GLOBAL SLUM DWELLERS

Contents

1. *Scale of global slum dwelling*

Precisely calculating the worldwide number of slum residents – considering both their proportions in relation to the total population and their absolute figures continues to pose a difficult endeavor, leading to substantial variations in estimations.

Currently, more than half of the world's population resides in urban areas, and this rate is projected to rise to 68 percent by 2050[1]. Presently, around 1.1 billion individuals are living in slums or slum-like conditions within cities, and it is anticipated that an additional 2 billion will join them in the next three decades.[2] This marks a considerable increase from the 881 million slum dwellers worldwide recorded in 2015[3].

The available data concerning global slum development generally indicates a dual trend. In real terms, the number of slum dwellers has grown since the turn of the millennium, yet the proportion of people living in such conditions has decreased.

The proportion of the global urban population that resides in slums decreased by 20 per cent between 2000 and 2014, dropping from 28 per cent to 23 per cent during that period[4]. These results support the common belief that slum living has decreased proportionally in the twenty-first century.

However, more recent estimates suggest a reversal of this positive trajectory. In 2018, this optimistic trend took a downturn, and the proportion of slum dwellers rose to 23.5 percent[5].

The 2018 increase in the global proportion of slum dwellers can be attributed to a shift in trends in North Africa and Western Asia, and to a lesser extent, in sub-Saharan Africa[6]. In other regions, the proportion of slum dwellers continued to decrease, although at a much slower pace than before[7]. (See Figure 1).
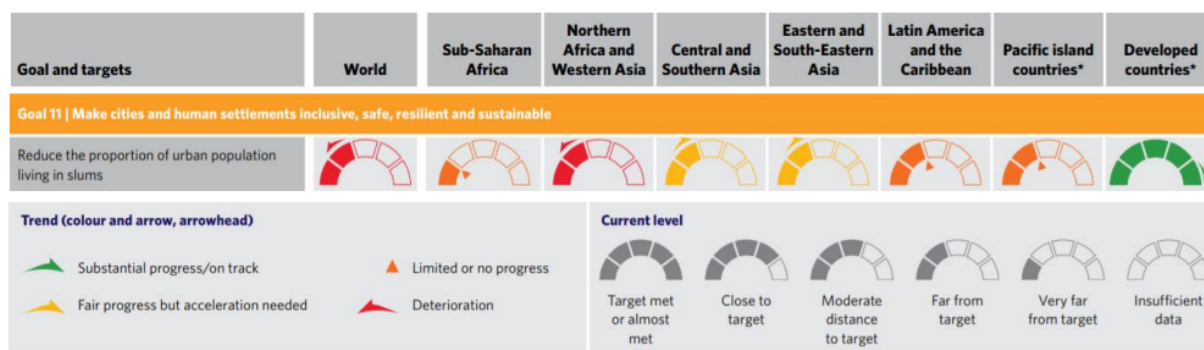

Figure 1: Progress chart of Target 11.1 (Source: UN (2020) Sustainable Development Goals Progress Chart https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/progress-chart-2020.pdf).

---

[1] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2018, May 16).
https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html
[2] United Nations Statistics Division. (2023). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023. United Nations.
https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf
[3] United Nations. (2015). The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015. United Nations.
https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf
[4] United Nations. (2019). Sustainable Development Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. United Nations.
https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-11/#:~:text=The%20absolute%20number%20of%20people,Southern%20Asia%20(227%20million)).
[5] Ibid.
[6] United Nations. (2020). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020. (p.48).
https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf
[7] Ibid., p.48.

The battle is far from over. Slums are pervasive across all regions of the Global South, transcending any specific continent or area.

Over two-thirds of these slum dwellers are concentrated in Asia, with a substantial number located in East and Southeast Asia (around 370 million, with a notable share in China), and Central and South Asia (around 230 million, with a significant share in India)[8]. Sub-Saharan Africa also houses a considerable slum population of 238 million[9]. These datasets show a relatively even distribution of slum dwellers across the three most prominent regions in the field.

However, there are notable differences in levels of slum dwelling as a proportion of the urban population across these regions.

The highest proportion of slum dwellers is found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where over half of the urban population (56.5 percent) resides in slums or informal housing conditions[10]. In Central and South Asia, the proportion of slum dwellers in the urban population reaches nearly one-third (31.2 percent)[11]. About a quarter of the urban population in East and Southeast Asia, North Africa, Western Asia, and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) reside in slum households. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this proportion is approximately one-fifth, at 20.9 percent[12]. This supports the findings that the phenomenon is more prominent within African towns and cities than in their counterparts in other slum-prominent regions.

Despite Africa's cities containing the most slum dwellers per capita, neither of the countries with the largest population of slum dwellers are on the continent. Orangi Town, Karachi, Pakistan (with 2.4 million people), Ciudad Neza in Mexico (with 1.2 million people) and Dharavi, India's 100 million slum represent the largest totals in any country[13]. However, these high figures are reflective of each countries' large populations. In proportional terms, 6 out 10 countries with the highest populations of slum dwellers are in Africa, with Kibera, Kenya topping the list with 700,000 people[14]. It has in fact been called Africa's largest slum, where: nearly half the population is without work; there is no garbage collection; and there is limited access to clean water.

However, studies have found no evidence that the location of a slum determines the size of a slum within it. Friesen et al. have undertaken a detailed study into the size distribution of slums in different cities across the world and found that there is no regional characteristic which determines the size of a slum. Their findings highlight that 86% of slums in the world span a geographic area between 0.0085 km² and 0.0198 km², indicating that the majority of slums amount to collections of smaller areas that are distinct from one another[15], as opposed to the larger settlements outlined above.

It is therefore clear from these numbers and trends that slum conditions are prominent across all regions and warrant urgent action

[8] Habitat for Humanity International. (2021). SDG Progress Report (p. 11). https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/SDG%20Progress%20Report_0.pdf
[9] United Nations Statistics Division. (2019). Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019: Goal 11. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-11/
[10] Habitat for Humanity International. (2021). SDG Progress Report (p. 12). https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/SDG%20Progress%20Report_0.pdf
[11] Ibid, p.12.
[12] Ibid, p.12.
[13] Borgen Project.10 Worst Slums in the World. Borgen Project. https://borgenproject.org/10-worst-slums-in-the-world/
[14] Ibid.
[15] Friesen, John et al. (2019) *Size Distributions of slums across the globe using different data and classification methods:* European Journal of Remote Sensing v.52 n. 2 pp.99-111

2. *Definitions*

Broadly, a 'slum' is a form of urban poverty in a developing region. A 'slum', for the purpose of analysis, is not rural and is not in the developed world; however, both these contexts do contain households which exhibit 'slum-like' characteristics.

Within this frame, UN-Habitat defines a 'slum' as when a household possesses at least one of the following 'deprivations'[16]:

- Lack of access to **improved water source** – meaning a source protected from outside contamination, e.g., faecal matter
- Lack of access to **improved sanitation facilities** – meaning a facility that 'hygienically separates human waste from human contact', e.g., a flush toilet, or a latrine connected to a closed sewer or septic tank
- Lack of **sufficient living area** – meaning no more than three people in a room that is at least four-square metres, or six people to eight square metres etc.
- Lack of **housing durability** – meaning being built on a non-hazardous location and a structure able to withstand various climatic conditions
- Lack of **secure tenure** – meaning right to effective protection against unlawful eviction

The final part of the definition, "secure tenure", is the most difficult to assess and is not currently used in slum measurements[17]. Thus, the above statistics are a global minimum, and the scale of slum dwellings is in fact higher - likely, much higher.

The UN-Habitat definition is seen as too restrictive by some. In reality, 'the local context matters, and different countries adopt their own definitions'[18]. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, for example, categorizes an area as a 'slum' simply if it is 'unplanned'.[19] Further, what a slum dwelling looks like is highly variable. Within Dhaka alone, slum homes vary from thatched huts to sturdier kacha houses (mixture of wood, mud and straw), through to pukka houses (conferring solid construction material such as stone or cement).[20] In this way, while UN-Habitat's precise definition is helpful in gathering data, it is important to be cognizant of local understanding. The five-part criteria are best used as a reference for common characteristics, rather than a rigid formula.

3. *Slum Dwellers and Homelessness*

There is debate over whether to define slum dwellers as 'homeless'. Slum dwellers are included in the Framework established by the Institute of Global Homelessness[21]. Bush-Geertsema, Culhane and Fitzpatrick, who composed the Framework, at a base level consider an individual to be 'homeless' if they are 'living in severely inadequate housing…'[22] Their understanding of 'inadequate housing' shares many of the 'household deprivations' identified in the above definition of a slum by the UN:

---

[16] World Urban Campaign, 'Slum Almanac', pp.2-3.

[17] United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2020). Indicator 11.1.1 Training Module: Adequate Housing and Slum Upgrading. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/06/indicator_11.1.1_training_module_adequate_housing_and_slum_upgrading.pdf

[18] Bird, J., Montebruno, P., and Regan, T., 'Life in a slum: understanding living conditions in Nairobi's slums across time and space', Oxford Review of Economic Policy 33:3 (2017), p. 497.

[19] Ibid., p. 502.

[20] Kamruzzaman, M., & Hakim, M. A. (2016). Socio-economic Status of Slum Dwellers: An Empirical Study on the Capital City of Bangladesh.1. 13-18.

[21] This is in Category 3H: 'People living in non-conventional buildings and temporary structures, *including those living in slums*/informal settlements' (my emphasis).

[22] Bush-Geertsema, V., Culhane, D., and Fitzpatrick, S., 'Developing a global framework for conceptualising and measuring homelessness', *Habitat International* 55 (2016), p. 125.

this includes insecure tenure, lack of protection from adverse weather, poor provision of services and more.

Despite this, the authors urge a distinction within this broad definition between the literal 'homeless' and the 'inadequately housed': slum dwellers are the latter. This draws a meaningful distinction between people living **without accommodation** (or in temporary accommodation as a result), and people living in **inadequate accommodation**. While this distinction is contentious, the literal 'homeless' suffer from the UN's 'household deprivations' because they lack accommodation entirely, rather than because the accommodation they do have is of poor quality. There are similarities between the needs of those without any accommodation and those in inadequate accommodation, but there are also differences which need to be acknowledged at this definitional level.

This distinction is also useful as 'homeless' people lack organisations and networks which advocate for them. In contrast, slum dwellers have been comparatively well-represented at governmental and supranational level for several decades (see 'The International Response', below). Any organisation seeking to end homelessness therefore needs to consider how not to subsume the unique and specific needs of those **without accommodation** into the better-represented discussion concerning **inadequate accommodation**, whilst still tying both into the wider theme of affordable housing.

4. *Causes*

The reasons behind the prevalence of slum dwellings are many but three are primary: population growth; rapid urbanisation; and poor planning.

Populations are growing across the developing world, and urban housing is not keeping up with demand. This is why the number of individuals living in slums has increased, even as the proportion of urban residents living in slums has fallen significantly since 2000. As the global urban population increases, the number of those who make slums their home will increase with it. A joint UN HABITAT/OECD study, published in 2017, found that a 1% increase of urbanisation will lead to a 1.8% increase in the prevalence of slums[23].

The rapid pace of urbanisation presents a range of difficulties. These challenges encompass addressing the rapidly growing need for affordable housing, establishing sustainable infrastructure such as transportation networks and essential utilities, and generating employment opportunities. Access to these opportunities and resources are especially pertinent for the nearly 1 billion living in urban informal settlements.

Ninety per cent of urban growth worldwide is happening in developing countries. In developing regions, 52 per cent of the population currently resides in urban areas. This figure is expected to grow to 57 per cent in 2030 and to 66 per cent in 2050[24]. Already, half of the people in Asia live in urban areas, and the urban populations of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are expected to double in the next 20 years.[25] However, urbanisation does hold opportunities for the poor. Employment opportunities are greater in cities: urban employment in Africa grew at twice the general rate over the past decade.[26] Cities also allow for greater mobility and productivity, as well as proximity to services.

The continued expansion of slums is a result of a failure to plan for this urbanisation – a failure of government and the private sector. For example, house building has often focused on provision for the

---

[23] Arimah, Ben C.(2017) *Slums As Expressions of Social Exclusion: Explaining The Prevalence of Slums in African Countries*: OECD/UN HABITAT

[24] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (2022). p.47. World Cities Report 2022. UN-Habitat. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/wcr_2022.pdf

[25] World Urban Campaign, 'World Cities Report 2016: Abridged Edition', 2016, p. 1.; UN-Habitat, 'Slum Almanac

[26] UN-Habitat, 'World Cities Report 2016', p. 8.

middle classes rather than the poor. Mass-housing projects, usually undertaken on greenfield sites on the peripheries of cities, have proven unaffordable to most of the urban population. The affluent have tended to 'downgrade' their property value by moving away from the city centre but into this new, better-quality housing, leaving poorer residents in slums. The minister of Human Settlement in South Africa has started a social housing program offering rental housing units which are conveniently located near workplaces and transportation hubs, for a total of 127,000 social housing units[27]. Similar initiatives have been completed or are underway in Ethiopia, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe and elsewhere.[28]

Mass-housing is preferred to upgrading slums (e.g., by improving sanitation) as it is cheaper and quicker to carry out. But in the meantime, those in slums continue to live in substandard accommodation. More comprehensive planning that accounts for the needs of the poor is required.

Studies have shown that, instead of taking up the offer of new and improved accommodation, residents choose to remain in slums to take advantage of the economic opportunities that exist there. Residents of Dharavi (Mumbai) cite the unique economic climate of the slum – which provides regular work in industries such as textiles, because of the abundance of supply of labour – as a reason not only to remain but also to oppose redevelopment plans.[29] In Kenya, initially, there was considerable enthusiasm among individuals to relocate to a residential complex: "*The Promised Land*." However, subsequent challenges emerged such as water shortages, which prompted certain residents to vacate the flats. Others saw a business opportunity in renting out their new homes to middle-class Kenyans at several times the subsidised rate. Those who remained continue to engage in commerce within the slum area, given the relatively lower cost of food and goods[30]. These examples show that economic factors are not the sole driver of slum inhabitation, and a more holistic analysis is required to understand the reasons why residents choose to live in these areas.

There are other factors causing slum dwellings. The cost of land in many urban areas is prohibitive, often exceeding 40% of total property prices[31]. The prevalence of idle land, hoarded by investors speculating on rising value, inhibits an increase in housing stock. In both China and the Philippines, levies were issued on such investors with success.[32]

Conflict also causes an increase in slum dwellings, given that over 50% of forcibly displaced individuals have settled in urban regions[33].

---

[27] South Africa Department of Human Settlements. (2018, November 17). More Social Housing in KwaZulu-Natal as Department Marks 4.7 Million Housing Opportunities. South Africa Department of Human Settlements.
https://www.dhs.gov.za/content/media-statements/more-social-housing-kwazulu-natal-department-marks-47-million-housing

[28] Croese, S., Cirolia, L.R., and Graham, N., 'Towards Habitat III: Confronting the disjuncture between global policy and local practice on Africa's "challenge of slums"', *Habitat International* 53 (2016), p. 240.

[29] Yardley, Jim *(2012) Dharavi: Self-created special economic zone for the poor*: Declan Herald

[30] Why Residents of Kibera Slum Are Rejecting New Housing Plans. ONE.
https://www.one.org/international/blog/why-residents-of-kibera-slum-are-rejecting-new-housing-plans/

[31] McKinsey Global Institute. (2014). 'A blueprint for addressing the global affordable housing challenge – Executive Summary', p. 7.

[32] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[33] The World Bank. (2023). Urban Development: Overview. World Bank.
https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview

5. *Consequences*

The human cost of living in slums is considerable. Disease and ill-health are linked to slum-living, primarily due to two factors common to slums: poor sanitation infrastructure and unclean water. Diarrhoea in particular is prominent: 88% of all diarrhoea infections worldwide are attributed to these two factors.[34] In particular almost 60 percent of deaths due to diarrhoea worldwide are attributable to unsafe drinking water and poor hygiene and sanitation[35]. In a survey of slum dwellers in Dhaka, 78% of respondents had suffered from disease in the previous two months, the most frequent being diarrhoea, then fever[36]. Despite the fact that two-thirds of these respondents used improved sanitation facilities, the pits and open latrines used by a minority of the population impacted on the health of the entire community.[37]

Another study revealed that this issue not only affects health but also has significant financial implications. In the slum of Kuala Bandar, Mumbai, India, urban poor slum households spend a significant amount of money and proportion of their income on costs related to diarrhoea[38]. The cumulative costs that diarrhoea causes for poor urban slum households is significant and can, over a period of time, help finance the cost of water and sanitation infrastructure[39]. Innovative financing schemes and investments should be made for urban slum water and sanitation infrastructure development, to prevent illness and its role in driving poverty.

In Nairobi, just two thirds of slum dwellers have access to piped water, and only 25% to hygienic sewage disposal[40]. While unclean water and inadequate sanitation are hardly exclusive to slums, the densely populated environment of cities facilitates the diffusion of pathogens which spread disease. Thus, 'The urban poor have a lower life expectancy at birth, and a higher infant mortality rate than both the rural poor and the urban nonpoor.'[41]

Slum dwellers are also prone to suffer from non-communicable diseases. The contraction of this type of disease is not dependent on contact with others, and so points to an overall lower level of health among slum dwellers than the general population. In a research study conducted in Buenos Aires, Argentina, it was found that self-reported hypertension, being overweight, and obesity exhibited significantly higher rates within the slum population[42]. Furthermore, among individuals aged 18-24 years, the prevalence of diabetes was three times greater than the national average[43].

Slum dwellers are more likely to experience tenure insecurity and face eviction (or the threat of eviction). In Dhaka's slums, every year, thousands are forcibly displaced from their homes, often residing on public and private lands for generations after migrating from various regions of the

---

[34] Duflo, E., Galiani, S., and Mobarak, M., 'Improving Access to Urban Services for the Poor: Open Issues and a Framework for a Future Research Agenda', *J-PAL,* October 2012, p. 14.

[35] UNICEF (2022). Diarrhoeal Disease. UNICEF Data.
https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/diarrhoeal-disease/

[36] Kamruzzaman, M., and Hakim, M.A., 'Socio-economic Status of Slum Dwellers: An Empirical Study on the Capital City of Bangladesh', p. 15.

[37] Ibid., p. 15.

[38] Patel RB, Stoklosa H, Shitole S, et alThe high cost of diarrhoeal illness for urban slum households–a cost-recovery approach: a cohort studyBMJ Open 2013;3:e002251. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2012-002251

[39] Ibid.

[40] Bird, Montebruno and Regan, 'Life in a slum: understanding living conditions in Nairobi's slums across time and space', p. 515.

[41] Duflo, E., Galiani, S., and Mobarak, M., 'Improving Access to Urban Services for the Poor: Open Issues and a Framework for a Future Research Agenda', p. 14.

[42] Doval HC, Mariani J, Gómez GC, Vulcano L, Parlanti L, Gavranovic MA, Iemma M, Sanchez R, Macchia A. Cardiovascular and other risk factors among people who live in slums in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Public Health. 2019 May;170:38-44. doi: 10.1016/j.puhe.2019.02.014. Epub 2019 Mar 25. PMID: 30921654.

[43] Ibid.

country[44]. These evictions are typically characterised by violence, involving the demolition of homes and the physical and psychological mistreatment of slum dwellers[45]. Crime and violence also tend to be higher in slums. [46]

Slum dwellers tend to have fewer educational and employment opportunities than those in formal accommodation. However, slum dwellers often have greater opportunities than the rural poor. The higher population density and greater mobility of cities improves access to schools. In Nairobi, 94% of children attend primary school in slum areas, the same level as those in the city's formal housing population. This is 10% higher than those in rural areas.[47]

Similarly, employment opportunities are often greater in slum areas than rural parts, which accounts for the increase in rural-urban migration in recent decades. Due to the greater connectivity of cities, slum dwellers are also more likely to have access to electricity, which improves quality of life. Some 85% of respondents to the survey of slum dwellers in Dhaka owned a television. [48]

Of course, not all cities offer such opportunities to the same degree, and employment especially is often precarious. Slum dwellers are usually at the sharp end of urban poverty, and do not share significantly in the wealth-creation of developing cities. Countries with large slum populations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, are among the most unequal in the world. Yet it is important to recognize that slums 'are not static areas of poor living conditions'.[49] Some slums have relatively prosperous residents: in Nairobi, half of slum dwellers have a secondary education.[50] This underlines the striking variety in slums and slum dwellers, and the importance of local context. There is great disparity even within one city. In Nairobi, the Mukuru area contains slum houses which overwhelmingly lack solid roofs or walls, usually owned by the very poorest. In contrast, in Kayole the construction is mostly of a higher quality and properties are larger than average, raising living standards.[51] To understand the consequences of slum-living therefore requires nuance and localised investigation.

6. *The international response*

The international community has responded to the prevalence of slums primarily by setting targets through the United Nations. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) included Target 7.D: '*By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers*'. [52] This was achieved, with over 320 million people experiencing improvement in at least one of the four measurable criteria which define a slum: improved water; improved sanitation; more durable housing; or less crowded conditions.[53] In 2015, the UN radically extended this ambition through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Target 11.1 is the most relevant: '*By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.*'[54] In addition, SDG 1 (on ending poverty) and SDG 6 (on improved sanitation) apply to slums.

At the U.N. High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2020, it was made clear that Target 11.1 is one of

---

[44] Institute of Development Studies. (2021). Violent Slum Evictions in Bangladesh: Whose Voice Counts? Retrieved from https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/violent-slum-evictions-in-bangladesh-whose-voice-counts/
[45] ibid.
[46] World Urban Campaign, 'Slum Almanac', p. 4.
[47] Bird, Montebruno and Regan, 'Life in a slum: understanding living conditions in Nairobi's slums across time and space', p. 515.
[48] Kamruzzaman and Hakim (2016), p. 15.
[49] Bird, Montebruno and Regan, 'Life in a slum: understanding living conditions in Nairobi's slums across time and space', p. 498.
[50] Ibid., p. 505.
[51] Ibid., p.514.
[52] United Nations, 'The Millennium Development Goals Report', p. 60.
[53] Ibid., p. 60
[54] World Urban Campaign, 'Slum Almanac', p. 2

the five targets that is regressing [55]. As mentioned above, the proportion of the world's urban population living in slums grew to 24 percent by 2018 compared with the previous decrease between 2000 and 2014.[56] Habitat for Humanity has identified the principal factors contributing to the stagnation of progress in SDG 11.1, including:

- Population growth
- Rapid urbanization
- The impact of climate change
- Migration patterns
- Political and economic instability
- Systemic inequalities
- Inadequate urban planning
- Local governance challenges
- Land and housing policies
- Housing finance mechanisms[57]

In this sense, Habitat for Humanity underscores the importance of placing people, especially the most vulnerable, at the core of addressing the global housing challenge. This approach involves considering the needs of low-income families, assessing the existing capacities and resources of local governments, understanding market conditions, and evaluating the policy environment to develop integrated solutions.[58]

---

[55] Habitat for Humanity. (2023). Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report. Habitat for Humanity. Retrieved from https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/SDG%20Progress%20Report_0.pdf
[56] Ibid., p. 4.
[57] Ibid., p.5
[58] Ibid.,p. 5.

7. *Strategies for Achieving SDG 11.1*

While significant improvements were made in achieving MDG Target 7.D, the world faces a huge challenge to achieve SDG Target 11.1.

Countries experiencing significant political unrest and economic crises between 2014 and 2018 witnessed a notable surge in the proportion of urban slum dwellers. Some of these nations include Syria (with an 18.6% increase) and Jordan (10.5% increase) in Western Asia. Additionally, Myanmar in Southeast Asia saw a substantial increase of 15.1%, while countries like Colombia, Venezuela, and Honduras experienced increases ranging from 10% to 15%.[59]

The factors contributing to the rise in slum populations differ from one country to another. In Syria, the persistent conflict inflicted substantial harm on the housing sector, resulting in the destruction of residences, investments, and property rights.[60] Meanwhile, in Venezuela, the annual inflation rate, which reached 180,000% by the close of 2018, plunged 82% of the population into poverty. This economic crisis made it increasingly difficult for people to afford established housing, prompting many households to relocate to informal or substandard settlements.[61] In Papua New Guinea, more than 80% of the population faces vulnerability to disasters linked to climate change, while there exist constraints in the capabilities of institutions for effectively strategizing and managing the urban environment.[62]

The main strategy advocated by the UN to improve the lives of slum dwellers is Slum Upgrading – this is explicitly referenced in Target 11.1 ('…upgrade slums'). Slum Upgrading means an in-situ improvement in housing and surrounding infrastructure; greater access to social provision; and ensuring secure tenure. For example, an upgrade might include the introduction of a tile or concrete roof or hygienic sanitation.

In this regard, several countries have reported progress toward reducing the proportion of the urban slum population, for example in Guangzhou (China), micro-renovation projects were implemented to enhance the housing conditions in shantytowns. Over the period from 2016 to 2020, approximately 1.5 million residents experienced improvements through these renovations.[63] The government of Trinidad and Tobago, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity, has joined forces to enhance the quality of life for low-income residents. This was achieved by offering grants and low- or zero-interest loans to address critical infrastructure repairs in homes, including sanitation, plumbing, and electrical improvements.[64]

The effectiveness of slum upgrading is contingent upon participatory approaches being embraced. One widely-championed implementation mechanism is a Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP). This has been advocated by the UN since the Habitat II Conference in 1996, and was again enshrined in the SDGs through Target 11.3 which agreed an 'inclusive' approach to urbanisation and

---

[59] Ibid., p.17.
[60] World Bank. Syria Damage Assessment. (2017). https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/530541512657033401/pdf/121943-WP-P161647-PUBLIC-Syria-Damage-Assessment.pdf
[61] Borgen Project. (2019). 10 Facts About Slums in Venezuela. The Borgen Project. https://borgenproject.org/10-facts-about-slums-in-venezuela/
[62] VNR Papua New Guinea. (2020). https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26453VNR_2020_Papua_New_Guinea_Report.pdf
[63] VLR Guangzhou. (2020). https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/VLR%20Guangzhou%2C%20China-compressed.pdf
[64] VNR Trinidad and Tobago. (2020). https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26730VNR_2020_Trinidad_Report.pdf

'capacity for participatory… planning and management in all countries.'[65] This approach is distinct in incorporating all stakeholders in the planning process, facilitating collective interest. Engaging the local community is pivotal for ensuring sustainable project outcomes. However, if these approaches are not thoughtfully implemented, they can inadvertently exacerbate inequalities within the community. For instance, if privileged community members have greater opportunities for participation without measures to include the most vulnerable, it can reinforce clientelistic networks or political manipulation.[66]

The Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) aimed to improve living conditions in Mumbai's Dharavi slum, but faced resistance from residents. It didn't integrate existing slum enterprises, leaving residents without livelihoods. The rising land value also raised concerns about displacement and prioritising higher-cost development. Trust issues persisted, with residents fearing that developers would benefit more. This case underscores the need for community involvement in urban development to prevent such challenges.

Projects from across the world that are capable of taking on board community perspectives have achieved far greater levels of success. In Cape Town's Zwelisha slum, the presence of a Community Development Committee (CDC) played a vital role in the successful redevelopment of the area. The interaction between committee members and non-committee residents proved crucial, not only during the initial upgrade but also in ensuring the ongoing maintenance, adherence to construction rules, approaches to home upkeep, and improving the overall sense of security and well-being related to land tenure. [67]

However, many governments and private firms are pursuing mass housing projects on the peripheries of cities as a quicker and cheaper way of meeting demand. Even though current strategies are failing to offer housing for the poor, some argue that such direct supply may be a more effective approach than Slum Upgrading. First, the scale of the housing challenge demands more than just incremental change; slum upgrading is slow. Second, improving informal settlements such as slums is disproportionately expensive compared to improving formal housing developments. As slums are usually unplanned, extending infrastructure such as sanitation and water through upgrading programmes costs around three times more than in planned developments. [68] Third, slums are an inefficient use of prime urban land. As the building quality is poor, they are predominantly one or two stories high. [69] In theory, high density urban living in structures with a large capacity (e.g. high-rise blocks) holds opportunities for the poor. They can provide low-cost housing right next to employment and educational opportunities. In contrast, slums (whether upgraded or not) are an inefficient use of urban land, housing one family on a plot which could house ten to twenty times more. Trying to make them habitable, or slightly less inhabitable, may be a bad way of improving the lives of slum dwellers and future slum dwellers.

Part of Slum Upgrading, and central to SDG Target 11.1, is guaranteeing secure tenure. Insecure tenure means facing the threat of forced and/or arbitrary eviction, often leading to homelessness. The UN estimates 70% of the world's people-to-land relationships are not documented. Women face particular discrimination – in some countries, if a husband dies, by custom the house is the property of his family rather than his wife. Insecure tenure also entrenches slum conditions, as residents are reluctant to invest in their property (e.g. by installing improved sanitation, water or electricity) if they face possible eviction at any moment. The Global Land Tool Network (part of UN-Habitat) is working across the world to improve security of tenure through a culturally-sensitive formula termed the

[65] World Urban Campaign, 'Slum Almanac', p. 86
[66] UN-HABITAT. World Cities Report 2020. (2020).
https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr_2020_report.pdf
[67] Patel, Kamna (2018) *A successful slum upgrade in Durban: A case of formal change and informal continuity*: Habitat International v.40 pp.211-217
[68] Croese, S., Cirolia, L.R., and Graham, N., 'Towards Habitat III: Confronting the disjuncture between global policy and local practice on Africa's "challenge of slums"', p. 240.
[69] Bird, Montebruno and Regan, 'Life in a slum: understanding living conditions in Nairobi's slums across time and space', p. 497

'Continuum of Land Rights'.[70] This incorporates the various forms of tenure – including documented and undocumented, formal and informal, individual and group – to establish an application which holds legitimacy locally, and then push for policy or administrative reform.

---

[70] Global Land Tool Network, 'The Continuum of Land Rights – A brief', 2015.

8. *Conclusions*

In spite of the dedication outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – specifically Goal 11, Target 11.1 – has seen a setback in its achievement, undoing prior advancements.

Various factors such as rapid urbanisation, population growth, climate change impacts, political and economic crises, and systemic inequalities have driven this trend. Past efforts to improve slums and prevent new ones were insufficient. Challenges impeding progress on Target 11.1 include insufficient prioritisation of housing in development programs, inadequate funding, the complexity of the housing ecosystem and insufficient collaboration among stakeholders. [71] Achieving SDG Target 11.1 demands a multifaceted approach tailored to the unique challenges faced by different countries.

Housing needs to take centre stage in urban programs and policies, with a particular focus on securing adequate funding for interventions. The adoption of a holistic housing ecosystems perspective (encompassing planning, design, implementation, and monitoring) is crucial for comprehensive and effective solutions. Furthermore, forging strong collaborations between people, public institutions, and private entities is essential in tackling housing challenges efficiently. Simultaneously, there is an urgent need for data improvements, particularly in data collection, reporting, and monitoring. This involves updating global data on affordability, disaggregating data to consider various inadequate housing criteria, and creating a composite index that combines indicators related to urban slum populations and unaffordable housing.[72]

A key aspect of this data-driven approach is ensuring that it remains people-centred, with a focus on community involvement and engagement throughout the process. These concerted efforts represent a holistic strategy to address the complexities of achieving Target 11.1 and fostering sustainable urban development.[73]

---

[71] Habitat for Humanity. (2023). Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report. Habitat for Humanity. Retrieved from https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/SDG%20Progress%20Report_0.pdf
[72] Ibid., p.30
[73] Ibid., p.30

Bibliography

- Arimah, B. C. (2017). Slums As Expressions of Social Exclusion: Explaining The Prevalence of Slums in African Countries. OECD/UN HABITAT.

- Bird, J., Montebruno, P., & Regan, T. (2017). Life in a slum: understanding living conditions in Nairobi's slums across time and space. Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 33(3), 497-515.

- Borgen Project. (n.d.). 10 Worst Slums in the World. Borgen Project. Retrieved from https://borgenproject.org/10-worst-slums-in-the-world/

- Borgen Project. (2019). 10 Facts About Slums in Venezuela. The Borgen Project. Retrieved from https://borgenproject.org/10-facts-about-slums-in-venezuela/

- Bush-Geertsema, V., Culhane, D., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2016). Developing a global framework for conceptualising and measuring homelessness. Habitat International, 55, 125.

- Croese, S., Cirolia, L. R., & Graham, N. (2016). Towards Habitat III: Confronting the disjuncture between global policy and local practice on Africa's "challenge of slums". Habitat International, 53, 240.

- Duflo, E., Galiani, S., & Mobarak, M. (2012). Improving Access to Urban Services for the Poor: Open Issues and a Framework for a Future Research Agenda. J-PAL, October 2012, 14.

- Friesen, J., et al. (2019). Size Distributions of slums across the globe using different data and classification methods. European Journal of Remote Sensing, 52(2), 99-111.

- Habitat for Humanity International. (2021). SDG Progress Report, 11.

- Institute of Development Studies. (2021). Violent Slum Evictions in Bangladesh: Whose Voice Counts? Retrieved from https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/violent-slum-evictions-in-bangladesh-whose-voice-counts/

- Kamruzzaman, M., & Hakim, M. A. (2016). Socio-economic Status of Slum Dwellers: An Empirical Study on the Capital City of Bangladesh.1. 13-18.

- McKinsey Global Institute. (2014). A blueprint for addressing the global affordable housing challenge – Executive Summary.

- Patel, K. (2018). A successful slum upgrade in Durban: A case of formal change and informal continuity. Habitat International, 40, 211-217.

- Patel, R. B., et al. (2013). The high cost of diarrhoeal illness for urban slum households–a cost-recovery approach: a cohort study. BMJ Open, 3, e002251. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2012-002251

- South Africa Department of Human Settlements. (2018, November 17). More Social Housing in KwaZulu-Natal as Department Marks 4.7 Million Housing Opportunities. South Africa Department of Human Settlements. Retrieved from https://www.dhs.gov.za/content/media-statements/more-social-housing-kwazulu-natal-department-marks-47-million-housing

- The World Bank. (2023). Urban Development: Overview. World Bank. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview

- UN-HABITAT. (2016). World Cities Report .

- UN-Habitat. (2020). Indicator 11.1.1 Training Module: Adequate Housing and Slum Upgrading. Retrieved from https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/06/indicator_11.1.1_training_module_adequate_housing_and_slum_upgrading.pdf

- UN-Habitat. (2022). World Cities Report 2022. UN-Habitat. Retrieved from https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/wcr_2022.pdf

- UNICEF. (2022). Diarrhoeal Disease. UNICEF Data. Retrieved from https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/diarrhoeal-disease/

- United Nations. (2015). The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015. United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf

- United Nations. (2018, May 16). 68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html

- United Nations. (2019). Sustainable Development Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. United Nations. Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-11/#:~:text=The%20absolute%20number%20of%20people,Southern%20Asia%20(227%20million)

- United Nations. (2020). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020. Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf

- United Nations Statistics Division. (2023). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023. United Nations. Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf

- United Nations Statistics Division. (2019). Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019: Goal 11. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-11/

- VLR Guangzhou. (2020). Retrieved from https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/VLR%20Guangzhou%2C%20China-compressed.pdf

- VNR Papua New Guinea. (2020). Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26453VNR_2020_Papua_New_Guinea_Report.pdf

- VNR Trinidad and Tobago. (2020). Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26730VNR_2020_Trinidad_Report.pdf

- World Bank. (2017). Syria Damage Assessment. Retrieved from https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/530541512657033401/pdf/121943-WP-P161647-PUBLIC-Syria-Damage-Assessment.pdf

- World Urban Campaign, 'Slum Almanac 2015/2016: Tracking Improvement in the Lives of Slum Dwellers', 2016 - https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-05/slum_almanac_2015-2016_psup.pdf