

## That's slum problem 07 Oct 2003



The slums of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on steep hillside liable to landslides

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**One in six of the population in the world today - that's nearly one billion people - are slum dwellers, and this number is likely to have doubled by 2030, according to a new UN-HABITAT report.**

The UN organisation said that currently in developing countries slum dwellers accounted for 43% of the population compared to 6% in developed countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of urban residents in slums was highest, at 72%.



Before slum upgradation

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<b>% of urban population living in slums</b>	
<b>Region</b>	<b>%</b>
Sub-Saharan Africa	71
South central Asia	48
East Asia	46
Latin America and Caribbean	34
West Asia	31
Oceania	30
South East Asia	29
North Africa	28
Europe	6

Two billion people will end up in slums across the world unless policies are implemented to stop the worldwide migration of people from the countryside to urban areas. The report finds that there is currently little or no planning to accommodate these people or provide them with services. Future cities

without slums will only be possible with "implementation of urban planning and management policies designed to prevent the emergence of slums, along with slum-upgrading and a commitment on the part of government to reduce poverty", said the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT.

The report also finds that slum formation is linked to the negative effects of globalisation. In particular, economic booms and busts that ratchet up inequality and distribute new wealth unevenly contribute to the growth of slums. Slum development is then fuelled by a combination of rapid rural-to-urban migration, spiralling urban poverty and the inability of the urban poor to access affordable land for housing and insecure land tenure.

While traditional approaches to the slum problem have tended to concentrate on improvement of housing, infrastructure and physical environmental conditions, the report's authors suggest a more comprehensive approach: to address the issue of employment for slum dwellers and issues such as incomes, shelter, food, health, education and access to basic urban infrastructure and services. Improving incomes and jobs for slum dwellers, however, requires national economic growth, which is dependent upon effective national and international economic policies, including trade. Current evidence suggests that globalisation in its present form has not always worked in favour of the urban poor and has, in fact, exacerbated their social and economic exclusion in some countries.

There is abundant evidence of innovative solutions developed by the poor to improve their own living environments, leading to the gradual consolidation of informal settlements. Where appropriate upgrading policies have been put in place, slums have become increasingly socially cohesive, offering opportunities for security of tenure, local economic development and improvement of incomes among the urban poor.

At the core of efforts to improve the environmental habitability of slums and enhance economically productive activities is the need to invest in infrastructure - to provide water and sanitation, electricity, access roads, footpaths and waste management. Low-income housing and slum-upgrading policies need to pay attention to the financing of citywide infrastructure development. However, the main focus of policy makers must be on poverty reduction and the up-grading of slum communities.

The report finds that upgrading existing slums is more effective than resettling slum dwellers. It goes on to state that the eradication of slums and resettlement of slum dwellers can create more problems than are solved. Eradication and relocation unnecessarily destroy a large stock of housing affordable to the urban poor and the new housing provided has frequently turned out to be unaffordable, with the result that relocated households move back into slum accommodation.

