



Putting human settlements and urban poverty at the heart of the development agenda

Chair's summary of the discussions by the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) and ComHabitat

Vancouver, 18th June 2006

The significance of human settlements development for poverty reduction

We live in an urbanising world. Soon more than half of the world's population will live in towns and cities. 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.

Nearly a billion people live in slums worldwide. If urgent action is not taken, 1.4 billion people worldwide will live in slums by 2020, residing in health- and life- threatening environments, and often prevented from realising their political, social, and economic rights.

The consequences of this urbanisation of poverty are grave and affect us all. There can be no sustainable development without sustainable urbanisation. It is clear that adequate shelter, with secure tenure and access to essential services, is necessary to reduce poverty in all its dimensions.

Governments have made numerous commitments to improving human settlements and tackling poverty, including:

- the Habitat Agenda and its twin goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world.
- the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular the target to achieve by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers whilst providing adequate alternatives to new slum formation.
- the Commonwealth goal of "Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all, with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015", established by CCGHS in 1999.

Sustainable urbanisation and the provision of adequate shelter for all can only be achieved through effective participation and mutual obligations of national government and Habitat Agenda partners (including local government, civil society organisations, parliamentarians, the private sector, women and youth groups). Effective decentralisation of resources and powers is essential to enable local government structures to play their important role in implementing the Habitat Agenda.

The need for action

The comprehensive implementation of the Habitat Agenda is now more urgent than ever. Slum upgrading and urban planning can contribute towards all eight MDGs. Conversely, if the urban context of poverty is not directly addressed, it will be impossible to achieve the MDGs.

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 development.

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 areas. Statistics on



MDG indicators that contrast figures for rural and urban areas mask the deprivation in urban slums where rates of water and sanitation coverage and education enrolment can be much lower, and child mortality much higher, than richer urban neighbourhoods.

Human settlements issues in the Commonwealth

Some 327 million people live in slums in Commonwealth countries; that is almost one in six Commonwealth citizens. 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. Small island and vulnerable Commonwealth states face particular sustainable development challenges in the face of rapid urbanisation.

To address these concerns, the ministerial-level Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements provides a forum for exchanging views and developing a Commonwealth consensus approach to implementing the Habitat Agenda. ComHabitat has been established as a partnership of the CCGHS and agencies from government, local government, civil society and the private sector that the CCGHS recognises have a key role to play in implementing the Habitat Agenda. ComHabitat aims to promote and monitor the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the Commonwealth Goal within and between Commonwealth countries. It focuses on networking, research and sharing practical examples of progress in implementation.

A call for action

Ministers recognized the critical importance of including concerns related to the provision of adequate shelter for all, with secure tenure and access to essential services, good governance and sustainable urbanization, in policies and strategies aimed at reducing poverty and stimulating economic growth.

They therefore called upon:

- Governments, donors and other Habitat Agenda partners to further the inclusion of human settlements concerns and the challenges resulting from the rapid urbanisation of poverty in PRSPs and other national development frameworks.
- Donors to recognise that adequate shelter for all, with secure tenure and access to essential services, good governance and sustainable urbanisation should be treated as central concerns within policies and strategies aimed at reducing poverty, localising the MDGs and stimulating economic growth.
- Donors to dedicate a substantial increase in resources to these concerns, providing reliable funding for sustainable human settlements development in the medium- to long-term.
- Donors to support efforts to localise the MDGs and to promote local democracy and good governance in line with internationally recognised standards such as the *Aberdeen Agenda: Commonwealth Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy and Good Governance*.
- All Habitat Agenda partners to work together towards the rapid and comprehensive implementation of the Agenda, and the necessary investment in capacity to bring this about. An important element of such capacity is the creation of reliable, appropriate and timely data collection to support policy development and the monitoring of progress.