

CHOGM Briefing Paper

In 1998, the Secretary-General established the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS). At its first meeting, the CCGHS adopted a Commonwealth goal of:

“Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015”.

In establishing this goal, the Commonwealth took the lead in the international development debate, as at that time the International Development Targets¹ did not include slums, water or sanitation. In June 2001, CCGHS presented the *Commonwealth Input to Istanbul+5* to the UN General Assembly Special Session on the Habitat Agenda, which promoted the goal and discussed CCGHS activities towards its achievement. There are now two targets under *Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7* that specifically address human settlements issues:

Target 10, to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to drinking water and basic sanitation; and

Target 11, to achieve by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

CCGHS meets regularly and ComHabitat has been established as a partnership of the CCGHS and agencies from government, local government, civil society and the private sector that have a key role to play in implementing the Habitat Agenda². ComHabitat aims to promote and monitor the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Commonwealth Goal and associated Millennium Development Goals within and between Commonwealth countries. It focuses on networking and sharing practical examples of progress in implementation, such as successful slum upgrading initiatives. ComHabitat has initiated two research projects to help assess: progress on internationally agreed goals on human settlements; and the availability of, and options for, urban development finance.

Why are human settlements issues important?

327 million people live in slums in Commonwealth countries³. That is almost one in six Commonwealth citizens live in what amount to health- and life- threatening environments, largely excluded from city life and from realising their political, social, and economic rights. In a quarter of Commonwealth countries (11 African, 2 Asian and 1 Pacific), more than two out of three urban dwellers live in slums and many of these countries are urbanising rapidly. Between 2000 and 2030, the urban areas of the less developed regions of the world will absorb 95 per cent of the world’s population growth.

Urban poverty is often underestimated, unrecognised and poorly understood. In many nations, official poverty lines define significantly fewer urban dwellers as being poor than would be suggested by an examination of nutritional levels or health outcomes in urban areas⁴. Statistics on MDG indicators that contrast figures for rural and urban areas mask the deprivation in urban slums⁵ where rates of water and sanitation coverage and education enrolment can be many times lower, and child mortality many times higher, than richer urban neighbourhoods. ComHabitat research has demonstrated that Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) show a general lack of focus on, and understanding of, urban poverty issues. This prevents governments and donors being able to take advantage of the considerable opportunities that exist within urban areas for addressing poverty, reaching the MDGs and building an infrastructure for long-term economic growth and sustainable development⁶. Slum upgrading and urban planning can contribute towards all eight MDGs⁷.

¹ The International Development Targets were a precursor to the MDGs first outlined by OECD’s Development Assistance Committee.

² The Habitat Agenda came out of the United Nations’ 1996 Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul. It contains commitments in the following areas: adequate shelter for all; sustainable human settlements; enablement and participation; gender equality; financing shelter and human settlements; international co-operation; and assessing progress. Currently, the key partners in ComHabitat are the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, Homeless International, and the UK Government’s Department for International Development (DFID). ComHabitat is funded by DFID and the Commonwealth Foundation.

³ The UN’s slum dweller estimation is based on a definition of a “slum household” as lacking either: access to improved water; access to improved sanitation facilities; sufficient living area (less than 3 people per habitable room); a durable dwelling (non-hazardous location, permanent structure adequate to protect from climatic extremes); or security of tenure. All statistics in this paragraph are from UN Habitat (2003) *Slums of the World: the face of urban poverty in the new millennium?* Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

⁴ Satterthwaite, D. (2004) “The under-estimation of urban poverty in low- and middle-income nations”, *Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas Working Paper Series* (Working Paper 14), London: IIED.

⁵ United Nations (2005) *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2005*, New York: United Nations.

⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) *PRSPs, Human Settlements and Urban Poverty*, Submission of ComHabitat to the Commonwealth Finance Ministers’ Meeting, FMM(05)(INF)1.

⁷ UN Millennium Project (2005a) *Investing in Development: A practical plan to achieve the millennium development goals*, New York: UNDP.

"If the urban context of poverty is not directly addressed, it will be impossible to achieve the [Millennium Development] Goals. By improving the lives of slum dwellers, we are also combating HIV/AIDS, improving environmental sustainability, reducing gender inequality, and addressing all the Goals in the most efficient manner. In other words, as the world becomes more urban, the integration and synergies emerging from the potential of comprehensively addressing the Goals in a specific, dense location are best achieved in the very settlements where slum dwellers live. These issues have not been given the attention they deserve"⁸

Insecure tenure exacerbates urban poverty. Improving security of tenure is central to improving the lives of slum dwellers⁹. Security of tenure enables slum dwellers to invest in the improvement of their own homes and living conditions and to access essential services, whereas the threat of forced eviction inhibits investment and places people in constant fear that their homes may be demolished. The precise strategies and policies for ensuring security of tenure will vary between countries and cities. ComHabitat research has shown that, within PRSPs, there is little evidence of long term strategic planning for growth in urban populations and the consequent pressures on access to land¹⁰.

There can be no sustainable development without sustainable urbanisation. Adequate shelter, with secure tenure and access to essential services, is deeply connected to achievement of the millennium development goals, including those on poverty, education, health, water and sanitation¹¹.

"Investments in water, sanitation and human settlements contribute to economic growth, sustainable development, better health and reduced poverty. The achievement of water, sanitation and human settlements goals, is critical to the implementation of the three pillars of sustainable development and the achievement of all the internationally agreed development goals; . . . The policy options and practical measures for expediting implementation relating to water, sanitation and human settlements should be nationally-owned and integrated into poverty reduction strategies . . . or national development plans"¹².

Opportunities for action

Addressing human settlements issues in strategies to reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs

- Consider human settlements, in particular slums, as a crosscutting issue within PRSP development and implementation and incorporate consultative city development strategies – with both local government and communities playing central roles - into PRSP development and monitoring.
- Recognise and support the role of local government in delivering urban services and implementing equitable land regularisation and allocation policies, by providing appropriate capacity building and access to central budgetary and aid resources for the purpose.
- Recognise and support the urban poor as active agents not passive beneficiaries of development, by working with local communities to upgrade slums and plan urban development¹³.
- Examine linkages between environmental sustainability and human settlement development planning; particularly where the urban poor face increasing vulnerability to natural hazards or lack secure tenure.
- Plan for sustainable urban development, through developing policies and practices that ensure affordable land is available to the poor.

Investing in urban development for poverty reduction

- Donors should devote a larger share of increased ODA to human settlements programmes and urban development, not only to meet MDG 7 target 11, but also the other MDGs that are dependent upon a safe and healthy living environment.
- Increase "*funding to finance community-based slum upgrading*" as a *Quick Win* for achieving the MDGs¹⁴; and explore options to leverage and blend finance from public and private sources.
- Develop new mechanisms of capital financing for urban development, exploring with donors options to use debt forgiveness finance to capitalise local funds, which are accessible to local governments and non-governmental or community-based organisations and can be used to support slum upgrading, negotiated resettlement and infrastructure provision initiatives.

⁸ UN Millennium Project (2005b) *A Home in the City. The report of the Task Force on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers*, London & Vancouver: Earthscan (emphasis added).

⁹ UN Millennium Project (2005a) op cit

¹⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) op cit.

¹¹ CCGHS (2005) *Statement on Behalf of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements at the Thirteenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development*, April 2005.

¹² Commission on Sustainable Development (2005) *Decision adopted by the Commission at its Thirteenth Session* (Advance Unedited 22 April 2005).

¹³ UN Millennium Project (2005b) op cit

¹⁴ UN Millennium Project (2005a) op cit