UN Habitat Report on Cities and Pandemics: towards a more just, green and healthy future

Discussion Paper Webinar 3

Addressing systematic poverty and inequality in cities

December 8, 2020
16:30 – 18:30 EAT
DIAGNOSIS
Nature of pandemics: not just a health crisis

- Global connectivity
- Unprecedented lockdowns
- Technology advances with deep digital divides
- “Perfect storm” for a global socio-economic crisis due to pre-existing inequalities

1.8B people living in inadequate housing
60% global workforce in informal sector
COVID-19 is reversing decades of progress

- **120m** people pushed back into poverty
- Living standards could fall by 23%
- Global unemployment historic high in 2020
- Exacerbating existing inequalities while creating new vulnerabilities (e.g. for women)

![Graph showing proportion of people living below $1.90 a day, 2010–2015, 2019 nowcast, and forecast before and after COVID-19 (percentage).](image)

**UN-Habitat COVID-19 Campaign**
Income inequality and COVID-19 death rate

New York City’s COVID-19 Death Rate and Income Map

71% deaths in poorest nbds

6% deaths in wealthiest nbds

- Income matters
- Location matters
- Identity matters

*Based on data collected until August 2020

Data Sources: 2010 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau & MOE2010 - Coronavirus Data (18 August 2020), NYC Health
Higher death rate amongst minority groups

- Neighborhoods with relatively lower proportion of minorities (less than 20 per cent) tend to present lower fatality rate (around 4.5 per cent of those infected) compared with neighborhoods with more than 70 per cent of minority population, which tend to suffer from higher fatality rate (around 9 per cent of those infected).

*Based on data collected until August 2020
Racial disparity in residential evictions

More than 60% of residential evictions were from poorer neighborhoods characterized by higher percentages of minority population (more than 80 per cent) and lower income than the city average.

These neighborhoods also reported higher number of COVID-19 deaths compared to wealthier neighborhoods in the city.

>60% residential evictions in low income and minority nbds

*Evictions count based on data collected between March’20 – October’20*
The areas with higher proportion of slum population (>65%) reported more COVID-19 cases (30%) in the city, with higher fatality rate of 6.3 percent.

Compared to, areas with lower proportion of slum population (<30%) that reported less COVID-19 cases (<22%) in the city, with lower fatality rate of 4.2 percent.

Furthermore, the fatality rate seems to be exceptionally low in wards with very low slum proportion. In areas with a slum population lower than 10 percent - such as Marine lines ward - only 85 deaths were recorded out of the total of 1520 reported cases.
Over-crowding and COVID spread: Singapore

94% COVID-19 cases in migrant dorms in Singapore

5-10 inhabitants per room

*Based on data collected on dorm clusters on foreign worker infections in May 2020

Data Source: Ministry of Health of Singapore

UN-HABITAT COVID-19 CAMPAIGN
DIAGNOSIS

Inadequate living conditions: a key driver
(Lack of water, insufficient living space)
2 COVID-19 RESPONSES

One-size fits all approach: not fair/equitable
Housing at the centre of COVID-19 responses
Infrastructure related measures

- Isolation facilities, shelters
- WASH and hygiene
- Safe and inclusive mobility
- Digital inclusion
Social protection measures

- Job retention, income security
- Food vouchers
- Housing
- Health
- Social protection coverage gap

% of **vulnerable** population receiving social assistance cash benefits, % of **unemployed** persons receiving unemployment cash benefits, 2016
Analysis of COVID-19 responses in cities

- **Housing** related measures in >70% of the cities and GDP is not a predictor
- **Transportation** in <8% of the cities
- **Economic** measures in 50% of the cities
- **Long term** responses in >33% of cities, higher income bracket most active
- **WASH** measures in <40% of the cities, dominantly in lower income bracket
- **Community-driven** measures in >25% of cities, <75% in lowest income group
Lessons learnt

- Governments can assume a greater role in social protection functions
- Communities are achieving successful results in self-reliance
- Fast-tracked problem solving and solutions already exist
- New templates of collective action
Many of the inspiring actions not sustainable

✓ Cities need longer term strategies

40m evictions in US alone

1B people living in slums

https://www.cbsnews.com/
3 RECOMMENDATIONS

To recover from this crisis
To build resilience to future shocks
Need for a social contract based on human rights and shared prosperity

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Universal Deceleration of Human Rights 1948
Adequate housing as a part of COVID response

- Habitability
- Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure
- Security of tenure
- Affordability
- Accessibility
- Location
- Cultural Adequacy
To tackle urban inequalities, cities should

- **Address discrimination** in the right to adequate standards of living for all and promote the participation of marginalised groups

- **Expand capabilities** through improved health, education and access to technology for socially, economically and spatially disadvantaged groups

- **Redistributive measures** towards a fairer allocation of urban space and services - resources like land, housing, water and energy

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#Invert the pyramid

The Global Wealth Pyramid

- USD 173.3 tm (43.4%)
- USD 161.8 tm (40.5%)
- USD 58.6 tm (14.7%)
- USD 5.4 tm (1.4%)

Source: Credit Suisse 2020
New economic paradigm

Role of cities to finance

- Universal Basic Income
- Universal Health insurance
- Universal housing
How UN-Habitat can support

- Prioritize right to **adequate standard of living** in all programmes
- Critical position to **end homelessness** and **evictions**
- Coordinate **service delivery operators** to cover under-served areas
- Scale up pro-poor, gender responsive **land policies** and **finance**
- Data, policy and practice to reduce **spatial inequality** in cities
- Expand work with **communities** to catalyze transformative change
- Partnerships to enhance **social protection** measures
CONCLUSIONS

Income and housing security critical for tackling poverty and inequality in cities
#Invert the pyramid
An immediate crisis upon us

**Short-term**

- **Protect jobless and homeless**
  - Temporary policy & financial support
  - Ensure availability of basic urban services

**Medium-term**

- **Improve living conditions in cities**
  - Infrastructure & planning solutions
  - More equitable land management

**Long-term**

- **Enable all to meet basic needs**
  - Making markets work for all, affordability crisis
  - Social protection measures

50% of the world population lives under $5.5/day.
We need to act now

- **Cascading effects:** Job losses increase inability to pay rent & defaults on mortgage
- **Next step:** UN-Habitat’s role, convening power and call to action
- **Compounded risks:** Climate change & automation – cities should prepare for future shocks

- **60%**
  - global workforce affected

- **14%**
  - fall in global working hours in Q2
Thank You

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