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Urbanisation, growing slums and global change: a challenge Commonwealth countries need to address urgently.

"Slums in many cities are no longer just marginalised neighbourhoods housing a relatively small proportion of the urban population; in many cities, they are the dominant type of human settlement, carving their way into the fabric of modern-day cities, and making their mark as a distinct category of human settlement that now characterizes so many cities in the developing world." UN-Habitat¹

Some statistics

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 rapidly².

Between 2000 and 2005, a third of Commonwealth countries had urban growth rates between 3 and 6 per cent. Countries with high urban growth rates included both populous member states (Bangladesh, Nigeria and Pakistan) and small island states at risk from climate change and environmental degradation (Vanuatu, Kiribati and the Maldives)³,

At least eight Commonwealth member states, all in sub-Saharan Africa, have annual slum growth rates of more than 5 per cent⁴. There may be others with even higher rates, but data was only available for 32 member states, none of which were in the Pacific region.

Urbanisation, growing slums and the MDGs

"... the international community must concentrate more of its efforts on improving the lives of the urban poor if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved. . . . Without a renewed commitment to the needs of our urban era, matched by resources, the world's urban transition will see a further expansion and entrenchment of slums, and the spread of urban ills." Kofi Annan⁵

This paper examines outlines linkages between urbanisation, growing slums and each of the MDGs. Appendix 1 contains extracts from the Sachs Report demonstrating how human settlements interventions can contribute to all of the goals. Each section poses a question about these linkages and how the Commonwealth might seek to tackle them.

¹ UN-Habitat (2006) *State of the World's Cities Report 2006/07*, London: Earthscan

² 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.

³ <http://esa.un.org/unup>

⁴ UN Habitat (2003) *Slums of the World: the face of urban poverty in the new millennium?* Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

⁵ Foreword to UN-Habitat (2006) *State of the World's Cities Report 2006/07*, London: Earthscan

MDG1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

"If the urban context of poverty is not directly addressed, it will be impossible to achieve the [Millennium Development] Goals. . . 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" UN Millennium Project⁶

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 areas⁷. Statistics on MDG indicators that contrast figures for rural and urban areas mask the deprivation in urban slums⁸ 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. Because the urban economy is highly monetised, urban households may need higher cash incomes than rural households to avoid poverty, particularly in large and prosperous cities.

Question: How can we ensure that efforts to eradicate extreme poverty take account of poverty in urban areas that exists but may not be reflected in official statistics?

MDG2 - Achieve universal primary education

"The combination of poverty, poor health and lack of hygiene means that children from unserved homes [i.e. lacking sanitation] miss school more frequently than those whose families do benefit from improved drinking water and sanitation services....For girls, it is not just sickness that costs them their schooling. The burden borne by women of hauling water from distant sources is often shared by her young daughters, leaving them with neither the time nor the energy for schooling." World Health Organisation⁹

In 2002, more than 500 million school-age children lived in families without access to improved sanitation and 230 million were without an improved water supply¹⁰. Many schools also lack sanitation facilities, which can also affect school attendance, particularly once girls reach puberty.

Question: How can we ensure that water and sanitation concerns are included in efforts to achieve universal primary education?

MDG3 – Promote gender equality and empower women

"Slum life forces many women and girls to engage in sexually risky behaviour, making them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases....In slums, where there are few or no toilets, many women are forced to defecate under cover of darkness, which renders them more vulnerable to sexual and physical assault." UN-Habitat¹¹

For poor people, particularly women, the struggle for shelter and housing comprises one of the most fundamental elements of their daily survival strategy. Improved housing has a particularly positive impact on the well being of children and women, and is often prioritised by women above other forms of investment. Many community-driven programmes to build or improve housing have helped low income women to work together and to develop constructive relationships with local authorities or other service providers.

Question: How can equality be achieved when urban poverty/slum conditions impact disproportionately on women?

⁶ UN Millennium Project (2005) *A Home in the City. The report of the Task Force on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers*, London & Vancouver: Earthscan

⁷ 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).

⁸ United Nations (2005) *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2005*, New York: United Nations.

⁹ WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (2005) *Water for life: making it happen*, Geneva, WHO, p. 14

¹⁰ WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (2005) *Water for life: making it happen*, Geneva, WHO, p. 14

¹¹ UN-Habitat (2006) *State of the World's Cities Report 2006/07*, London: Earthscan, p. ix

MDG4 - Reduce child mortality; MDG5 - Improve maternal health; and MDG6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

"Both use of safe water and basic sanitation coverage remain extremely low in the burgeoning slums of the developing world . . . disease, mortality and unemployment are considerably higher in slums than in planned urban settlements. Surveys suggest that in some African cities, the death rate of children under age 5 who live in slums is about twice as high as that of children in other urban communities" United Nations¹².

"Many women living in slums cannot afford the relatively more expensive delivery and post-natal services in urban areas, and are, therefore, less likely to seek these services, especially when a choice has to be made between paying for these services and buying food or meeting other household expenses." UN-Habitat¹³.

"In various sub-Saharan countries, HIV prevalence is significantly higher in urban areas than in rural areas, and is also higher in slums than in non-slum areas. Moreover slum women are particularly at risk, with HIV prevalence rates that are higher than that of both men and rural women." UN-Habitat¹⁴

Slum dwellers often lack adequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities. Water supplies may be unreliable, expensive or contaminated. These factors have serious repercussions for health and well-being and undermine any investment made to improve healthcare provision, education and other aspects that contribute to poverty. Overcrowding and poor ventilation are associated with acute respiratory infections such as meningococcal meningitis and tuberculosis and the rapid spread of diseases such as diphtheria. Poor sanitation and drainage are crucial factors in the spread of Malaria and waterborne diseases. High costs and socio-political barriers may limit slum dwellers' access to health services, despite possible proximity to the facilities. The case of Nairobi – where under-five mortality rates in slums are 151 per 1,000 live births, significantly higher than the average of 62 for Nairobi as a whole or of 113 for rural Kenya – gives some idea of what all this means in practice¹⁵

Question: How can we ensure that efforts to meet the health MDGs not only focus on curative health, but also the preventative health benefits of improving living conditions?

MDG7 - Ensure environmental sustainability

"There can be no sustainable development without sustainable urbanisation" Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, Mr Ransford Smith, statement on World Habitat Day 2006, Monday, 2nd October.

There are two targets under MDG7 that specifically address urban 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.

However, the existence and growth of slums has wider environmental implications. Because of the lack of access to secure land, millions of urban poor are forced to live on marginal land, vulnerable to flooding, landslides and other environmental hazards. The lack of adequate sanitation in slums results in the pollution of groundwater, watercourses and coastlines. The environmental impact of poor sanitation in unplanned urban settlements may be hidden in statistics that consider access to "improved sanitation". A report on MDGs in the Pacific argues that its data on sanitation facilities is evaluated using different definitions of "improved sanitation", specifically excluding pit toilets, in seven Pacific Island Countries less than half the population have access. It notes that *"Acceptable densities and separation distances suggested by studies relevant to tropical islands are exceeded in many PICs¹⁶, especially in urban areas"* ¹⁷.

Question: What will be the impact of urbanisation and growing slums on wider environmental concerns?

¹² United Nations (2005) The Millennium Development Goals Report 2005, New York: United Nations, p. 34 [emphasis added] (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/pdf/MDG%20Book.pdf>)

¹³ UN-Habitat (2006) *State of the World's Cities Report 2006/07*, London: Earthscan, p. 53

¹⁴ UN-Habitat (2006) *State of the World's Cities Report 2006/07*, London: Earthscan, p. 52-53

¹⁵ African Population and Health Research Center, 'Population and Health Dynamics in Nairobi's Informal Settlements', Report of the Nairobi Cross-sectional Slums Survey (NCSS) 2000, African Population and Health Research Center, Nairobi, April 2002, p. xvi

¹⁶ Pacific Island Countries.

¹⁷ Secretariat of the Pacific Community, UNDP & UN/CROP MDG Working Group (2004) Pacific Islands Regional Millennium Development Goals Report 2004, Noumea: SPC, p. 113

MDG8 - A global partnership for development

Not only has the Commonwealth made a commitment to realising the Millennium Development Goals, it has also adopted a specific Goal on human settlements issues: “*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 Targets¹⁸ did not include slums, water or sanitation.

This paper has demonstrated that urbanisation and the growth of slums affect the chances of realising all the MDGs and tackling environmental degradation. The appendix contains extracts from the Sachs report on how slum upgrading, urban planning and water and sanitation interventions can contribute to all the MDGs. However, urban areas also provide considerable opportunities to tackle poverty and build an infrastructure for long-term economic growth and sustainable development¹⁹.

Question: How can the Commonwealth ensure that urbanisation and slums are considered as key issues in efforts to meet the MDGs?

Question: Is the Commonwealth demonstrably working towards the human settlements goal that it set itself, working in partnership with other actors? If not, what more can be done?

¹⁸ The International Development Targets were a precursor to the MDGs first outlined by OECD's Development Assistance Committee.

¹⁹ Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) *PRSPs, Human Settlements and Urban Poverty*, Submission of ComHabitat to the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Meeting, FMM(05)(INF)1.

Appendix 1: How human settlements interventions can help achieve the MDGs (extracts from the Sachs report)²⁰

Goal & Target	Slum upgrading and urban planning	Water and sanitation
Income poverty (MDG1, Target 1)	Providing security of tenure can improve labor market participation and access to credit markets. Urban infrastructure, including transport systems, is necessary for establishing manufacturing and service industries.	
Hunger (MDG1, Target 2)	Slum upgrading and accompanying interventions help raise incomes and reduce urban hunger. Improved transport infrastructure lowers the cost of food products, further reducing hunger.	Safe drinking water reduces the incidence of diarrheal diseases, which contribute to malnourishment. Drinking water supplied through wells and boreholes can help irrigate fields during droughts. Access to sanitation reduces the incidence of diarrheal disease and thereby increases nutrient uptake. Integrated water resources management sustains adequate water supply for agriculture. Water storage and water management infrastructure improve water management for agriculture.
Primary education (MDG2, Target 4)	Security of land tenure and a fixed address are often necessary for children to be allowed to attend school.	Improved access to water frees up children's time, thus allowing them to attend school. Improved health through sanitation and hygiene reduces school absenteeism. Installing girls' toilets in schools can increase girls' enrollment and completion rates.
Gender equality (MDG3, target 4)	Women benefit disproportionately from slum upgrading, since it reduces their transport burden and time-poverty, improves their health, and provides them with additional income-generating opportunities.	Improved access to water generates time savings for women and girls. Improved access to water reduces the need to carry heavy loads over long distances, thus improving women's health. Increasing access to toilets reduces women's exposure to harassment and improves personal hygiene and well-being.
Child mortality (MDG4, target 5)	Slum upgrading, improved urban infrastructure, and access to basic services (including solid waste disposal) can reduce exposure to pollutants and thereby reduce child mortality rates. Road curbing and street lighting can reduce traffic deaths.	Access to clean water, sanitation, and improved hygiene reduce the incidence of waterborne disease.
Maternal mortality (MDG5, target 6)	Slum upgrading and security of land tenure improve women's access to health systems and emergency obstetric care.	Running water and sanitation facilities are essential for provision of prenatal care and emergency obstetric care. Access to sanitation and hygienic behavior improve women's health
HIV/AIDS (MDG6, target 7)	Slum upgrading and security of land tenure improve access to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention.	Improving access to clean water and sanitation improves the nutritional status of people with HIV.
Malaria and other major diseases	Improving housing and urban water management infrastructure can reduce the incidence of malaria and	Improved water management in urban areas can contribute to containing mosquito breeding sites and transmission.

²⁰ UN Millennium Project (2005) *Investing in Development: A practical plan to achieve the millennium development goals*, New York: UNDP, pp. 281-293

(MDG6, target 8)	especially TB (which has a higher rate of transmission in overcrowded slum conditions). Slum upgrading improves access to appropriate malaria and TB treatment.	
Reverse loss of environmental resources (MDG7, target 9)	Slum upgrading and improved urban water and waste management infrastructure reduce environmental pollution.	Improved sanitation and sewage treatment can reduce environmental pollution. Integrated water resources management can maintain ecosystem functioning. Hydrological monitoring systems can help protect aquifers and freshwater ecosystems from excessive withdrawals.
Water and sanitation (MDG7, target 10)	Slum upgrading reduces water pollution and improves drinking water quality. Improved urban infrastructure ensures the separation of sewage from drinking water supplies.	<i>Water and sanitation interventions.</i> Provide, operate, and maintain water and sanitation infrastructure and services in conjunction with behavior change programs to improve household hygiene.
Improve the lives of slum dwellers (MDG7, target 11)	<i>Urban investments and slum-upgrading.</i> Scale up slum-upgrading with the support of improved urban planning and investments in core urban infrastructure as well as basic services.	Improved access to water supply and sanitation services can reduce household expenditure on water. Sewage treatment can further improve health outcomes in urban areas. Storm water drainage system are improved through sanitation infrastructure, thus minimizing the risk of flooding.