

TASK FORCE: Slum Dwellers

Need to Improve the Lives of Slum Dwellers, as Developing World Faces Dramatic Population Surge in Urban Centres

Report calls on city residents, local, national governments to strengthen focus on slum upgrading and preventing the growth of new slums

17 January 2005, New York—Currently 900 million people are living in slums around the world. Unless the world changes course, 1.5 billion urban residents in 2020 will be slum dwellers, most of them residents of developing regions who lack such basics as a political voice, decent housing, sanitation, access to water, schools, healthcare, and a safe and dependable way of getting to work. Even though development practitioners tend to focus on rural areas, developing countries face a tremendous challenge—an opportunity—in managing the rapid growth of urban centres.

The rise in number of people living in such appalling conditions can be prevented and millions of lives can be improved, however, if specific steps are taken to better the lives of the urban poor and prevent the creation of future slums, according to the UN Millennium Project's Task Force on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers.

The task force report—*A Home in the City. Report of the Task Force on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers*—released today is part of a detailed global action plan for fighting poverty, disease and environmental degradation in developing countries.

The report notes that the factors that cause slums to develop are complex and can vary from one country to another, but that solutions to the crisis of slums share many common elements, among them respect and recognition for the groups that represent the poor, legislation to protect the poor from forced evictions, investments in basic infrastructure, such as water, sanitation, garbage disposal. In addition, urban planning needs to be strengthened and reformed to prevent the formation of new slums.

According to the task force, it would cost US\$18 billion a year to improve conditions for 100 million slum residents and to introduce the infrastructure and services needed to provide alternative housing for another 570 million people who would otherwise become slum dwellers. The task force has developed a concrete blueprint to fight urban poverty. Its recommendations include:

- **Countries need to recognize that the urban poor are active agents and not just beneficiaries of development.** Local authorities and national governments should collaborate with the organizations of the urban poor in upgrading slums and providing alternatives to slum formation.
- **Managing cities requires local solutions.** Local authorities need to be empowered with financial and human resources to deliver services and infrastructure to the urban poor. Cities should draw up local long-term strategies for improving the lives of slum dwellers.
- **Following consultation with both slum dwellers and national authorities, local governing bodies should pass legislation** to prevent forced evictions and provide “security of tenure” to residents of slum communities.
- **Local governments should develop strategies to prevent the formation of new slums.** These should include access to affordable land, reasonably priced materials, employment opportunities, and basic infrastructure and social services.

- **Public investments must focus on providing access to basic services and infrastructure.** Working with the urban poor, cities need to invest in housing, water, sanitation, energy, and urban services, such as garbage disposal. These services and infrastructure must reach the poor living in informal settlements.
- **The transportation needs and safety concerns of a city's poorest residents should be a high priority in planning urban transportation systems,** which can expand the choices people have regarding where to live and work.
- **Building codes and regulations should be realistic and enforceable and reflect the lifestyle and needs of the local community.** This means, for example, that they may have to be flexible enough to allow for housing that is built incrementally, out of low-cost materials and on small plots of land.
- **To create jobs, cities should encourage the private sector by improving infrastructure and facilitating the transition from the informal into the formal economy.** Foreign direct investment can play an important catalytic role in promoting urban manufacturing and service-based enterprises.

The Task Force on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers was led by **Dr. Pietro Garau**, tenured researcher at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Rome, and **Dr. Elliott D. Sclar**, professor of urban planning and public affairs, Columbia University.

The Task Force report calls attention to the critical importance that alleviating urban poverty will play in meeting the commitments forged in 2000 at the Millennium Summit, where world leaders agreed make the fight against poverty—and all of its faces—in developing countries their priority. The summit inspired the Millennium Development Goals, which are built on the recognition that, from health to the environment, from education to gender equality, a growing list of development issues can no longer be managed solely within the boundaries of a single nation.

The Task Force recommendations comprise part of the UN Millennium Project, which was commissioned by the UN Secretary-General in 2002 to develop a practical plan of action for enabling developing countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals and reverse the grinding poverty, hunger and disease affecting billions of people. As an independent advisory body directed by Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, the UN Millennium Project submitted its final recommendations in January 2005.

The Task Force on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers is one of 10 UN Millennium Project Task Forces that drew on the expertise of some 265 experts from around the world including: members of parliament; researchers and scientists; policymakers; representatives of civil society; UN agencies; the World Bank; International Monetary Fund; and the private sector. The UN Millennium Project Task Force teams were challenged to diagnose the key constraints to meeting the Millennium Development Goals and present recommendations for overcoming the obstacles to get nations on track to achieving them by 2015.



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