

How to meet the Millennium Development Goals in urban areas

SUMMARY: This Brief is on how to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in urban areas – both in the informal settlements where those with unmet needs are concentrated and at a city scale. A large and growing proportion of those with unmet needs for water, sanitation, health care and schools live in urban areas. Addressing this will require local governments that are more competent, accountable and able to work in partnership with urban poor groups and their organizations. A growing number of precedents show how this can be done, including:

- the nationwide Baan Mankong (secure tenure) programme in Thailand that aims to reach 300,000 urban poor households in five years through community-directed upgrading or new-house developments;
- a slum-upgrading framework in Mumbai, implemented through partnerships between local government and federations of slum and pavement dwellers;
- new institutions in Central America that finance upgrading and affordable new-house developments for low-income groups (to date, these have reached 400,000 people); and
- the initiative by the Methodist Church in South Africa to work with the homeless people's federation to allocate land to homeless groups.

In many nations, representative organizations of the urban poor have demonstrated more effective and less costly ways of meeting the MDG, especially where local governments work with them and international agencies have learnt how to support them.

I. WHERE ARE THE LOCAL CHANGES ON WHICH MEETING THE MDGS DEPEND?

IN URBAN AREAS, it is locally applied government rules and procedures that determine whether low-income households can send their children to school and afford to keep them there; whether they can get treatment when ill or injured; whether they are connected to water, sanitation and drainage networks; whether their neighbourhoods have street lights and electricity; whether they can build homes legally on safe sites; whether they can avoid eviction; whether they can vote and have access to politicians and civil servants; whether they are protected from violence and crime (including corruption) by a just rule of law; whether they can influence development projects. The performance of local schools, health care centres and water and sanitation providers determines whether many of the MDG targets are met. Just halting and reversing the spread of AIDS will involve huge changes in the kinds of support that local organizations provide. Local organizations also have important influences on whether many other targets are met – for instance, whether there are effective strategies to combat malnutrition, to work with youth and to ensure that everyone has access to essential drugs. So success in meeting most of the MDGs depends on more effective and accountable local governments, and local offices of higher levels of government.

Thus, two critical questions are:

- how to make local organizations more effective and more pro-poor, or less anti-poor; and
- how can higher levels of government and international agencies support this?

Of course, the MDGs will not be met without larger changes – for instance, to global trade regimes and debt burdens. But the effectiveness of such changes is largely determined by whether they help make local bodies more effective in meeting local needs and more accountable to those with unmet needs. Of course, local government should not provide for all needs. But in urban areas, it has a major influence on how local markets operate, including those that have particular importance for low-income groups – for instance, for land for housing, for water and, in many instances, for building materials, credit, public transport and electricity. It influences the scale, scope and effectiveness of what organizations formed by the urban poor can do. And what these organizations can do is central to meeting the MDGs in urban areas.

This is a Brief of the April 2005 issue of the journal *Environment&Urbanization*. It draws on the papers in this issue (which are listed on the back page, along with details of how to obtain electronic copies of individual papers or the whole issue). This summary, produced with the support of the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DANIDA) and the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID), is to allow the journal's main findings to reach a wider audience.

1. Satterthwaite, David (2004), *The under-estimation of urban poverty in low- and middle-income nations*, IIED Working Paper 14 on Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas, IIED, London, 69 pages. This can be downloaded at no charge from http://www.iied.org/urban/pubs/urban_pov.html

2. Lipton, Michael (1977), *Why Poor People Stay Poor – Urban Bias in World Development*, Temple Smith, London.

3. For details of water and sanitation deficiencies, see UN-Habitat (2003), *Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities; Local Action for Global Goals*, Earthscan Publications, London, 274 pages.

4. See the Table on page 66 of reference 1, which was compiled by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health from Demographic and Health Survey data accessed at <http://www.measuredhs.com/> using the statistical compiler (STATcompiler) on this site.

5. See the paper by Sundar Burra listed on the back page.

6. Roy, A N, A Jockin and Ahmad Javed (2004), "Community police stations in Mumbai's slums", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 16, No 2, October, pages 135–138.

7. Patel, Sheela, Celine d'Cruz and Sundar Burra (2002), "Beyond evictions in a global city; people-managed resettlement in Mumbai", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 14, No 1, April, pages 159–172. This can be freely accessed at www.ingentaconnect.com/content/iied/eau/2002/00000014/00000001

8. See the paper by Sundar Burra listed on the back page.

9. See the paper by Jean du Plessis listed on the back page.

10. See the papers by Sundar Burra and by Somsook Boonyabancha, listed on the back page.

II. THE SCALE OF NEED

THE SCALE OF deprivation in urban areas has long been underestimated, in part because of inappropriate poverty definitions – especially poverty lines set without regard for the cost of non-food needs.⁽¹⁾ Many international agencies do not support poverty reduction in urban areas because they believe that their populations benefit from "urban bias". But since the mid-1970s, when development agencies were first accused of urban bias,⁽²⁾ the urban population in low- and middle-income nations has increased by 1.5 billion, while the rural population increased by 770 million. A very large proportion of this much-expanded urban population lacks provision for schools, health care, water and sanitation.⁽³⁾ A large, and probably growing, proportion of the world's population who suffer from very high under-five and maternal mortality rates, malnutrition and AIDS, TB and other major diseases live in urban areas. In many low-income nations, infant and child mortality rates in urban areas are not much different from those in rural areas.⁽⁴⁾

III. MAKING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS LESS ANTI-POOR

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE important for their capacity both to reduce poverty and to increase it. This is illustrated by recent events in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) where, since December 2004, the municipal corporation has been implementing a very large forced evictions and slum demolition programme. Yet this is the same municipal government that is working with federations of slum and pavement dwellers on projects to house more than 50,000 of the poorest households.⁽⁵⁾ It is also the city where the police commissioner has been working with committees of slum residents to set up police stations in slums.⁽⁶⁾ This is the city that pioneered new forms of resettlement for thousands of low-income households who had to move to allow improvements in infrastructure, but who were fully involved in the planning and management of the resettlement.⁽⁷⁾ These evictions in Mumbai are an example of how not to meet the MDGs. It is also difficult to see how they can serve the chief minister's apparent intention to make Mumbai a successful global city. Developing partnerships with urban poor organizations to find mutually acceptable and affordable solutions to improving conditions in slums⁽⁸⁾ would contribute far more to Mumbai's international success.

Every year, millions of people are forcibly evicted by "development" projects, leaving them homeless, and entrenching patterns of poverty, discrimination and social exclusion.⁽⁹⁾ It is difficult for anyone who has not experienced forced eviction to appreciate the consequences – not only the lost homes or the damaged or destroyed possessions, but also the broken social networks, the compromised livelihoods and the loss of access to services. Often added to this are the injuries sustained during the evictions, and the risks in the locations where the evictees move to, which are often tents and plastic shacks with no provision for services.

Governments justify evictions as being for "the public good": to support city regeneration; to improve health and safety or to reduce crime; to develop needed infrastructure. But those whose homes are bulldozed also want improved health and safety, better infrastructure and a more successful economy; most also want the rule of law. Many would be happy to move, as they live on land at risk of floods or landslides or on pavements – as long as they can help determine to where, when and how. A real engagement with urban poor groups can allow land to be freed up for improving infrastructure or urban regeneration, but in ways that also benefit the urban poor.⁽¹⁰⁾ So meeting their needs is also part of the "public good". In most instances, the problem is not the cost of resettlement (which is generally very low compared to the cost of redevelopment) but the incapacity of city governments to change their approach. This does not address the hidden motives for most evictions, which might claim to be for the public good, when they are clearing poorer groups off valuable land sites from which powerful vested interests will make large profits. Evictions are also driven by middle-class groups who do not want the poor living near them (even as they still want domestic workers and cheap services). Neither does including the urban poor in redevelopment plans appeal to politicians and bureaucrats, who believe that "poor people" move to cities for illogical reasons, despite four decades of research showing that migration flows are logical and usually carefully planned responses to changing economic circumstances. Of course, people move to cities if cities are the centres where most new investments are concentrated – as is the case in most low- and middle-income nations.

IV. HOW TO MEET THE MDGS IN URBAN AREAS

a. Another way to do urban development

THERE IS ANOTHER way to plan, implement and manage urban development: with local governments listening to and working with urban poor households and their organizations. There

11. See www.sdinet.org/home.htm for details of the work of the different federations.

12. See www.sdinet.org/home.htm; many papers in *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 13, No 2, Vol 16, No 1 and Vol 17, No 1 describe the work of the different federations.

13. See the paper by Jessica Budds with Paulo Teixeira listed on the back page.

14. See the paper by Geoff Payne listed on the back page.

15. See the papers by Geoff Payne and by Sundar Burra listed on the back page.

16. See the paper by Joel Bolnick and Greg Van Rensburg listed on the back page.

are good examples of this going back more than three decades, but they have become more common in the last 10–15 years and have demonstrated their capacity to “go to scale”. In part, this is because far more urban authorities have elected councillors and mayors than 30 years ago. But perhaps as importantly, in increasing numbers of nations there are representative organizations of the urban poor that want to work with urban governments in addressing their members’ needs.⁽¹¹⁾ There are also many examples of effective partnership between urban authorities and urban poor federations – in upgrading, in new-house developments that poor households can afford, and in improved water and sanitation and other services.⁽¹²⁾ This combination of more pro-poor local governments and more organized urban poor groups is one of the keys to meeting the MDGs in urban areas.

In Thailand, a national programme supports partnerships between urban poor organizations and local governments. The *Baan Mankong* (“secure housing”) programme channels infrastructure subsidies and housing loans direct to poor communities, who plan and carry out improvements. It is unusual in that it is a national programme that supports locally driven solutions in which urban poor communities have a central role. It seeks to improve housing, living and tenure security for 300,000 households in 2,000 poor communities in 200 cities within five years – the kind of scale needed if the MDGs are to be met.

A focus on supporting urban poor households to obtain legal housing (and legal land tenure) is important not only for improving living conditions but also for the MDG targets relating to water and sanitation, and access to health care and schools – as official service providers often refuse to serve those living in illegal settlements because they lack legal addresses. In the Thai programme, the means by which those in illegal settlements obtain legal land is locally determined – for instance, by purchasing the land they occupy, supported by a government loan; by negotiating a community lease; by agreeing to move to a part of the site they occupy in return for tenure (land sharing); or by moving to another location provided by the government agency on whose land they were squatting.

Another example of the kind of programme needed to meet the MDGs is from São Paulo City. This included major programmes for upgrading, legalizing land tenure, and inner-city redevelopment that reached some 250,000 low-income households between 2000 and 2004. But perhaps as important as these programmes was the government recognition that these needed to be underpinned by new legislation, more effective coordination between different government agencies, new financial instruments, a modernized administrative system, partnerships with the private sector, and more scope for citizen participation in all decision-making and implementation processes.⁽¹³⁾

b. Land: getting tenure or land for new housing for low-income groups

Informal settlements are the result of people being priced out of legal land and housing markets. Economic success in a city pushes up land prices because of the competition for the best-located sites. But much of the population has incomes that are too low to allow them to spend much on housing or on land on which they can construct their own housing. Government measures can help increase the supply and reduce the cost of land for housing through expanding infrastructure networks and changing standards (for example, reducing minimum plot sizes and infrastructure standards) and procedures (for example, reducing the time and financial cost of getting permission to develop land or to build, or of getting legal tenure of land on which they already live).⁽¹⁴⁾ But in most cities, governments do not do this. The MDGs will not be met unless those living in illegal settlements can get tenure and infrastructure, and unless a higher proportion of lower-income households can enter official land-for-housing markets.

City politicians and civil servants often claim that there is no land available for housing for urban poor groups – but many detailed surveys have shown this to be untrue.⁽¹⁵⁾ It is also common for large amounts of vacant land to be in public ownership – although much of it may be owned by national rather than by local government agencies as, for example, in Mumbai, by the railway, port and airport authorities and the military. In many cities, religious institutions are major landowners. The Methodist Church in South Africa is currently working with the South African Homeless People’s Federation to identify and allocate vacant land it owns to housing projects for homeless families and, in rural areas, to support livelihoods. This is important not only for the new land it could provide to low-income households but also for encouraging more action from the government on land redistribution and tenure reform, and in setting an example that other churches may follow.⁽¹⁶⁾

c. Financing alternatives to “slums” for low-income groups

Complete, legal houses are too expensive for most urban households. The only way that most can afford new housing is to build it themselves, incrementally, on land occupied or developed illegally. It usually takes many years before a good quality house is built and before land tenure and infrastructure and services are negotiated. Finance systems can speed up the process, as shown

17. See the paper by Alfredo Stein with Luis Castillo listed on the back page.

18. For more details, see the paper by Alfredo Stein with Luis Castillo listed on the back page.

19. This is also at the core of the success of Orangi Pilot Project's work with urban authorities all over Pakistan, because it reduces the dependence of urban authorities on external funding. See Hasan, Arif (1997), *Working with Government: The Story of the Orangi Pilot Project's Collaboration with State Agencies for Replicating its Low-Cost Sanitation Programme*, City Press, Karachi, 269 pages.

20. See the paper by Sundar Burra listed on the back page.

21. This section on the importance of city-wide action is drawn from the paper by Somsook Boonyabancha that is listed on the back page. This paper can be downloaded at no charge from http://www.iied.org/human/eandu/sample_pubs.html

22. See, for instance, ACHR/Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (2004), "Negotiating the right to stay in the city", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 16, No 1, April, pages 9–26; also Weru, Jane (2004), "Community federations and city upgrading: the work of Pamoja Trust and Muungano in Kenya", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 16, No 1, April, pages 47–62.

by a range of institutions in different Central American nations that provide loans to low-income families to improve or expand their homes or build new ones. With US\$ 50 million from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), some 400,000 people have been reached.⁽¹⁷⁾ The external funding was complemented by each family's own resources and, in some instances, by government housing subsidies to low-income households. In some nations, grants were provided to local governments for infrastructure and services, as long as communities participated in the decision-making and implementation process. These programmes and the loan components of the secure housing programme in Thailand described earlier show that:

- low-income groups can benefit from loan finance and can repay loans, if loan conditions are tailored to their needs and capacities to pay;
- good levels of cost-recovery are achievable and important, as recovered funding supports more low-income households;
- financial support for upgrading and new-house development calls for different ways of determining costs and interest rates than conventional microfinance;⁽¹⁸⁾
- loans can be blended with transparent and focused subsidies to the poor; and
- alternative forms of collateral are required. Conventional housing finance agencies usually require official land tenure documents before loans are provided, and often proof that the house structure is legal – which obviously disqualifies much of the urban population from getting loans.

Most community-driven initiatives try to minimize unit costs – for housing construction or improvement and for all forms of infrastructure – because this reduces the gap between what can be provided and what poorer groups can afford.⁽¹⁹⁾ In part, this is because so little funding is available to support urban projects, so whatever is made available has to be used well – and used to leverage resources from other institutions. In part, it is because any initiative that can recover costs has more potential to greatly increase its scale and coverage – and the less the external funding, generally the greater the influence by urban poor groups as to what is done.

But it is nonsense to think that full cost-recovery is always possible for measures that really benefit the poorest groups who have the least capacity to pay for infrastructure (for instance, through connection fees) or to repay loans. It is also unrealistic to think that most formal private sector financial institutions can reach low-income households. Even if such households have perfect loan repayment records, the loans they need are too small to cover "for-profit" institutions' administration costs and these households cannot provide the guarantees that loan-providing agencies find convenient.

What is needed is a system that minimizes the need for subsidies and that uses subsidies in ways that reach low-income households with "alternatives to slums". Formal private sector financial institutions may be able to support collective initiatives by urban poor groups because this lowers transaction costs – for instance, a loan to a savings group of 150 households to buy land, with the savings group managing repayments. They can also provide financial underpinning for larger schemes.⁽²⁰⁾

V. HOW TO MEET THE MDGS AT SCALE; THE IMPORTANCE OF CITY-WIDE ACTION

THE *BAAN MANKONG* programme in Thailand demonstrates why city-wide action is needed.⁽²¹⁾ Not only does it allow larger-scale action, but it also gives urban poor groups more possibilities to become involved, and increases the scope for what they can negotiate and what they can do themselves.

Step one in any city-wide programme is to build an information base on the conditions in all of the areas with poor quality housing. In Thailand and in many other nations, community organizations and their networks or federations have shown how to do very detailed "slum surveys", in ways that fully involve the inhabitants.⁽²²⁾ This provides the information base for a city-wide programme and:

- develops linkages between all the urban poor communities;
- makes apparent the differences between the many "slums", and what causes these. This allows solutions to be tailored to each group's needs and circumstances – instead of the usual "standard" upgrading package that governments try to apply to all settlements; and
- allows urban poor communities to help choose which settlements will be upgraded first. If urban poor groups are not involved in these choices, those that are not selected will feel excluded and often resentful.

Step two is pilot projects. These are often criticized for never moving beyond the pilot phase. When designed and implemented by external agencies, this is often the case. But if pilot projects are planned within city-wide processes involving urban poor organizations, they are centres of experiment and learning that become precedents and catalysts for action elsewhere. Observing the first pilot projects can encourage other urban poor groups to start a savings group, to develop their

23. Burra, Sundar, Sheela Patel and Tom Kerr (2003), "Community-designed, built and managed toilet blocks in Indian cities", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 15, No 2, October, pages 11–32. This can be downloaded at no charge from http://www.iied.org/human/eandu/sample_pubs.html

24. As the former mayor of Villa el Salvador in Peru noted: "Community leaders so far have been demand-making leaders... So if there is no drinking water, they organize marches to demand drinking water... But times have changed... We need leaders willing to take responsibility for our city, leaders that come up with development proposals... We all – citizens, entrepreneurs, NGOs, authorities – have to consider ourselves protagonists of change, with a shared responsibility to develop our city" – see the paper by Michaela Hordijk listed on the back page.

25. See the paper by Genevieve Connors listed on the back page.

26. See the papers by Sundar Burra, by Somsook Boonyabanha and by Michaela Hordijk listed on the back page.

27. See the paper by Sundar Burra, listed on the back page.

own survey, to undertake a project – because they see "people like them" designing and implementing these. For instance, in India, government support for hundreds of community sanitation blocks in Pune and Mumbai and for the community-managed relocation programmes were catalysed by pilot projects developed by urban poor groups.⁽²³⁾

City-wide consultations, data gathering and pilot projects strengthen the horizontal linkages between urban poor communities. Thus, urban poor groups engage individually and collectively with city governments in discussing city-wide programmes. This is no longer the hierarchical system that has long isolated them. Rather than restricting interaction to negotiations between particular urban poor groups and the politicians or civil servants responsible for their district, it allows the kinds of negotiations at city level that can address the urban poor's problems of land tenure, infrastructure, housing and services at the city scale. This is not easily achieved. City governments and professionals find it difficult to see urban poor organizations as key partners. City politicians find it difficult to no longer be the "patron" dispensing "projects" to their constituency. Traditional community leaders may resent their loss of power.⁽²⁴⁾ But this kind of city-wide process allows the jump in scale from isolated upgrading projects to city-wide strategies, and builds the partnerships between urban poor organizations and local governments to support a continuous process.

VI. UPGRADING RELATIONSHIPS AS WELL AS "SLUMS"

REAL SLUM AND squatter upgrading changes urban poor groups' relationships with city authorities and politicians, shifting from conventional patronage-based relationships with political parties and local governments to relationships that are more transparent and accountable. This change in relationships is at the centre of the *Baan Mankong* and São Paulo programmes outlined above. It is also at the core of an initiative in Bangalore to transform the way in which the water utility views slum dwellers and works with them.⁽²⁵⁾

These changed relationships also depend on urban poor groups becoming organized and developing the confidence to make demands, to negotiate solutions that suit them and to do things themselves.⁽²⁶⁾ In many nations, community-managed savings groups have facilitated this, and they also form the basis for most of the urban poor federations. Savings groups managed by the urban poor are important not only for the emergency credit they provide members but also for helping groups learn to work together. Being able to manage finance collectively for their own development means that, for once, it is not someone else who is making the decisions about how funds are used. This develops community capacity to determine priorities, transparently manage external finance, negotiate with city authorities and other groups, and plan their own initiatives. And as they negotiate solutions (for instance, to get tenure of the land they occupy) and develop their own building and upgrading programmes (keeping unit costs to a minimum), so the value of their savings and their capacity to make regular payments becomes so important. Urban poor groups and their representatives also have to change their relationships with each other – rather than seeing other poor settlements as competitors for resources, they become allies and co-learners, working with each other.

VII. CAN INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES SUPPORT PRO-POOR LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS?

IT IS NOT easy for aid agencies and development banks to support these kinds of local processes. Their structures were not set up to do so. There is a huge physical, conceptual and institutional distance between those facing serious deprivation and these agencies' decision-making processes and management. This can be resolved by channelling funding through intermediary institutions located in recipient countries, which can work in partnership with low-income groups and their organizations – for once, with donors having to be accountable and transparent down to poorer groups as well as up to the governments that oversee them. Some donors recognize this – for instance, the support from Sida for various Central American institutions mentioned above. The external funding provided was not large given the number of people reached in many different locations in five nations. What was unusual was the long-term support for local institutions, and the focus on ensuring that funds were recovered for re-use wherever possible. Another example of an intermediary local institution is the Community-Led Infrastructure Finance Facility (CLIFF), through which British and Swedish bilateral aid fund community-driven development in India.⁽²⁷⁾

In many nations, more external funding will be needed to support the kinds of community-driven processes described above. But international agencies must recognize that the less funding they contribute the better, and that effective community-driven processes must not be subject to external pressure to spend quickly. It also means recognizing that international funding requirements may suddenly increase considerably if circumstances allow a much-increased scale of locally determined development – and this requires a quicker response than most funding agencies are currently able to provide.

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