

Reaching the MDGs in Urban Bangladesh

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Overview

- Urban poor provide vital contributions to economies of cities and towns
- Lack of integration into mainstream city life condemns poor urban residents to reinforcing cycles of low income, abysmal living conditions, vulnerability to crime and violence, and ill-health
- MDG 7 Target 11 focuses on improving the lives of slum dwellers, but all MDGs are relevant in the urban context
- Hope lies in the innovations of poor communities themselves and good local governance

The MDGs and the Urban Target

- Target 11 of MDG 7: “By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.”
- Definition: “A slum is a contiguous settlement where the inhabitants are characterized as having inadequate housing and basic services”

Target 11 Indicators

- Original indicators related only to tenure and sanitation
- A wider set of indicators were added
- A slum household is a household that lacks any one of the following conditions:
 1. Access to safe water
 2. Access to sanitation
 3. Secure tenure
 4. Durability of housing
 5. Sufficient living area

MDGs and the Urban Setting

- The dedicated target brings recognition of slums as a major development issue
- But all MDGs matter in the urban setting
- Urban poor are often missing in MDG programming
 - Difficulties operating in urban areas
 - Undercounting

Challenges to MDG Achievement in Urban Areas: What is Urban Poverty?

- Income, savings, and assets
- Occupation, power, and networks
- Access to public services
- Number of dependents
- Number of meals
- Type of housing
- Illness/addiction
- Women/children working
- Extremely vulnerable groups: Beggars, day laborers, widows & female-headed households, elderly, disabled

Characteristics of Slum Life

- Link between poverty and insecure employment
- Ill-health and poor education as characteristics and causes of poverty
- Poor service delivery
- Crime & violence
- Insecurity of tenure

Insecurity of Tenure

- Slum dwellers are an integral part of the city, but their right to live in the city is not recognized
- MP Task Force: “To get hold of prime land, many politicians, developers and bureaucrats take advantage of the weak or non-existent legal protection against forced evictions and the lack of appropriate dispute resolution procedures”

Eviction

- Estimated 1.8 million people evicted and 3.9 million under immediate threat of eviction in Asia in 2001-02
- Dhaka: Around 135 slums were evicted in 1975-2005
- Estimated 12,000 families evicted under the last Caretaker Government for cleanup before elections
- Eviction in Agargaon affected an estimated 40,000 slum dwellers in 2004
- Shift toward slums on private land since the early 1990s

Insecurity of Tenure: Consequences

- Housing investments and community infrastructure inhibited
- Long-term planning undermined
- Prices distorted
- Opportunities to support poverty reduction constrained
- Links of solidarity and mutual assistance severed
- Severe psychological effects
- Poverty and social exclusion reinforced

Where is the Hope for Urban MDG Achievement?

- Where it is not: Slum evictions & demolitions, project-based slum upgrading, incentives for out-migration
- MP Task Force: “The foundation of almost any solution to the problems of the urban poor lies in their potential to organize themselves, to make effective decisions, and to negotiate and collaborate with local government and other partners.”

Slums as Part of the Solution

- Slums as sources of finance
- Slums as sources of information
- Slums and service delivery
 - Small community infrastructure
 - Connection to / maintenance of city's large infrastructure
 - The poor are willing/able to pay for services
 - Communities can reduce crime through complementary crime prevention strategies

Security of Tenure: An Incremental Process

- A continuum: Completely insecure to completely secure
- Community tools for preventing eviction: Information, alternative planning, collective action
- Dialogue among poor communities, local governments, other service providers, civil society
- Small steps in Bangladesh: No-eviction agreements for occupation of local government land; proposals for allocating portions of public land to cooperatives of slum dwellers

Strengthening Local Governance

MP Task Force:

- “A key to productive and sustainable urban development is for city governments to have the political autonomy and financial independence to design and implement plans and infrastructure programmes. Decentralisation strategies need to strengthen local authorities that are directly accountable to urban communities.”

Bangladesh:

- Local governance capacity building gaining momentum in rural areas
- Multiple local and national bodies involved in urban matters
- Limited resources, weak administrative capacity, little coordination and planning

Policy

- Bangladesh lacks a policy for urbanization and urban poverty reduction
- *National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction* gives scant attention to urban issues itself but envisions a national policy on urban development
- National Housing Policy supports slum upgrading and security of tenure but is not implemented
- National policy needed with local adaptation of Target 11 and other MDGs in urban areas

Conclusions

- The urban poor contribute positively to the economic dynamism of cities
- Solutions to problems of urban poverty lie within communities themselves
- Improving the lives of slum dwellers—and overall urban MDG achievement—requires community empowerment, good local governance, and dialogue among all stakeholders