



ComHabitat Research Strategy

April 2005

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Background to ComHabitat's involvement in research	4
3. Some principles for ComHabitat's involvement in research	4
4. Initial research projects	5
4.1 Context.....	5
4.2 Design issues.....	6
4.3 Research on measuring progress (indicators)	7
4.4 Research on urban finance.....	8

Abbreviations & Acronyms

CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CCGHS	Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements
DFID	Department for International Development (UK Government Department)
Istanbul+5	United Nations General Assembly Special Session for an Overall Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda, New York, June 2001.
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
PRSPs	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
UN	United Nations
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (now UN-Habitat)
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme (formerly UNCHS)

I. Introduction

ComHabitat has developed a research strategy to contribute towards the CCGHS's mandates of measuring and gauging progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda and providing practical assistance to Commonwealth countries in implementing the Agenda. ComHabitat, with its limited resources, should not be trying to duplicate existing research programmes, but rather to build on these, complement their approaches and provide a Commonwealth perspective. The diversity of Commonwealth membership in terms of country size, geographical location, income and type of economy, combined with a largely common heritage in terms of legislation relating to human settlements, makes the Commonwealth a particularly useful arena in which to carry out research. Commonwealth countries offer a broad and rich spectrum of experience in human settlements issues. ComHabitat can also play an important role in making existing information accessible – particularly through its website – and in developing research projects specifically geared to the CCGHS process.

In developing the Research Strategy, Management Group members have agreed both on some principles for ComHabitat's involvement in research, and on two initial research projects that are seen as working towards priorities set by the CCGHS. The principles identified for ComHabitat research were:

- Avoid duplication and work in partnership.
- Ensure research is relevant to the work of the CCGHS.
- Ensure research results are accessible by CCGHS and other Habitat Agenda partners.
- Facilitate linkages and dialogue between agencies concerned with human settlements.

The two initial research projects are concerned with:

- measuring progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda and working towards the Commonwealth goal and related Millennium Development Goals; and
- ascertaining the availability and options for urban development finance.

CCGHS has prioritised monitoring and gauging progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda and defined incorporating shelter provision into national poverty alleviation programmes as a major objective; this incorporation will only be achieved if those influencing the design of these programmes have access to information about lack of shelter¹ provision. Statistics currently in use are often inappropriate due to the questionable validity of the indicators used and problems in the accuracy of the data. It is hoped that the first research project will not only complement the work of UN-Habitat, but also enhance the ability of Ministers to advocate for inclusion of urban poverty and shelter data into national poverty alleviation strategies, such as PRSPs. Current work carried out by UN-Habitat seeks to simplify the collation of statistical indicators relating to inadequate shelter. In addition it is anticipated that the research will highlight practical examples of progress made in this area within different national contexts.

CCGHS highlighted the creation of new and innovative funds for housing and land development as a key element of the Commonwealth framework for action. A crucial element of encouraging the development of new and innovative funds must be an appreciation and analysis of existing funds, the context in which they have operated and lessons learnt. ComHabitat has chosen to focus on researching finance for human settlements in urban areas for a number of reasons including: a recognition that poverty is becoming increasingly urban; and that in densely populated urban areas scaling up solutions will require larger scale and more complex financing arrangements than has been the case in the past. It is hoped that the second research project

¹ Shelter is taken to mean adequate, safe, secure housing and the associated infrastructure.

will result in practical recommendations of ways to increase the accessibility of urban development finance for a range of key actors.

2. Background to ComHabitat's involvement in research

In *Focus on the Habitat Agenda*², the CCGHS made a commitment to “work through practical, hands-on approaches to providing shelter and improving human settlements”, and identified “monitoring and gauging progress” as a key element of this work. The Commonwealth Input to Istanbul+5³, states that the “CCGHS, through partnership with other concerned sectors of the community, will assist Commonwealth countries to implement the Habitat Agenda in practical ways which include: . . . Promoting the sharing of ideas, experience and best practices . . . [and] . . . Assisting in capacity building through for example, increased access to relevant information including web sites . . .”. More recently, research and information sharing has been identified as a means by which ComHabitat can assist the CCGHS in meeting these commitments. The proposal for hosting ComHabitat, which was accepted by the Management Group in April 2004, outlined a vision for ComHabitat in 2006 that placed monitoring and gauging progress, and sharing experiences at the centre (see Box I below). With the widespread adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) it is important to also consider how people will monitor and gauge progress towards achieving these goals.

Box I – Vision of ComHabitat in 2006

ComHabitat will be recognised as an established, credible and respected facility working at international level and offering the following:

- An effective mechanism for promoting and monitoring, within and between Commonwealth countries, the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and associated Millennium Development Goals.
- An information and referral service for CCGHS and other governmental, local authority, non-governmental, community, professional and private sector agencies seeking assistance in strengthening their capacity to implement the Habitat Agenda, particularly in the area of creating alternatives to forced eviction.
- An active network within the Commonwealth enabling dialogue and exchange between all the key partners involved in implementing the Habitat Agenda.
- A means of strengthening dialogue between the Commonwealth and other agencies and networks concerned with ensuring safe and secure shelter for all.

3. Some principles for ComHabitat's involvement in research

ComHabitat differs from other agencies and programmes in its position with respect to the CCGHS, and the lead position that Ministers have for facilitating implementation of the Habitat Agenda and achieving the MDGs most relevant to human settlement development. It is important that this positioning be strengthened rather than diluted through the competencies that the ComHabitat Secretariat seeks to develop, including those in the area of research. Given the anchor of ComHabitat in the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS), one of the main objectives of the facility should be to act as a referral and support base for CCGHS itself, as well as for NGOs, CBOs, local government, etc. It is important that such a base be anchored in real practices rather than idealised notions of “what should be”. Research will play a key role in ensuring that ComHabitat can play this role.

² CCGHS (1999) *Focus on the Habitat Agenda: The Commonwealth Development Framework for Human Settlements*

³ CCGHS (2001) *Statement by member countries of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements at the Special Session on Habitat II*, New York, June 8, 2001.

There are Commonwealth countries on every continent. The diversity of Commonwealth membership in terms of country size, income and type of economy, combined with a largely common heritage in terms of legislation relating to human settlements, makes the Commonwealth a particularly useful arena in which to carry out research.

There are a number of principles that ComHabitat should consider in developing research projects:

- **Avoid duplication and work in partnership.** There are numerous research agencies, academic institutions and programmes actively researching issues surrounding the Habitat Agenda and related Millennium Development Goals, based in the Commonwealth and elsewhere. ComHabitat, with its limited resources, should not be trying to duplicate these programmes, but rather to build on these, complement their approaches and provide a Commonwealth perspective.
- **Ensuring research is relevant.** Research projects should be relevant to the work of the CCGHS and the priorities that it has from time to time outlined. In particular, research should work towards the aim of the CCGHS employing “*vision and innovation to establish new and practical solutions to the problem of providing shelter for all*”⁴. Research should also take account of wider movements in the field of human settlement development.
- **Ensuring research results are accessible.** This includes not only the results of any ComHabitat research, but also the research of others and is key to ComHabitat becoming established as a useful referral and support base for CCGHS and other Habitat Agenda partners. Accessibility not only involves availability – for example through the ComHabitat web site – but also presentation in appropriate language⁵ and formats, for example case studies of real examples. The Communication Strategy currently being developed by the ComHabitat Secretariat will outline some ground rules for documentation.
- **Facilitating linkages and dialogue.** Research projects should provide material to feed into macro-level planning; particularly as such processes are frequently dominated by agencies, such as finance ministries, that lack a human settlements perspective. Both the processes and outcomes of ComHabitat’s research should focus on facilitating linkages and dialogue, rather than merely the production of research papers.

4. Initial research projects

4.1 Context

In the field of human settlement development, and development more widely, a number of trends have become apparent. The series of UN conferences during the 1980s and 1990s, together with their five- and ten-year reviews, led to the UN resolving to achieve a number of new, time-bound targets for economic and social development in order to free people from “*the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty*”⁶. Most bilateral and multilateral development agencies have taken since used these MDGs as a framework to guide their programme design and resource allocation.

⁴ CCGHS (1999) *Focus on the Habitat Agenda: The Commonwealth Development Framework for Human Settlements* (emphasis added).

⁵ Language here refers to terminology and style.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/2, *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, paragraph 11.

Poverty has also become more widely defined as “*caused not only by inadequate income but also by many other (usually interconnected) deprivations*”⁷, many of which the Habitat Agenda seeks to address. Meanwhile, an increasing number of Commonwealth countries are developing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). These PRSPs have sought to both analyse poverty and elaborate strategies to combat it. However, in a review of 23 PRSPs, Mitlin (2004) identified an “*apparent confusion of approach, methodology and analysis*” in their measurement of poverty. As a result “*simple quantitative estimates based on poverty lines are failing to pick up issues relating to the urban poor*”⁸, but it is these estimates upon which countries’ and donors’ strategies are based.

Some agencies, including DFID, have begun to focus on urban/rural linkages and the World Habitat Day theme for 2004 was ‘Cities - engines of rural development’. The Habitat Agenda calls for “*a regional and cross-sectoral approach to human settlements planning, which places emphasis on rural/urban linkages and treats villages and cities as two ends of a human settlements continuum*”⁹. A recent paper argued that “*the rapid growth of capital cities like a Kampala or a Dar es Salaam, that perhaps offer the only prospects of serious poverty reduction in the country where they are located, is often prematurely curtailed by a failure to support the urban infrastructure necessary to fuel the growth process*”¹⁰.

Considering the breadth of vision of the Habitat Agenda, and the inter-dependent nature of the Millennium Development Goals, all of the MDGs could be considered as part of ComHabitat’s research remit. UN-Habitat has recognised this interdependence in its latest Urban Indicators Programme, which has broadened its scope beyond its traditional range of Habitat indicators to look at MDG indicators. However the most directly relevant targets to ComHabitat are likely to be those under Goal 7 “Ensuring environmental sustainability”:

- 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.

4.2 Design issues

ComHabitat has a limited budget with which to carry out these two research programmes, and is unable to fundraise for research until it can demonstrate concrete achievements in this area. As a result the first phase of research is essentially desk-based; in-country research has been limited to researchers’ visits for other purposes, or work carried out by local partner organisations. The aim is to have completed four country studies by the time of the CCGHS meeting in April 2005.

The ComHabitat Secretariat and Management Group partners had detailed discussions regarding the research design, including the selection of countries for the research. The countries have been chosen to be broadly representative of the diversity of the Commonwealth; but there were also pragmatic reasons for choosing certain countries, for example the opportunity to travel there.

⁷ Mitlin, D. and Satterthwaite, D. (Eds.) (2004) *Empowering Squatter Citizen: local government, civil society and urban poverty reduction*, London: Earthscan, p xii.

⁸ Mitlin, D. (2004) “Understanding Urban Poverty: what the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers tell us”, *IIED Working Paper* (series on Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas), London: IIED.

⁹ UNCHS (1996) *The Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda*, Nairobi: UNCHS, paragraph 104.

¹⁰ Ellis, F. and Harris, N. (2004) *New thinking about urban and rural development*, Keynote paper for DFID sustainable development retreat, University of Surrey, Guildford, July 2004.

4.3 Research on measuring progress (indicators)

In carrying out research on measuring progress, ComHabitat is seeking to support CCGHS's commitment to "monitoring and gauging progress"¹¹. The proposal for hosting ComHabitat, which was accepted by the Management Group in April 2004, outlined two research projects the first of which focused on indicators. The proposal included the following activities in its work programme:

- Carry out the necessary research to identify, in collaboration with other agencies and programmes, key indicators that will enable effective tracking of implementation of the Habitat Agenda.
- On the basis of research carried out, produce documentation and design and build a database detailing the current status of Commonwealth member states in implementing the Habitat Agenda and achieving the MDGs. Focus on key partnerships that enabled progress to be made.
- Identify key resource centres where good practice has enabled significant progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda and where personnel are able and willing to share their methods, learning and insights with others.
- Establish systems whereby those who need assistance are able to contact and establish linkages with relevant resource centres.

The following section describes how these proposed activities relate to the research principles outlined above.

There is much current work on indicators and measurement (e.g. UN-Habitat's Global Urban Observatory and the MDG taskforces). Many Commonwealth countries also produced National Habitat Reports for Istanbul+5. However, this information is often not accessible to practitioners. CCGHS has prioritised monitoring and gauging progress and defined "incorporating shelter provision into national poverty alleviation programmes"¹² as a major objective; this incorporation will only be achieved if those influencing the design of these programmes have access to information about lack of shelter¹³ provision. Statistics currently in use are often inappropriate due to the questionable validity of the indicators used and problems in the accuracy of the data:

*"There is no lack of nonsense statistics on levels of urban poverty. Anyone with knowledge of Nairobi or any other urban centre in Kenya would be astonished to see that only 1.2 per cent of Kenya's urban population was considered "poor" in 1998 . . . or that only 4 per cent of its urban population lacked sanitation in 2000"*¹⁴

Community-based organisations and local government are developing new ways of measuring and prioritising; for example the surveys carried out by federations of the urban poor affiliated to Slum/Shack Dwellers International¹⁵, or City Development Strategies being developed by many cities.

The research on indicators is seeking to:

- Develop working relationships with other research initiatives¹⁶.

¹¹ CCGHS (1999) *Focus on the Habitat Agenda: The Commonwealth Development Framework for Human Settlements*

¹² CCGHS (2001) *Statement by member countries of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements at the Special Session on Habitat II*, New York, June 8, 2001.

¹³ Shelter is taken to mean adequate, safe, secure housing and the associated infrastructure.

¹⁴ Satterthwaite, D. (2003) "The Millennium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction" in Satterthwaite, D. (Ed.) *The Millennium Development Goals and Local Processes: Hitting the target or missing the point?* London: IIED, p 38

¹⁵ See for example, Weru, J. (2004) "Community federations and city upgrading: the work of Pamoja Trust and Muungano in Kenya", *Environment and Urbanization*, 16 (1), pp. 47 – 62.

¹⁶ For example, the ComHabitat Secretariat has already met with Eduardo Moreno, Chief - Global Urban Observatory, UN-Habitat

- Review and synthesise Habitat National Reports.
- Review Commonwealth PRSPs with a view to analysing the degree to which they are supportive of Target 10, Target 11 and the CCGHS goal.
- Provide links to key web sites, documents and contact details of researchers through the ComHabitat web site¹⁷.
- Identify key indicators and the levels and methods whereby these indicators can be tracked and collated.
- Develop a database and provide overview syntheses and analysis on the ComHabitat web site.
- Identify key resource centres where good practice has enabled significant progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda.

4.3.1 Research questions

The following questions are being considered in the research:

- What is considered progress? Are the MDGs and Habitat Agenda being looked at, or are there other targets?
- What reports/strategies exist (Habitat National Reports & Plan of Action, PRSPs, City Development Strategies, Local Agenda 21, MDG progress reviews, National Strategies for Sustainable Development, etc)?
- Do these reports/strategies consider the following issues:
 - MDGs (particularly targets 10 and 11);
 - Urban/rural differences in poverty (and measurement of);
 - Human settlements, water and sanitation and their links to other aspects of poverty?
- What indicators are being used to measure progress?
- Where does the information come from? Who collects it? How?
- Is the available information considered accurate?
- What other information is available, but not being used?
- How does information feed into planning/implementation? Is there a National Plan of Action for implementing the Habitat Agenda or an equivalent document? How do national poverty strategies link to national budget allocations?
- Institutional mapping. Which agencies are involved in human settlements issues? What are the relationships between the various agencies? Which ministries are responsible for housing, water, sanitation, local government, PRSPs, National statistics offices, etc?
- Are there interesting case studies of progress that could be considered as key resource centres?

4.4 Research on urban finance

In *Focus on the Habitat Agenda*¹⁸, the CCGHS highlighted “*the creation of new and innovative funds for housing and land development*” as a key element of the framework for action. A crucial element of encouraging the development of new and innovative funds must be an appreciation and analysis of existing funds, the context in which they have operated and lessons learnt. The second research project outlined in the proposal for hosting ComHabitat, which was accepted by the Management Group in April 2004, focuses on urban finance. The proposal included the following activity in its work programme:

and WaterAid, and has identified further relevant research initiatives.

¹⁷ For example the UN-Habitat Global Urban Observatory web site, or the reports of the Millennium Task Forces.

¹⁸ CCGHS (1999) *Focus on the Habitat Agenda: The Commonwealth Development Framework for Human Settlements*

- Carry out research on the availability and options for urban development finance and disseminate the findings of this research widely

ComHabitat has chosen to focus on researching finance for human settlements in urban areas for a number of reasons including: a recognition that poverty is becoming increasingly urban¹⁹; and that in densely populated urban areas financing needs are larger scale and more complex²⁰. Research into financing human settlements development (including infrastructure) has been carried out by a range of institutions, including international NGOs such as Homeless International and WaterAid. It is important that ComHabitat seeks to build upon this work.

The research on urban finance is examining the following research issues:

- financial and banking regulations and their impact on settlement investment;
- the development of local financial markets;
- the range and status of local financial institutions, including banks, micro-finance institutions and non-formal institutions; and
- the range of products available (and affordable to different groups) for slum upgrading, home improvement, new build, land purchase, infrastructure development, etc.

¹⁹ UN-Habitat (2003) *Slums of the World: the face of urban poverty in the new millennium?* Nairobi: UN-Habitat, p.12.

²⁰ Providing micro-finance to individuals often cannot help in improving housing and infrastructure in dense urban settlements, instead large-scale finance is needed, for example to construct community toilet blocks, or settlement-wide water and drainage systems.