



UN-HABITAT

THE CHALLENGE OF SLUMS



FOREWORD

Almost 1 billion people, or 32 per cent of the world's urban population, live in slums, the majority of them in the developing world. Moreover, the locus of global poverty is moving to the cities, a process now recognized as the 'urbanization of poverty'. Without concerted action on the part of municipal authorities, national governments, civil society actors and the international community, the number of slum dwellers is likely to increase in most developing countries. And if no serious action is taken, the number of slum dwellers worldwide is projected to rise over the next 30 years to about 2 billion.

In the United Nations Millennium Declaration, world leaders pledged to tackle this immense challenge, setting the specific goal of achieving 'significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020'. This means addressing not only the needs of slum dwellers for shelter, but also the broader problem of urban poverty, especially unemployment, low incomes and a lack of access to basic urban services.

The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003 presents the results of the first global assessment of slums by the United Nations since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration. The report proposes an operational definition of slums and, on this basis, provides the first global estimates of the numbers of urban slum dwellers. It discusses the local, national and international factors underlying the formation of slums. It analyses the social, spatial and economic characteristics and dynamics of slums. And it assesses the impact of the main policies towards urban slums adopted by governments, civil society groups and international organizations.

Slums represent the worst of urban poverty and inequality. Yet the world has the resources, knowhow and power to reach the target established in the Millennium Declaration. It is my hope that this report, and the best practices it identifies, will enable all actors involved to overcome the apathy and lack of political will that have been a barrier to progress, and move ahead with greater determination and knowledge in our common effort to help the world's slum dwellers to attain lives of dignity, prosperity and peace.

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