Alliance in 2002. It describes a **slum household** as 'a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking **one or more of the following conditions**: (1) **access to improved water**, (2) **access to improved sanitation facilities**, (3) **sufficient living area – not overcrowded**, (4) **structural quality/durability of dwellings**, and (5) **security of tenure**'. These conditions represent the *Five Deprivations* negatively affecting the lives of slum dwellers.

#### Water and Sanitation

Access to improved basic services is arguably one of the main challenges slum dwellers face. However, by 2010, **227 million slum dwellers** across Asia, Africa and in Latin America **have gained access** to improved water and sanitation as well as to durable and less crowded housing, **actually achieving the targets** concerned with improving the lives of slum dwellers contained in the MDGs. In any case, current slum population trends indicate us that more needs to be done.

In **Kibera**, Kenya's largest slum situated in the capital, **Nairobi**, **open sewer lines** empty effluent in front of people's houses. **Defecating into polythene bags**, then disposing the bag haphazardly is common; sometimes the bags, known as "flying toilets", are simply flung into the distance. **Open Defecation Areas** are also an affordable solution. Kibera slums, home to hundreds of thousands of poor citizens, it only has **1,000 public toilets**, according to the Nairobi City Council (IRIN, 2013).

**Liberia**, a country recently ravaged by civil war and currently suffering an Ebola outbreak, has experienced a decline in per capita income while its population is becoming more urban, indicating that the internal conflicts that drove thousands of rural people to seek the security of towns and cities have serious consequences for economic growth. In Liberia's capital, **Monrovia**, only **one third of the 1.5 million residents have access to clean toilets**, and **20 to 30 cholera cases** are reported weekly, **98%** of them in Monrovia's overcrowded shantytowns such as West Point, Clara Town, and Sawmill (IRIN, 2009).

Poor or non-existent clean water and sanitation facilities are linked to high malaria and diarrhoea rates, **Liberia's two leading child killers**. In the **Clara Town slum, 75,000 people share 11 public toilets and 22 public taps**; **West Point's 70,000 residents must make do with just 4 public toilets** (IRIN, 2009).

#### Overcrowding/Density

**Slums are usually dense settlements**. About **60 to 80 per cent** of **Kenya's** urban population lives in slums. In Nairobi, informal settlements cover just **6% of the total residential land** area, yet house **60%** of the city's population (IRIN, 2013).

Access to basic services is not the only thing lost in slum life. **Privacy is an unachievable luxury**. A sample survey conducted by UN-Habitat's country partners in the diverse informal settlements of 7 Sub-Saharan African countries shows that the average **room occupancy** (Number of Persons/Room) is **4 people, one person more than the recommended maximum** when considering typical slum rooms of **9 square meters** (Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme, PSUP, 2012).

Public space is a key characteristic of any city. However, slum areas are infamous for lacking public areas and for the predominance of **fragmented patches of empty land** that fulfil their residents' needs for open space. In the **Paraisopolis favela in Sao Paulo, Brazil**, a steep hillside home of 40,000, there was no public space until recent flooding severely damaged houses occupying a particularly risky spot, and their subsequent removal opened up space allowing for the creation of the **Grotao Community Centre**, a system of terraces, plazas, playing fields and an amphitheatre currently under construction.

#### Durability of Dwellings

One of the most characteristic features of slum life, the **precarious quality of the constructions** is also one of the most graphic symptoms of urban poverty. This is very clear when you find yourself walking in and around an ocean of iron sheet shacks. In the same sample of countries referred above, **permanent constructions represent just a meagre 28% of all slum structures**.

#### Security of Tenure

**The most critical aspect for slum upgrading and sustainable urban development**, the tenure status of the millions of slum households in the world is also the most controversial and difficult to research and quantify.

According to UN-Habitat estimates (Security of Land Tenure Today, 2003), **one decade ago 924 million people in urban areas did not have security of tenure**. In 2014, this figure is expected to have grown exponentially given the high rate of urbanization in developing countries.

Most residents of urban slums live **without any form of secure tenure and under constant threat of eviction**, which prevents them from accessing credit and constrains their motivation to improve their homes and neighbourhoods. Slum areas that are not titled challenge existing land registration and cadastral approaches. In the slums there is **little spatial information** and the land use does not often fit the town plans.

In the aforementioned sample survey conducted in 7 Sub-Saharan African countries, **more than half of the households are informal tenants**, while the majority of the rest are **house owners without official title deeds**.

#### 4. Other Slum Life's Aspects

##### Health

Differences in health across the population can be observed in any city. However, no law of nature decrees that the children of poor families should die at a higher rate than that of children born into rich families. This difference is, therefore, largely **produced by differential social circumstances and is not biologically determined**. Inequity in health is considered to be unfair because it is generated and maintained by “unjust social arrangements”, like the one that provides that **among the poorest 20% quintile of urban dwellers in the world, the under-five mortality rate is more than double that of the wealthier urban quintiles** (Urban HEART, 2010, WHO).

Similarly, **poorer urban populations have lower life expectancy at birth than richer urban populations**. While the **poorest 20% struggles to reach 55 years**, the **richest 40% goes well beyond 70 years** (Urban HEART, 2010, WHO).

**Slums are also prone to disease outbreaks**, like HIV, Cholera and, as most recently demonstrated, Ebola. In one of **Monrovia's** highly populated slum areas, **West Point**, Ebola cases have been reported and confirmed, **demonstrating how vulnerable and underprepared these little-surveyed areas in the eventuality of health crisis**. Social unrest caused by the general confusion came after, with protests, clashes and looting. On 19 August, the entirety of West Point was quarantined until the end of that month. This crisis highlights how hard the backlash of the neglect towards slums can be, as **the lack of basic services, planning, household survey and community engagement facilitate the spread of the disease**. Most probably, in these same aspects resides the solution to fight back Ebola.

##### Education

**UNESCO** estimates that the youth population in urban areas is larger than it has ever been, and is growing. According to UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2012), **in one out of every five countries, the urban poor and young people have less education than in rural areas**. Investing in young peoples' skills is a smart move for economic growth. The Report estimates that every USD 1 spent on a person's education, yields USD 10 – USD 15 in economic growth over that person's working lifetime.

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012), the **lowest literacy rates are observed in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia**, coincidentally the regions with the highest prevalence of slums. The region of South and West Asia is home to **more than one-half of the global illiterate population (52%)**, while **22%** of all illiterate adults live in sub-Saharan Africa, **13%** in East Asia and the Pacific, **6.5%** in the Arab States and **4.7%** in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## Labour

One of the most vulnerable aspects of slum life is job opportunity. **Unemployment, underemployment, informal jobs and few slum-based economic initiatives** are part of the scarce options available for the slum working force.

**Global unemployment rose by nearly 4 million in 2013**, reaching **200 million** people, with the global unemployment rate remaining broadly unchanged at **6%** (Global Employment Trends, 2013, ILO).

In many developing economies job creation has mainly taken place in the **informal economy, where around 60% of workers find income opportunities**. However, the informal economy is characterized by less job security, lower incomes, an absence of access to a range of social benefits and fewer possibilities to participate in formal education and training programmes – in short, the absence of key ingredients of decent work opportunities.

**More than a quarter of the young urban poor** earn little more than **USD 1.25 a day** (UNESCO).

## Women

Women of the slums represent one of the strongest forces for the development of millions of urban families living in poverty. They take care not only of the different household members but **often they are also the main bread-winners**. The survey carried out in 7 Sub-Saharan African countries demonstrates that **at least 20% of slum households are headed by women**.

## **5. Improving Slums and Preventing their Formation**

**Slum living conditions can be improved**, and this goal can only be achieved through the **concerted efforts** of all involved stakeholders, reassuring the **good-will of the authorities**, the **engagement of the concerned communities** and the **better understanding of the urban poverty problem** by the general public. Strategies and tools for the improvement of slum living conditions are:

Slum Upgrading: programmes oriented to the betterment of the current conditions of slum dwellings and neighbourhoods, **often in situ and incremental**, can give adequate housing solutions if inclusive, participatory and fair.

Housing: devising strategies to provide **affordable and adequate housing for all** must remain one of the top priorities for country governments.

National Urban Policies and other related byelaws: a policy approach towards solving the problem posed by slums helps provide the due **institutionalization and legal regulation** required for scale-up efforts.

Urban Planning and Planned City Extensions: one of the most effective ways to prevent the formation of slums is city planning, as it rationalizes urban space for future growth promoting **compact urban communities**.