



The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: Sustainable Development Sub-Commission 2 (SDC2)

Issue: Measures to improve housing conditions for people living in slums or informal settlements [SDG11]

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Introduction

Improving housing conditions for people living in slums or informal settlements is a critical global issue, one that has a profound effect on health, well-being, economic opportunities, and social equity. Slums, often known by their overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of access to clean water, and poor infrastructure, are home to millions. As Urban populations continue to grow, informal settlements are expanding, and the urgency to address their living conditions becomes more pressing. This issue intersects with broader global goals, such as sustainable Urban development, poverty reduction, and climate resilience, making it not only an ethical concern but a developmental challenge.

Housing conditions in slums are a major concern as they directly impact the health and quality of life of residents. People living in these areas often face exposure to diseases due to poor sanitation, inadequate waste disposal, and lack of access to clean drinking water. Overcrowding only worsens these issues, fostering the spread of infectious diseases like cholera, tuberculosis, and malaria. These settlements are often located in hazardous areas prone to floods, landslides, or other environmental risks, making residents even more susceptible to climate change impacts.

Slums and informal settlements refer to areas of Urban development that lack adequate infrastructure and services. These settlements typically emerge when rapid urbanization outpaces the formal market, leading to the construction of dwellings that are not exactly up to standard, often on land that is not legally owned by the inhabitants. Slums may lack basic amenities such as sanitation, electricity, and roads.

The historical context of slums dates back to the Industrial Revolution when mass rural-to-urban migration led to overcrowded cities, and insufficient housing was built to accommodate the surplus of workers. Over time, informal settlements became a widespread urban phenomenon in both developing and developed countries, as rapid urbanization continued to overtake formal urban planning processes. In recent decades, international efforts to improve housing conditions in slums have included initiatives such as UN-Habitat programs, and the Slum Upgrading Program. However, progress has been slow, often hindered by financial constraints, political instability, and inadequate policy frameworks.

Definition of Key Terms

Affordable Housing Projects

Aims to build or subsidize new homes that are financially accessible to low-income populations. These projects typically offer lower rents or affordable mortgage terms. A city government may partner with NGOs or private developers to build low-cost housing units for families living in overcrowded conditions in informal settlements ("Affordable Housing and Slum Upgrading,").

Environmental and Health Interventions

Focus on reducing the negative impact of slums on the environment and public health. This includes waste management, disease prevention, and improving air and water quality. In many informal settlements, improper waste disposal leads to unsanitary conditions. A local government could implement a waste management system, including garbage collection and recycling programs, to reduce pollution and improve public health ("Global Report on Human Settlements 2020,").

Informal Settlements

Refers to areas where people live without legal recognition or approval from authorities. These settlements are typically characterized by inadequate housing, lack of proper infrastructure, and insecure land tenure. In many urban areas in developing countries, informal settlements form in response to rapid urbanization, such as the shantytowns found in parts of Lagos, Nigeria, where residents build makeshift homes on unregulated land ("Affordable Housing and Slum Upgrading,").

Legalization of Land Tenure

Involves recognizing the rights of people living in informal settlements to own or rent the land and homes they occupy, providing legal protection against eviction. In cities like Nairobi, Kenya, slum dwellers often live in fear of being evicted because they don't have formal land rights. By legalizing land tenure, residents gain security, enabling them to invest in improving their homes without the fear of being displaced ("Slum Upgrading," Habitat for Humanity).

Microfinance and Livelihood Support

Support programs aim to provide low-income individuals with small loans, grants, or training to help them start businesses, improve their incomes, and eventually upgrade their living conditions. A microfinance institution could offer low-interest loans to small business owners in informal settlements, enabling them to expand their businesses, improve their economic status, and invest in better housing or infrastructure ("Habitat for Humanity,").

Slum Resettlement Programs

Involves relocating residents from high-risk or overcrowded areas to new settlements with improved infrastructure and housing. In Jakarta, Indonesia, a resettlement program might involve relocating people from flood-prone slums to new, safer housing with access to better sanitation, roads, and water supply, ensuring improved living conditions ("World Bank," 2021).

Slums

Overcrowded urban areas are characterized by substandard living conditions, lack of basic services (water, sanitation, electricity), and insecure housing. Slums are often informal settlements but are specifically associated with extreme poverty and poor infrastructure. Dharavi in Mumbai, India, is one of the largest slums in the world, where over a million people live in cramped spaces with limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities ("2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015).

Sustainable Urbanization

Refers to the development of cities in ways that meet the needs of current populations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This involves promoting economic, social, and environmental sustainability in urban development. Curitiba, Brazil, is often cited as a model of sustainable urbanization due to its emphasis on public transportation, green spaces, and efficient waste management while ensuring that all residents, including those in informal settlements, have access to key services ("UN-Habitat," 2016).

Background Information

Introduction

The global housing crisis remains one of the most pressing urban challenges, with over 1 billion people living in slums or informal settlements as of 2023. These areas are characterized by inadequate housing, lack of access to clean water, sanitation, and basic infrastructure, and insecure tenure. Slum proliferation is closely linked to rapid urbanization, poverty, and systemic inequalities, disproportionately affecting developing regions like sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America ("2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015; "Global Report on Human Settlements 2020,").

Origins of the Issue

Urbanization and Migration

The exponential growth of urban areas over the past century has led to a high demand for affordable housing. Between 1950 and 2020, the global urban population surged from 751 million to 4.4 billion, driven by rural-to-urban migration. Many cities failed to prepare for this influx, leading to the formation of informal settlements as affordable housing options lagged behind population growth ("2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015; "Global Report on Human Settlements 2020,").

Economic Inequality

Slums thrive where income disparities are stark. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, 60% of the urban population lives in informal settlements due to limited formal job opportunities, low wages, and unaffordable housing markets. Weak governance exacerbates the issue, as housing policies often favor middle- and upper-income groups ("World Bank," 2021).

Historical Failures in Urban Planning

Colonial and post-colonial city planning in many developing countries ignored or marginalized low-income populations. Policies focused on "beautifying" urban centers often resulted in forced evictions, pushing marginalized groups to peripheral, unregulated areas ("Affordable Housing and Slum Upgrading,").

Impact of Large Slums on Cities and Countries

The presence of large slums and informal settlements severely affects both cities and nations in multiple ways. These areas often lack basic infrastructure, including reliable access to clean water, sanitation, and waste management, which poses serious health risks, contributing to the spread of disease and public health crises ("UN-Habitat," 2020). The overcrowded conditions and poor living environments further strain already limited resources, forcing cities to divert funding away from other essential services like education and transportation.

Impact of Slums on Inhabitants

Slums are characterized by overcrowded living conditions, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate access to essential services, leading to severe consequences for residents' health, education, employment, and social inclusion ("World Bank," 2021; "Global Report on Human Settlements 2020,"). Poor sanitation infrastructure, such as limited access to clean water, sewage systems, and waste management, exposes residents to waterborne diseases like cholera, typhoid, and diarrhea. A 2022 WHO report revealed that 80% of diseases in slums are linked to inadequate water and sanitation services. Overcrowding further facilitates the spread of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and respiratory infections, while malnutrition due to food insecurity and contaminated water worsens the health crisis ("Global Report on Human Settlements 2020," n.d.; "Affordable Housing and Slum Upgrading,").

In terms of education, children in slums often lack access to proper schooling due to the scarcity of educational facilities, which are frequently overcrowded, under-resourced, and staffed with underqualified teachers. This perpetuates intergenerational poverty, as children without education struggle to secure stable, well-paying jobs in the future ("UN-Habitat," 2016). Girls face additional barriers stemming from cultural norms and unsafe school environments.

Adults in slums typically work in informal, unstable jobs such as street vending, domestic labour, and day-to-day construction work. Without legal protections or employment contracts, they are vulnerable to exploitation and job losses, perpetuating financial insecurity that limits investments in housing, education, and healthcare ("2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015). Additionally, slums are often located in environmentally hazardous areas, such as floodplains, hillsides prone to landslides, or near industrial waste sites, making residents vulnerable to natural disasters and environmental pollution with minimal government intervention. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires integrated policies focused on infrastructure development, legal protections, education access, and social inclusion to break the cycle of poverty and improve the quality of life for slum residents.

Previous Attempts to Address the Problem

Slum Upgrading Initiatives

Kibera Slum Upgrade (Kenya) is one of Africa's largest slum upgrade projects, involving construction of modern housing and improved infrastructure ("Global Report on Human Settlements 2020,"; "World Bank," 2021). However, critics argue that poor stakeholder engagement led to displacement of original residents.

Favela Bairro Program (Brazil) focuses on integrating favelas into formal city structures by providing sanitation, roads, and social services. Despite some success, limited funding and scalability remain challenges.

Mass Housing Programs

Countries like India and South Africa launched large-scale housing schemes to replace slums with formal housing. For example, South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) built over 3 million homes since 1994. However, many RDP houses remain far from job centers, perpetuating inequality (*National Department of Human Settlements, Republic of South Africa, 2020*).

Global Efforts

Since 2008, PSUP (UN-Habitat Participatory Slum Upgrading Program) has worked in 40 countries, emphasizing community participation and government collaboration to improve slum conditions (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

Current Developments and Trends

Goal 11.1 of the SDGs (Sustainable Urban Development Goals) aims to ensure access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services for all by 2030. However, achieving this requires an estimated \$650 billion annually, a figure currently unmet (*United Nations, 2020*).

In countries like Thailand, programs such as the Baan Mankong initiative empower slum communities to manage upgrades themselves, supported by government subsidies (*Asian Development Bank, 2020*).

Recommendations to Improve Housing Conditions

Governments must adopt long-term plans that integrate informal settlements into formal city infrastructure, prioritizing affordability and accessibility. Providing slum residents with legal ownership of their homes encourages investment in property improvements and deters forced evictions. Empowering municipalities to address housing challenges can enhance resource allocation and ensure accountability (*UN-Habitat, 2020*). Increased investment from international organizations, such as the World Bank, is crucial to scaling up housing projects in low-income regions (*World Bank, 2020*).

Summary Overview

Addressing slum and informal settlement issues requires a multi-faceted, inclusive approach combining policy reforms, technological advancements, and community empowerment. While notable progress has been made, the global housing deficit demands sustained effort and innovative strategies to ensure dignified living conditions for all.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UN and International involvement

The United Nations (UN) and various international organizations have played critical roles in addressing the global housing crisis, particularly for those living in slums or informal settlements. Their involvement spans from the adoption of key resolutions to the initiation of programs that promote sustainable urban development and poverty alleviation (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

Key UN Resolutions and Declarations

- *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements*, 31 May 1976 (**A/CONF.70/15**)
- *Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium*, 9 June 2001 (**A/RES/S-25/2**)
- *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 25 September 2015 (**A/RES/70/1**)
- *Implementation of the New Urban Agenda*, 20 December 2017 (**A/RES/72/226**)
- Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 25 June 1993 (**A/CONF.157/23**)
- Paris Agreement on Climate Change, 12 December 2015 (**FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1**)
- Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, 27 July 2015 (**A/RES/69/313**)

Major UN Programmes and Initiatives

Established in 1978, UN-Habitat has led initiatives such as the *Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP)*, which focuses on improving housing and basic services in informal settlements across 40 countries.

SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 11 aims to "make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable," specifically targeting the improvement of slum conditions by 2030.

World Urban Forum (WUF) is a biennial platform for discussing urban development issues and fostering global cooperation on housing and sustainable cities.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) supports community engagement in urban planning, focusing on cultural preservation within slum areas.

Regional and International Efforts

World Bank invests in slum upgrading projects, such as the *Sites and Services* approach and allocates funding for affordable housing schemes.

African Union (AU) launched the *Agenda 2063* initiative, prioritizing infrastructure development to address housing shortages.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) funds urban renewal projects and advocates for inclusive city planning in rapidly urbanizing regions.

India

India has consistently supported efforts to address housing challenges, both domestically and internationally. The country recognizes the need for affordable housing, given that nearly 17% of its urban population lives in slums (Census 2011). India has implemented national programs like the *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)*, aiming to build 20 million affordable homes by 2022 (*Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, 2022*). It actively participates in global forums, supporting resolutions like the *New Urban Agenda* and SDG 11. In its 2022 UN General Assembly statement, India emphasized the importance of integrating slum dwellers into formal housing systems while respecting cultural identities (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

Brazil

Brazil has championed slum upgrading programs, especially in favelas, and is a strong advocate for inclusive housing policies. Programs like *Favela Bairro* serve as global models for integrating slums into urban frameworks (*World Bank, 2020*). Brazil co-sponsored the *Implementation of the New Urban Agenda* resolution, showcasing its commitment to housing equity. The country has repeatedly called for increased international funding for housing in developing nations during UN-Habitat sessions (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

South Africa

South Africa prioritizes housing issues domestically, reflecting its history of inequality and urban poverty. Since 1994, it has built over 3 million homes under the *Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)* (*National Department of Human Settlements, Republic of South Africa, 2020*). South Africa supports UN initiatives addressing urban inequality, often emphasizing the need for local empowerment in housing projects. It has endorsed resolutions like *A/RES/72/226* and consistently advocates for sustainable urban development (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

United States

The United States has supported international housing initiatives through foreign aid and partnerships with organizations like USAID (United States Agency for International Development). Domestically, it addresses housing issues through federal programs such as Section 8 housing vouchers and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The U.S. has backed UN resolutions promoting sustainable urban development and often leads efforts in global forums advocating for affordable housing, disaster resilience, and slum redevelopment programs worldwide (*USAID, 2020*).

Germany

Germany has been a strong advocate for sustainable urban development through its support for international frameworks such as the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Domestically, Germany has robust housing policies, including rent control measures and state-subsidized housing programs. Through its international development agency, GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), Germany has financed urban development and slum upgrading projects in various countries. The country frequently pushes for environmentally sustainable housing policies in global climate summits (*GIZ, 2020*).

Japan

Japan is a global leader in urban planning, disaster resilience, and sustainable housing innovation. With extensive experience in rebuilding after natural disasters, Japan promotes resilient housing and infrastructure projects worldwide. Its international development arm, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), funds housing and urban infrastructure initiatives in developing countries. Japan has consistently supported UN resolutions on sustainable development and housing while sharing its expertise in earthquake-resistant construction and smart city development (*JICA, 2020*).

Timeline of Events

June 20th, 1976 - Adoption of the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements

The *Vancouver Declaration* was adopted during the first UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I). It highlighted the urgent need for adequate housing and sustainable urban development. This event marked the beginning of global efforts to address slum conditions and urban poverty, laying the foundation for initiatives like UN-Habitat (*United Nations, 1976*).

September 25th, 2015 - Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The UN General Assembly adopted the *2030 Agenda*, including Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11), which aims to ensure access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing for all. This was a pivotal moment for global housing reform, focusing on slum upgrading and urban inclusivity (*United Nations, 2015*).

October 17th, 2016 - Launch of the New Urban Agenda

Adopted at Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador, the *New Urban Agenda* promotes sustainable urbanization, prioritizing the integration of informal settlements into formal city frameworks. It reinforced commitments to slum upgrading and urban equity globally (*UN-Habitat, 2016*).

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

United Nations (UN)

Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP)

Initiated by UN-Habitat in 2008, it has supported 40 countries in improving slum infrastructure. While impactful, scalability and limited funding remain challenges (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

New Urban Agenda (2016)

Advocated sustainable urban planning and slum integration but faced slow implementation due to varying national capacities (*UN-Habitat, 2016*).

International Community

World Banks Slum Upgrading Projects

Funded initiatives like the *Kibera Project* in Kenya, addressing infrastructure gaps. Success was limited by displacement concerns and community resistance (*World Bank, 2020*).

Favela Bairro Program (Brazil)

Upgraded infrastructure in Brazilian favelas. Though successful in improving living standards, the program faced criticism for underfunding and exclusion of marginalized groups (*World Bank, 2020*).

National Governments

India's Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)

Targeted mass affordable housing, with progress hindered by delays and urban land shortages (*Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, 2022*).

South Africa's RDP Housing Program

Delivered millions of homes, but poor quality and location far from economic centers reduced its effectiveness (*National Department of Human Settlements, Republic of South Africa, 2020*).

Possible Solutions

Integrated Urban Planning and Policy Reform

Governments should adopt comprehensive urban planning frameworks that integrate informal settlements into formal city structures. These frameworks must focus on providing basic infrastructure like water, sanitation, and transportation while preserving affordable housing. Zoning laws should be revised to accommodate mixed-use developments that combine residential, commercial, and public spaces. This would ensure slum dwellers have access to employment opportunities and public services without displacement (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

Community-Driven Upgrading Programs

Empowering local communities to lead slum upgrading projects ensures sustainability and inclusivity. Initiatives such as Thailand's *Baan Mankong Program*, where slum residents design and manage their housing improvements with government support, should be replicated. Community involvement enhances accountability, reduces displacement, and builds trust between residents and authorities (*Asian Development Bank, 2020*).

Affordable Housing Development

Governments should collaborate with the private sector through public-private partnerships (PPPs) to finance and construct affordable housing. Innovative solutions, such as 3D-printed housing and prefabricated structures, can reduce costs and accelerate construction. Housing policies must prioritize affordability for low-income families and provide subsidies or tax incentives to developers committed to low-cost housing (*World Bank, 2020*).

Secure Land Tenure and Legal Protections

Granting land tenure to slum residents ensures security and incentivizes investment in property improvements. Governments should streamline the process of legalizing informal settlements, protecting residents from forced evictions. Establishing clear land ownership rights also enhances access to credit, enabling residents to finance further improvements (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

Sustainable Financing Mechanisms

The establishment of urban housing funds, supported by international financial institutions like the World Bank and regional development banks, can provide long-term funding for slum upgrading projects. Mechanisms such as microfinance loans and savings groups should be expanded to allow slum dwellers to contribute to improvements gradually, fostering ownership and self-reliance (*World Bank, 2020*).

Global Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing

International bodies like UN-Habitat should establish global networks for sharing best practices in slum upgrading. Countries can learn from successful models, such as Brazil's *Favela Bairro* or Kenya's *Kibera Slum Project*. Multilateral agreements should encourage developed nations to fund housing initiatives in developing countries through grants and technical assistance (*UN-Habitat, 2020*).

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Appendix or Appendices

Appendix I: Useful Links

UN-Habitat Official Website: <https://unhabitat.org>

World Bank Urban Development Projects: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment>

Habitat for Humanity - Slum Upgrading: <https://www.habitat.org/our-work/impact/slum-upgrading>

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Official Site: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

The New Urban Agenda - UN-Habitat: <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>.

Appendix II: Visuals of Successful Slum Upgrading Projects

Favela Bairro Program (Brazil): Integrated slum upgrading through improved infrastructure and essential services like sanitation and roads.

Kibera Slum Upgrading (Kenya): Community-led housing and service improvements in one of Africa's largest informal settlements.

Appendix III: Case Studies of Slum Upgrading Initiatives

Thailand's Baan Mankong Program: A community-driven initiative providing secure tenure and better living standards for urban poor populations.

South Africa's RDP Housing Program: Overview of post-apartheid mass housing initiatives benefiting low-income households.