



The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: The role of NGOs in improving the lives of people living in slums

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Introduction

Three billion individuals will move to urban areas before the 21st century is halved. With almost 90% of these migrations likely to occur in low- and middle-income countries, it is evident that strict measures have to be implemented to make room for all newcomers. The steady trend towards urbanization will influence virtually every facet of human endeavor in the coming years, including healthcare, finance, education, and most definitely accommodation. Although the main actors in ensuring equal access to all essentials for humans to sustain their lives, it cannot be expected for them to accomplish these initiatives solitarily, seeing as that most LEDCs are already struggling to do so. That is the precise point where NGOs and private initiatives come onto the scene. A concept unfolded in the past two centuries, slums are almost always illegal and lack vital tools to ensure humane living for their residents. Often tucked away just outside city centers, but also existent in the middle of some of the

most developed cities, slums are home, according to UN data, circa 900 million people. With the real amount more likely to be even higher, as the UN has acknowledged imperfections within their slum resident counting system, it may seem as if this issue has no viable remedies. Still, it is impossible to abandon one-eighth of humans in their search for their universally recognized right to a fair living quarter. Therefore it is of utmost importance for NGOs to



meticulously plan out and set into action initiatives that not only align with the urgent necessities of slum-dwellers globally but also government policies, easing collaboration and funding through governing bodies and private investments.

Definition of Key Terms

Social Stratification

Social stratification refers to the categorization of members of a society or group into hierarchical layers based on factors including but not limited to wealth, gender, race, and age. This concept is important for the topic of slums as the existence of slums is a signifier that there is a lower class within the society that cannot afford basic necessities such as adequate housing.

Informal Settlements

Informal settlements are residential areas where inhabitants have no security of tenure within the land or dwellings they inhabit, with variations ranging from squatting to slums. The neighborhoods lack or are cut off from basic services and formal city infrastructure as the housing often does not comply with current planning and building regulations while being situated in geographically problematic areas.

Slum Household

According to the UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Program), and United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) the adequate definition of a slum household is a home in which the inhabitants suffer from one or more of the four determined deprivations: Lack of access to improved water services, lack of access to improved sanitation facilities, lack of sufficient living area, lack of housing durability, or lack of security of tenure. Slums are known around the world by multivarious names, such as gecekondu, shanty town, favela, rookery, skid row, barrio, ghetto, and banlieue.

Slum-Dwellers

A 'slum dweller', according to the UN, is an individual who resides in a household that shows any of the deprivations attributed to slum households.

NGO

The United Nations defines a Non-Governmental Organization as any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group that is organized on a local, national, or international level. NGOs are active in numerous fields such as healthcare, peace, climate activism, gender equality, and improving the living conditions of slum dwellers.

Slum Upgrading

Slum upgradings are initiatives that aim to eradicate inadequate situations such as legal (land tenure), physical (infrastructure), social (crime or education,) or economic. Slum upgrades are not intended to meddle with specific issues, but rather attempt to put into motion the economic, social, institutional, and communal activities that are needed to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers. These upgrades are truly effective when they are undertaken cooperatively among all parties involved: residents, community groups, businesses as well as local and national authorities.

Urbanization/Urban Society

Urbanization can be explained as the process by which large numbers of people become permanently concentrated in comparatively small areas, inevitably causing the formation of cities. The United Nations does not provide a definition for the word “urban” instead adapting the definitions used in each nation, which may vary significantly.

City Development Strategy

A City Development Strategy is a tool that eases a city’s attempt to harness the potential of urbanization. By enabling a city to develop a coordinated, institutional framework to make the most of opportunities, this tool reduces the possibility of new sprawlings of slums. Furthermore, a CDS provides residents a chance to have a voice in the future of the place where they live.

SDGs

Consisting of 17 main headers, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are a call for change directed to all countries, organized and evolved in global partnerships. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, ease climate change, and spur economic growth.

Doha Programme of Action

A kind of follow-up to the SDGs established in 2016, the Doha Programme of Action saw the coming together of least developed countries and their development partners, including the private sector, civil society, and governments at all levels in 2022 to establish six missions that would define the focus of the decade for Least Developed Countries. The definite involvement of development partners which are largely made up of NGOs and Goal 1: “eradicating poverty and building capacity to leave no one behind”, and Goal 3: “supporting structural transformation” is especially important for the issue at hand.

Background Information

While attempting to comprehend a topic as intricate as the impetus behind the emergence of slums, it is of absolute necessity to examine the concept of income disparity and its catalyst, social stratification. No matter how far back human history is scrutinized, in any complex society past the hunter-gatherer era, the concept of ownership and thus some form of social hierarchy will have

emerged. In the modern era, most hierarchies around the world can be found to be mostly based on one factor: money. One of the most prominent Marxist theorists of urbanization, David Harvey, claims that “cities are not just physical spaces but are shaped by economic forces and power structures.” Harvey’s approach fuses Marxist economic ideas with geography, displaying how capital accumulation drives the expansion and transformation of cities. Simply put, David Harvey theorizes that for any city to be able to operate properly and fix any of its issues, it primarily requires funding. If this concept is applied to slums, it can be realized that that is exactly what slums lack: money. Therefore, for NGOs to have any chance at being successful in creating a system that truly elevates the living standards of slum dwellers they must take the initiative to establish this funding. This is not at all simple though and solving the issues that these societies face the most is a very important step towards Encapsulating all, it can be said that for NGOs to be successful in slum communities, they must accumulate monetary investment in the community which will begin to gradually rid them of the problems preventing them from fixing the issues in the first place.

Living Conditions in Slums

Housing in Slums Accommodation in slums is characterized by overcrowding, inadequate construction, and a lack of basic amenities like water, sanitation, and electricity. Homes are often made of temporary materials, leaving them vulnerable to weather and natural disasters. The absence of secure tenure means residents face constant threats of eviction. Governments and NGOs implement slum upgrading programs to improve housing conditions, emphasizing access to affordable, safe, and durable housing. However, these efforts are often challenged by resource constraints, rapid urbanization, and bureaucratic hurdles, leaving many residents trapped in substandard living conditions.

Legality of Slums The legality of slums often exists in a controversial situation, as many settlements are built on public or private land without official recognition of land ownership. This is called as having no land tenure and very often leads to the demolition of slum-dwellings and indefinite displacement of their residents. This lack of legal recognition has many results such as no access to amenities such as electricity, plumbing, and other services governments offer such as waste management. Although very difficult to accomplish, if organized well enough and established a long time ago with a relevant population that cannot go unrecognized governments sometimes formalize land titles for slums, in a way “forgiving” them for living on land that they do not own. This is crucial for improving access to services and tenure security. However, regularization is often met with resistance due to political and economic interests, leaving many slums in legal gray areas.

Healthcare and Nourishment in Slums Healthcare in slums are often insufficient due to poor infrastructure, overcrowding, and limited access to medical facilities. Many slums lack nearby clinics, leading to reliance on unregulated private practitioners. Common health issues include infectious diseases, malnutrition, and chronic illnesses exacerbated by unsanitary living conditions. Women and children are particularly vulnerable due to inadequate maternal and child health services. NGOs and

governments strive to provide mobile clinics, vaccination programs, and community health initiatives, but funding and outreach remain barriers to comprehensive healthcare access in slums. Nourishment in slums is often inadequate due to poverty and limited access to nutritious food. Many residents rely on low-cost, calorie-dense diets that lack essential vitamins and minerals, leading to malnutrition and related health issues such as stunted growth in children and weakened immunity. Food insecurity is exacerbated by unemployment and rising food prices. NGOs and government programs aim to address this through food distribution, community kitchens, and nutrition education, but these solutions often face challenges in sustainability and scalability within densely populated informal settlements.

Safety in Slums Safety in slums is a pressing issue due to high crime rates, domestic violence, and inadequate policing. Slum residents often experience theft, assault, and exploitation, while limited infrastructure increases risks from natural disasters and structural collapses. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and human trafficking. Community policing initiatives, self-help groups, and urban planning improvements are some measures to enhance safety, but systemic neglect and underfunding often undermine their effectiveness. Collaboration between local governments and residents is essential to address safety challenges. Drug abuse in slums is a prevalent issue, driven by poverty, unemployment, and social marginalization. Slums often serve as hubs for drug trafficking and substance abuse, with limited law enforcement exacerbating the problem. Substance dependency leads to health deterioration, increased crime rates, and broken families. Youth are particularly vulnerable to falling into addiction due to a lack of opportunities and peer pressure. Rehabilitation centers, community awareness campaigns, and youth engagement programs are critical interventions, but they face challenges in outreach and long-term funding.

Education in Slums Education in slums is often limited by a lack of schools, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient resources. Many children are unable to attend school due to poverty, which forces them into child labor or domestic responsibilities. Girls face additional barriers like early marriage and gender discrimination and educational facilities quite often display discriminatory trends against women. NGOs and government programs focus on building schools, offering scholarships, and implementing community-based learning initiatives. Despite these efforts, dropout rates remain high due to economic pressures and limited access to quality education, perpetuating cycles of poverty within slum communities.

Employment in Slums Employment in slums is predominantly informal, with residents engaged in low-paying, insecure jobs such as street vending, domestic work, or manual labor. The lack of formal employment opportunities is exacerbated by limited access to education and skill development. Women often face additional barriers, earning less and having fewer opportunities than men. NGOs and community initiatives promote vocational training, microfinance, and entrepreneurship to improve economic prospects. However, systemic challenges like economic inequality and exploitation often limit the upward mobility of slum residents.

Discriminatory Practices and Trends in Slums Discrimination in slums manifests through social stigma, limited access to resources, and exclusion from urban planning processes. Residents are often stereotyped as uneducated, criminal, or unproductive, leading to marginalization. Within slums, caste, ethnicity, and religion can exacerbate internal divides, creating hierarchies and tensions. Anti-slum attitudes from policymakers and the public further perpetuate inequality. Efforts to combat discrimination focus on advocacy, community organization, and inclusive policies, though systemic biases remain a significant barrier to change.

Gender equality in slums is hindered by patriarchal norms, lack of education, and economic disparities. Women often face limited opportunities for employment and leadership, compounded by gender-based violence and inadequate healthcare access. Slum women are disproportionately burdened with unpaid domestic work, reducing their ability to participate in community development. Initiatives like women's self-help groups, skill development programs, and legal aid services aim to address these challenges. Progress is often slow due to deeply ingrained cultural norms and insufficient resources.

Racism in and against slums occurs when racial or ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented among slum residents due to historical and systemic inequalities. In some cases, minority groups face further marginalization within slums, leading to social divisions. Externally, racial prejudice contributes to the stigmatization of slum communities, limiting access to resources and perpetuating poverty cycles. Advocacy and policy interventions focused on anti-discrimination laws and equitable resource distribution aim to address these disparities, but progress remains uneven across regions.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United Nations Involvement

The betterment of living conditions in slums and urban development initiatives in general is a topic that the UN is quite involved in. The UN actively works to find universal solutions to slum-dwellers' most pressing issues and the existence of their human settlement proves this point very well. New resolutions, reports, and annual meetings are only some of the methods the UN uses to continue its pursuit of a slumless world. Number 11 of the 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals also reflects this as it encapsulates the idea of making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Its first clause, "ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, and upgrade slums" reflects slums' role in accomplishing goal number 11 even further. Considering that slums or other forms of disadvantaged urban development are present throughout the world, it makes sense throughout this process that the UN does not refrain from funding and cooperating with local or global non-governmental organizations as this eases their workloads and involves people and foundations very knowledgeable in the solution processes.

UN-Habitat(PSUP): The United Nations Human Settlements Programme is the UN's main branch that focuses on slum-dwellers' issues. They are concerned with accessibility to clean water, the creation of adequate accommodation environments, secure land tenure, gender equality, and many more difficult aspects of life for slum communities. They give importance to the integration of local communities into the slum upgrading process and ensure the consideration of human rights and climate resilience throughout all of their work. The Participatory Slum Programme is a tripartite initiative with the UN-Habitat being one of the parties. This initiative works to address the living situations of slum dwellers globally, working in close relation with the communities through collaboration and operating through governments, NGOs, and universities.

UNOPS: The United Nations Office for Project Services(UNOPS) is tasked with assisting countries in the global attempt to achieve important goals such as sustainable development and peace, while also lending a helping hand to individuals in pursuit of establishing better lives. UNOPS has a special focus on infrastructure elevating the relevancy of the sustainable development of slums to the operations of the UNOPS to a new stage. While working in quite challenging environments and locations, UNOPS claims to be very open to collaborative partnerships focusing on transferring expertise in infrastructure, humanitarian aid, and project management. They currently are coworking with other UN branches, state authorities, and NGOs boosting their productivity, and improving their cost-effectiveness.

UNCDF: Acting as a UN funding platform focused on financing initiatives that work to accomplish the Sustainable Development Program and the Doha Programme of Action, the United Nations Capital Development Fund helps out developing states in the elevation of their economical activities by granting capital loans and guarantees, always prioritizing the least developed countries. This fund may prove useful to NGOs especially teaming up with governments as it opens up a new way of being funded and covering all of the expenses of rebuilding a community consisting of slums.

UN Resolutions:

- Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), 19 December 2007 **(A/RES/62/198)**
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 25 September 2015 **(A/RES/70/1)**
- New Urban Agenda, 23 December 2016 **(A/Res/71/256)**
- Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, 1 April 2022 **(A/Res/76/258)**
- Accelerating the transformation of informal settlements and slums by 2030, 9 June 2023

(HSP/HA.2/Res.2)**NGOs and other International Bodies**

If taken into consideration that the agenda item focuses on NGOs' operations in slums, it is simple to see that without examining the involvement of copious diverse and global organizations in improving the lives of people in slums and researching the situations in countries notorious for their slums this topic cannot be understood fully.

BRAC: Self-defined as having adopted the empowerment of people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease, and social injustice through economic and social programs that enable women and men to realize their potential as their mission, BRAC is a global development NGO based in Bangladesh. With over 90,000 employees, BRAC is the largest non-governmental organization currently active. The NGOs 2021 yearly report declares that nearly 2 out of 5 Bangladeshi accessed the services of BRAC. 11.5 million of those are stated to have been financial, while they have been involved in the access to education of 190,000 children. Although founded under the name of Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee in 1972, their international scale of operations in nations such as Kenya, Liberia, Afghanistan, and Myanmar have rendered the name obsolete. BRAC works through both donations and self-funding through revenue-based companies they own.

CARE International: Founded in 1945 by 22 American charities of civic, religious, cooperative, and labor backgrounds as the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe, CARE's first operations were simple "CARE Packages" that delivered emergency nutrition to European cities heavily impacted by World War 2. As European nations quickly rebuilt themselves, CARE expanded to an international scale, having operations in all continents by the 1960s and showing their shift of focus in their 1953 name change to Cooperative for American Remittances Everywhere. In 1980 CARE International was established as an umbrella organization. Currently, CARE International is one of the biggest NGOs in the fight against inadequate living conditions, focusing on food security, climate change resilience, humanitarian response, sexual and general health rights, and upholding of gender-equality. They are especially active in the fight for gender equality with their Village Savings and Loan Association which enables small groups of women living in the same community to create a kind of emergency fund and provide financial stability to each other. Their involvement in the SABA+ project has seen improved water and sanitation access to 1 in 5 Peruvians and their Ignite program has enabled women entrepreneurs in multiple countries to assist in women's economic injustice.

Amref Health Africa: The Flying Doctors of East Africa founded in 1957 by three philanthropic surgeons to offer a helping hand in the subject of health to rural communities in countries such as

Kenya, is now the largest Africa-based international health development organization. The NGO accomplished this by slowly expanding its scope of operations, teaming up with other organizations meddling with healthcare issues, and working directly with the governments of African countries. Having had a significant impact in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and fully vaccinating 16 million people during the COVID epidemic, they continue operations in most of the Eastern and Southern nations of Africa enabled through fundraising. Their promise according to their declaration is “to transform the health of communities in Africa through investing in the health and lives of women and young people as agents of change in African communities”.

Médecins Sans Frontières(Doctors Without Borders): Made up mainly of doctors and health sector workers, while remaining open to all other professions that might help in achieving its aims, Doctors Without Borders is a private, international association that assists populations in distress, to victims of natural or man-made disasters and victims of armed conflict. They claim to do so irrespective of race, religion, creed, or political convictions. Founded in France 53 years ago, its catalyst was the emerging famine and war in Nigeria. They were and still are present for delivering medical aid as soon as possible to those in need never deviating from their principles of impartiality, independence, neutrality, and accountability. Although they are impartial, the volunteers of the organization often do bear witness and raise awareness against ongoing human rights violations or extreme needs within the region they are operating in.

Lawyers Without Borders: Established in 2000 in the USA, this NGO has no true connection to the previously mentioned Doctors Without Borders although their regions of operation may intersect. Volunteering lawyers from all over the globe offer pro bono(free of charge) legal help to international law procedures and human rights incentives, enabling reach to justice initiatives for people lacking thereof. Their assistance in holding governments and legal systems to account in underdeveloped and developing countries is especially important for their impact in slums considering that local and national governments often neglect the needs of their population living in slums and it is much harder for these individuals to defend themselves in court if accused of a crime.

Slum Dwellers International(Know Your City Campaign): Slum, or Shack, Dwellers International(SDI) is a non-governmental organization comprised of slum unions in South America, Africa, and Asia from 33 countries in total. Through the application of a process called “Enumeration”, SDI has collected statistics regarding slums at a city level, easing their creation of a mechanism that serves to connect urban informal dwellings and unite the residents under a larger group, revealing similar difficulties they face and battle together against the difficult situations they face, increasing the odds that their voices are heard. Their Know Your City campaign also has a similar aim as it unites leaders of slums from all over the world to discuss and debate solutions to widespread issues most of them face. Since its formation in 1996, Slum

Dwellers has based its operations out of Cape Town, South Africa but because of the nature of their operations, their presence is felt greatly in many places of the world.

IDEAMAPS Network: Although an initiative currently in its fourth year of existence, IDEAMAPS Network provides a very much-needed solution to a very crucial issue present in the lives of slum dwellers. Funded through a UK Research and Innovation Grant and evolving from workshops organized by Slum Dwellers International, this NGOs main project is to map out slums so to reach accurate statistics and facilitate situation-improving operations taking place in impoverished areas. One statistic that this NGO could alter is the UN-Habitat's data that there are a total of 1 billion slum dwellers internationally. Although the UN is the most cited and most trusted source for this information, their methods are still not perfect as they reach this number by classifying areas that are made up of more than 50% of slum households as slum areas. This leaves out a lot of slum households from being considered as what they are and through the operations of NGOs similar to IDEAMAPS, closer-to-the-truth statistics could be determined.

Selco Foundation: The Selco Foundation based in India approaches the commonplace issue of slum communities in the nation by delivering sustainable energy to impoverished areas. Considering that most slums do not have reliable access to electricity which they need for everything from cooking to heating this is an issue of absolute importance. It makes the Selco Foundation very relevant to slums. Selco also considers different geographies in India's slums and selects solutions in a manner that is most applicable to the climate, temperature, and similar factors.

Cities Alliance: Although not an NGO, instead a global partnership hosted by UNOPS combating urban poverty and supporting cities in the deliverance of sustainable development, Cities Alliance is one of the most prominent actors in the fight for improving the lives of people living in slums. Furthermore, having non-governmental organizations such as Slum Dwellers International on its executive board it also cannot be stated that they are completely unrelated to the world of NGOs. The main operations of Cities Alliance consist of aiding cities of all magnitudes in developing appropriate policy frameworks, strengthening local skills and capacity, and undertaking strategic city planning. Cities Alliance promotes the idea that "successful cities engage meaningfully with their citizens, and they recognize and promote the role of women".

Country Positions

India: Being one of the most significant colonies to remain under British rule, India still l with the consequences of the unjust urban planning and development during their colonial times. According to a recent "The Telegraph" report, this also shows through their faltering at accomplishing 19 out of 33 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal indicators including poverty and gender inequality. Ranked in

the 2024 Global Hunger Index 105th out of 127 countries and as having the largest number of poor people in the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, India's situation is especially grim in their slums. With almost 10% of the 1.4 billion population living in slums, India is a very important nation to consider while determining solution efforts.

For example, according to the National Institution for Transforming India, over 40 percent of the city of Gujarat's population is deprived of nutrition, over 37 percent lack sanitation, and 23 percent do not have decent housing. One reason for the lack of sanitation is open defecation as there is very limited access to toilets in most of the slums. While negotiating the heat is an everyday challenge, there are no toilets in the area, and workers have to defecate in the open. Furthermore, most communities do not have sufficient drinking water and no means of definite employment. A 2015 UNESCO report found that one in five Indians are illiterate, one of the highest in the world, further challenging the possibility of finding adequate employment and consistent income.

Women are often a lot worse off too, with child marriage, lack of education, and even exploitation. One in four Indian women are married before the age of 18 and barely any of them receive further education after primary. Slums are also very difficult for women because sexual exploitation is very common. Sex brothels tucked away in these illegal communities serve for the enslavement of often underage girls. Taking into consideration that India is the country with the most citizens in the world and such a large number of them live under such severe conditions it is of absolute necessity for NGOs to focus on assisting India in solving the issues India's slum residents face.



Sex slaves hiding their faces in an Indian slum



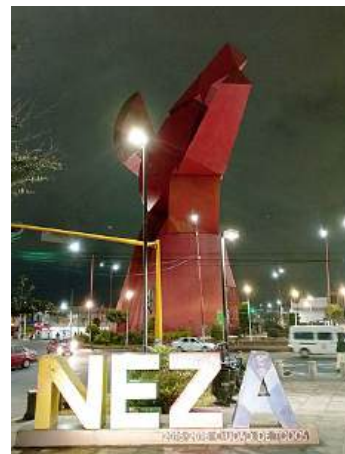
A community of slum-dwellings in Gujarat

Mexico: Nezahualcoyotl, known simply as Neza is a city turned slum community situated right next to the capital Mexico City on the dried-out bed of Lake Texcoco. An important area as far back as the Aztecs, Neza is called home by 1 million people. However due to its proximity and in some points even coinciding with the slums of Chalco and Itza this immense slum community is sometimes called Neza-Chalco-Itza and is said to be housing 4 million people. Thankfully, the situation in Neza is not as grave as in some other slums throughout the world. The city saw major growth during the period between 1940 and 1971 known as the "Mexican Miracle" as workers surged to the capital to find work in the newly built factories. These people naturally needed a place to live and thus the swampy lakebed where 6000 people lived in 1950 ballooned to 600.000 in 20 years.

Although no urban needs were met in the beginning, the gradual introduction of water resources, electricity, and other needs in the 1980s largely enabled the flourishing of the area. Today, Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl is Mexico's most densely populated municipality with 18,000 inhabitants per square kilometer. An initiative called "Movimiento de Restauración de Colonos" was a major step the community took in ensuring their right to adequate housing. This movement addressed land title issues and ensured the legal statute of the residents. In turn, this built a sense of a sustainable community which still shows in the statistic that 70% of the population is employed within city limits. Nowadays Neza and its surroundings, although packed with people and still facing issues such as lack of hospitals and educational facilities in some locations, an exemplary to slums around the world of how with a bit of luck and determined factoring it is possible to transform a slum community into a self-sustaining city.



Birds-eye view of Neza, displaying its high density



Coyote Statue in Neza's city center

Brazil: Carrying traces of slums known as favelas as far back as the early twentieth century, Brazil is home to the most colorful and famous but also dangerous slum communities on Earth. As Brazil transformed from monarchy to democracy, the successive political transitions were a catalyst for the rise in the number of favelas, especially in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Early on, these slum-like communities were like spontaneous outgrowths within city limits for internal immigrants to call home. As their numbers grew, their sense of community was elevated, forming liaisons to gather access to resources including nourishment and sanitation that the government lacked in providing. The government finally began recognizing favelas in the 1940's but not necessarily in a positive manner.

These early favelas were seen as breeding grounds for diseases and in general a plague for the community, so it was decided for them to be moved with national modernization efforts to mostly the outskirts of the city to newer structures. Still, the lack of care for these new projects and their negative view in the eyes of favela residents did not make them permanent solutions at all. Their poverty dragged them from their communities to wherever the government wanted them, although some communities like Rocinha managed to stand their ground, continued until the 1970s when politicians realized the uselessness of this system.

Still, favelas were not left in peace as the abandonment of military rule in the 1980s turned the nation into an important hub in the international trade of illicit drugs. Brazilian slums became more

unsafe than ever with police operations becoming a daily event. “At the peak of drug-related violence in 1994, Rio’s homicide rate was about seven times higher than the nation’s rate in 1979, during the military regime.” Levels of violence skyrocketed to the point where Brazil has been considered the world’s most violent nation not in a state of war. Today, although being a lot better than what could be due to a continuing very strong sense of community, many slum households in Brazil face unsanitary, unsafe, unorganized conditions. Exemplary, Rocinha, being the largest favela community in the country with a population of 150,000 is the birthplace of druglord and “public enemy number one” Nem da Rocinha which displays how slums are still the epicenter of drug operations in Brazil.



A scenic view of Rocinha’s favelas



Antonio Bonfim Lopes, aka Nem da Rocinha, during his arrest in 2013

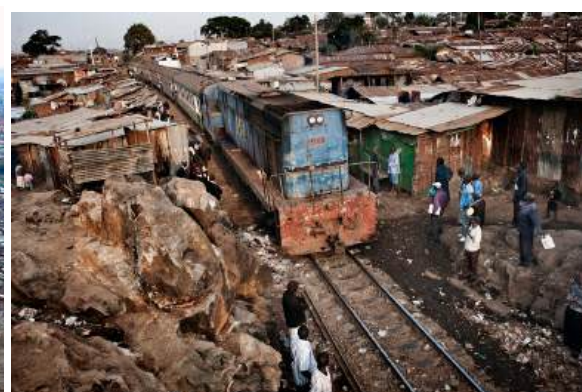
Kenya: Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, houses more than 3,000 non-governmental organizations and there is a very good reason behind why they possess this record. If a glance is taken at the colonial past of the city, it can be seen that its foundation is directly connected to a British railroad. Stretching from the Indian Ocean up to the valuable mines in Uganda, the railway was built majorly on uninhabited land. Completed in 1901, this railroad’s headquarters were established on this uninhabited land, quickly turning into the city that nowadays is called Nairobi. Rich in water resources, which also led to floods, and high in altitude this was a strategically planned location, but in its first years, it was not at all an equal-for-all city.

The British built the city under a system of urban segregation, providing the white minority with the land most arable and closest to the railway. Cheap labor to maintain this railroad was provided by Africans flocking to the city from all over, but to “guarantee their return to their villages once the period of work was finished”, they were not permitted to buy any property within city limits. Inevitably, this resulted in the construction and development of illegal houses without any kind of services in areas that were devoid of infrastructure which is how the slums that can be found all over Nairobi came into existence. Furthermore, during this period the city was divided into different quarters according to race. European colonizers lived on the most fertile lands located in the higher parts of the city. Quarters where Asians resided were more focused on central areas of the city, having drastically fewer available services. Africans on the other hand, were confined to the southern and eastern segments of the rail where huge swamps emerged during cold and rainy winters and no equipment was present to combat the harsh conditions this majority of the population had to live under.

Although these sectors have long been abolished and Kenya gained its independence in 1963, Nairobi’s slums continued to exist through all the societal shifts that occurred. Although having such a deeply rooted past, these dwellings are still considered illegal as they are almost all on land that is owned by the government. The lack of property rights to justify the occupancy of these lands by the inhabitants and the structures they have created makes the accommodation situation precarious and insecure. Unexpected evictions and demolitions are regularly carried out, often without any warning, worsening people’s lack of interest in making any improvements to their homes. No plan is followed as the slums are constructed and it is outlawed for these “illegal settlements” to be made out of anything other than wood, metal, and reinforced earth. Kibera is the largest of these communities not only in Nairobi but in Africa with 170,000 inhabitants, half of which are HIV positive and lacking stable jobs.



Aerial view of Kibera



Train passing through Kibera’s slums

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
17th-18th Centuries	With the influence of the Industrial Revolution, more and more Europeans begin to live within large cities, which leads to the inevitable overcrowding of cities such as London, Paris, and New York. With no money to even buy food, many newcomers begin to live in overcrowded and impoverished neighborhoods leading to the first instances of slum-like areas at a large scale ever recorded.
1830s	The word "slum" gains traction, in reference to London's impoverished housing areas.
1920s-1930s	Rapid industrialization leads to the proliferation of slums in colonial cities such as Mumbai, Nairobi, and Lagos whose effects can still be felt.
24 Oct, 1945	The United Nations is established, with a mandate that includes addressing global poverty and improving human settlements.
31 May-11 June, 1976	The premiere UN Conference on Human Settlements goes into session. It underlines urban poverty and housing problems, emphasizing the necessity of focusing on slums globally.

1978	The United Nations establishes the UN-Habitat to address urban development hurdles.
1985	The UN designates the first monday of October annually "World Habitat Day" to spread awareness about the importance of sustainable urbanization and slums.
1988	The Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 is decided by the UN. It highlights the growing slum crisis and calls for global action to ensure adequate accommodation for everyone.
1996	The Habitat II Conference is held in Istanbul. Participants focus on "adequate shelter for all" and sustainable urban formation.
September, 2000	The predecessor to the SDGs, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals are set, including Target 7D: "Achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020."
2008	The Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme is launched by UN-Habitat and collaborators.
September, 2015	The Sustainable Development Goals are adopted. Goal 11 includes a specific target (11.1) to improve slums and guarantee safe and affordable housing by 2030.
17-20 Oct 2016	The New Urban Agenda is adopted at Habitat III in Ecuador, outlining a framework for addressing urban issues, exemplary, slums.
27-31 May, 2019	The first UN-Habitat Assembly emphasizes accelerating efforts to transform informal settlements and address slum challenges globally.
2020	The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the vulnerability of slum dwellers, emphasizing the need for improved sanitation, healthcare, and infrastructure in informal settlements.
2023	UN-Habitat adopts the resolution titled "Accelerating the Transformation of Informal Settlements and Slums by 2030," aiming to speed up slum upgrading efforts.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Worldwide there are copious non-governmental organizations focused on both national and international multifarious difficulties of elevating living conditions in slums. The greatest benefit of NGOs for these communities has been the empowerment of their often collaborative approaches as this has enabled the suppressed residents of such areas to express their troubles fully to the responsible ranks and involve them in the decision-making processes. This and other kinds of collaborative work that NGOs undertake with slum-dwellers often focus on issues that these underdeveloped communities face in many aspects of daily life such as education, health, employment, and legal complications.

Education-focused organizations such as BRAC, establishing non-formal schools in radicalized

areas, and CARE International, advocating for gender-neutral education opportunities, continue playing a significant role, attempting to equip the youngest residents of slums for their future lives as well as possible. Healthcare movements aimed at maternal and child health, as well as addressing the spread of contagious diseases, especially Doctors Without Borders and AMREF Health Africa are also necessities for slums as most countries do not offer free healthcare to their disadvantaged citizens and in some places, almost half of the residents suffer from high-mortality rate diseases. Breaking the cycle of poverty is perhaps the most effective way of lowering the number of slum-dwellers worldwide. Some foundations working towards this include Slum Dwellers International and Cities Alliance, microfinancing communities, and establishing community-led-savings groups that institutionalize the flow of the often informally earned money by the working-age population of slums.

Securing land tenure in slums is very difficult to accomplish even for the most established NGOs as legal disputes for the recognition of slum communities are deeply rooted within disputes beginning decades ago. Forced evictions and demolition of shacks are common in most countries and their occupiers are often left stranded with no care for what they will do next. Therefore, Lawyers Without Borders and IDEAMAPS Network, which helps to map out and concretize dwellings integrating them into urban planning and the broader city infrastructure, offer their services to individuals and groups who have no land tenure rights at present.

Environmental sustainability has also been a sector that has seen the sprouting of new initiatives. NGOs work to improve sewage, and trash disposal, eliminating the need for electricity which most slums have very limited access to through the use of renewable energy sources, with the SELCO Foundation providing solar panels and other necessary equipment to slum households. Lastly, it is crucial to reiterate the importance of partnerships of slum representatives with NGOs, governments, and private sector actors, increasingly being leveraged to solidify and scale up these interventions, demonstrating the importance of a holistic approach to slum development.

Possible Solutions

While focusing on the future of slum-dwellers and their drastically disadvantaged situations, it may seem as if there are seemingly endless issues that slum communities face, however through the joint work of multifaceted NGOs, very efficient, applicable, and long-term solutions can be brought to light.

Housing in Slums

Housing in slums is an issue that must be resolved cost-effectively while considering all factors such as climate, culture, durability, applicability, and even originality. Therefore NGOs can promote the building of modifiable housing units. Using cheap materials such as metals, mixtures of cement and earth, and locally supplied insulation materials such as wood fibre that are also of sufficient quality and sustainability the housing situation could be majorly improved. Although many slums are not built on arable land, it is also crucial to plan for although very limited very crucial spaces of land where individual dwellings or even small communities could grow their produce finding a small solution to nourishment as well.

Legality of Slums

This is a more intricate topic compared to most as all countries have different laws and levels of approach toward slums. Taking inspiration from Mexico a viable ailment is the establishment of specific groups that fight for their land tenure together rather than battling against the government individually. While it is important for NGOs and other organizations to offer legal advice to these groups, they could enable the securing of a larger area to their name. Offering an extent of development within their newly owned land and presenting concrete plans along with their case could also elevate their chances of being heard. Still, this is a topic that has to be changed drastically from state to state..

Healthcare in Slums

The first step in ensuring the general health of a slum community should be awareness. Slum-dwellers should be informed seriously about safe sexual practices, how to deal with contagious diseases, and perhaps even taught first aid. Furthermore, a new concept could be to develop mobile diagnostic kits for diseases like tuberculosis and malaria which can empower residents to monitor their health proactively, reducing the strain on overcrowded urban hospitals.

Nourishment in Slums

Farming is something non-existent in most slums around the world caused by the infertility of most lands slums are built on. Still, non-governmental organizations educating the general population on how to grow produce in harsh conditions could offer some internal relief to the incredible lack of food in slum communities. Another assist that NGOs could offer is establishing connections between farmers, restaurants, and similar sectors of the country and slum communities, easing the possibility for slum-dwellers to buy produce directly from the farmers and leftover safely-edible-food from restaurants and market chains for much lower prices.

Drugs in Slums

Drug usage is an issue that is not only problematic but also incredibly destructive, leaving individuals without employment, and full functionality, and leading them to their death. Though awareness initiatives could help in some locations, they are not the best solution for this issue. Drug abuse and trade are directly connected to unemployment as it is one of the easiest ways of earning money. Keeping a close connection with governments and working against corruption could be a much more effective step NGOs could take. Also campaigning for the arrest of the leaders of such operations and offering especially the youth about to fall into the hands of drugs job opportunities and other possibilities to afford to live could prove effective towards the resolution of this issue.

Safety in Slums

Slums are often unsafe for more vulnerable groups within slum communities. Therefore one effort could be to unionize slums to “keep watch” over individuals part of these groups. NGOs could recruit residents of these slum factions, paying them a reasonable sum, to establish safety patrols which if given adequate training could protect women, children, and elderly from any kinds of abuse and dangerous

occasions that often occur within such communities.

Education in Slums

Education is the leading power behind solving slum-based issues as most of them arise from a lack of education. Receiving adequate teaching opportunities enables employment, develops safety, and erases discriminatory practices to a significant extent. Therefore, raising some of the members of the slum societies as teachers under the condition that they will contribute by teaching for a determined time within their home communities and transforming suitable areas within communities into makeshift schools and classrooms is an important step to take not only for education initiatives but also most other issues that slums face daily.

Employment in Slums

NGOs can create “slum enterprise incubators,” providing mentorship, workspace, and microgrants to residents with innovative business ideas tailored to their communities. A barter economy system could also be introduced, where residents exchange goods and services within the slum, fostering local self-reliance. Introducing digital hubs equipped with internet and training facilities can connect residents to remote work opportunities, creating pathways to employment without requiring physical relocation. Employment by any means is necessary to sustain a secure flow of currency into the slum societies which can in turn be used to improve general conditions.

Discriminatory Practices and Trends in Slums

Discriminatory practices are often very deeply rooted and closely connected to cultural practices. These are often very difficult to alter so any solutions offered should be strategically planned to be applicable in the regions they will be implemented in. Education is a great way of breaking dogma and offering the oppressed members of slum communities platforms to speak up and teaching them how to protect themselves and combat the difficulties set in front of them is a step in the right way although it is only a start to erasing this issue in such communities.

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