

QUICK
GUIDES
FOR
POLICY
MAKERS



housing the **poor** in Asian cities



UN-HABITAT



United Nations
ESCAP

2

LOW-INCOME HOUSING:

Approaches to help the urban poor
find adequate accommodation

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The original documents and other materials can be accessed at: www.housing-the-urban-poor.net.

The above contributions have all shaped the Quick Guide series, which we hope will contribute to the daily work of policy makers in Asia in their quest to improve housing for the urban poor.

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Millennium Development Goal 7, Target 11:

“To achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020, recognizing the urgent need for the provision of increased resources for affordable housing and housing-related infrastructure, prioritizing slum prevention and slum upgrading ...”.

Article 56.m of the September 2005 UN Summit resolution



PHOTO: HOMELESS INTERNATIONAL

Low-income housing: Approaches to help the urban poor find adequate accommodation

QUICK GUIDE FOR POLICY MAKERS NUMBER 2

This guide describes several ways of addressing low-income housing at the programme and project level. It focuses on well-tried methods of improving the housing and living environments of people living in slums and squatter settlements, and providing adequate housing for future generations of urban poor.

The first part presents concepts essential to understanding low-income housing, and explores the reasons behind the serious lack of decent, affordable housing — and hence the problem of urban slums. Key approaches to address the housing needs of the urban poor are outlined next, by examining alternative strategies for what to do about existing slums and how to avoid future slums through the production of new housing. Finally, the guide examines the main considerations needed to address the improvement of slums and production of adequate and affordable low-income housing on a city-wide scale.

This guide is not aimed at specialists, but instead aims to help build the capacities of national and local government officials and policy makers who need to quickly enhance their understanding of low-income housing issues.

What are slums and squatter settlements?

Not all of Asia's urban poor live in slums, and conversely, not all those who live in slums are poor. However, the poor quality of housing and lack of basic services that are common in slums represent a clear dimension of urban poverty. This guide will therefore look at slums as the main focus of low-income housing.

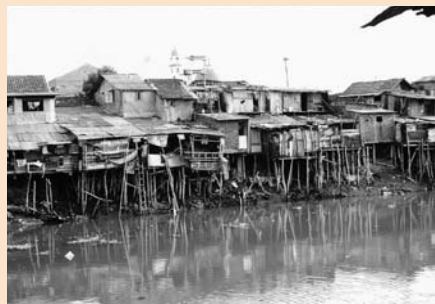
Urban poor settlements come in a variety of sizes and shapes, and are called by a variety of names — not only 'slums'. The word **slum** traditionally describes a neighbourhood of housing that was once in good condition but has since deteriorated or been subdivided into a state of high crowding

and rented out to low-income groups. A **squatter settlement**, on the other hand, is an area of poor quality housing built on illegally occupied land. A third kind of settlement is an **irregular subdivision**, in which the legal owner subdivides the land into sub-standard plots and sells or rents them out without following all relevant building bylaws.

UN-HABITAT defines a slum household as a group of people living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following conditions: durable housing, sufficient living area, access to clean water, access to proper sanitation and secure tenure. (See *Quick Guide 1 on Urbanization*)

What makes an urban community a slum?

- It lacks basic services such as adequate access to safe water, paved walkways, drains, sanitation and other essential infrastructure.
- It contains dilapidated and poor quality housing structures that break the various building bylaws.
- It is overcrowded or characterized by extremely high density of dwellings and population.
- It has an unhealthy living environment and may be located on hazardous or "undevelopable" land.
- Its residents have insecure land tenure and may be evicted.
- Its residents experience high levels of poverty and social exclusion.



PHOTOS: ACHIR

No two are alike

Informal settlements in Asian cities come in all shapes and sizes, but the common denominator is their highly dynamic, highly resourceful response to an absolute lack of other options



PHOTO: ACHR

A KATCHI ABADI IN KARACHI, PAKISTAN, a city ringed with public land, where people have laid out and built their own city-sized settlements.



PHOTO: UNISCAP

A "GER AREA" IN ULANBATAAR, MONGOLIA, where the city's rural migrants have brought their nomadic-style, felt-lined ger tents along with them.



PHOTO: UNISCAP

A ROOFTOP SLUM IN PHNOM PENH, a city where even the roof terraces of derelict apartment buildings were used for poor people's housing.



PHOTO: ACHR

A FOOTPATH SLUM IN MUMBAI, INDIA, a city where 55% of the population lives in slums, and many can't even afford to buy houses in slums.



PHOTO: ACHR

A GARBAGE DUMP SLUM IN MANILA, where 35,000 households earn a good living gathering recyclable waste, but must still live in poor conditions.



PHOTO: ACHR

A CANAL-SIDE SLUM IN BANGKOK, THAILAND, where the long stretches of public land along canals has been occupied by some 220 communities.

Why do slums exist at all?

In most cities, the main problem is access to suitable **land**

"Slums are the products of failed policies, bad governance, corruption, inappropriate regulation, dysfunctional land markets, unresponsive financial systems and a fundamental lack of political will. Each of these failures adds to the toll on people already deeply burdened by poverty and constrains the enormous potential for human development that urban life offers."

<http://web.mit.edu/urbanupgrading>

Slums and squatter settlements exist because the poor cannot afford or access even the most minimal housing provided by the formal land and housing markets. Many also face enormous barriers in accessing housing and land because of the time, red tape and difficulties involved.

There are slums of one sort or another in most cities and towns throughout the world. In many Asian cities, such as Mumbai, Manila and Karachi, slums are home to over 50% of the city's population. In some places, the systems for distributing and acquiring land and housing are still governed by traditional or indigenous land tenure systems that exist outside the market, yet even in these places, slums exist.

Low-income households need to live close to income-earning opportunities in the commercial and industrial centres of cities and towns in order to minimize the cost and time spent in getting to work. But good land in these central places is generally in high demand and therefore expensive. So poor households are forced to occupy land that is not in demand, because it is inappropriate or dangerous, such as land prone to flooding or landslides or along railway lines, canal banks and roadsides. They are also forced to occupy as little space as possible, which leads to very high densities and unhealthy levels of overcrowding in their settlements. Or alternatively, they may be forced to settle on land at the edge of towns and cities, where land may be more accessible, but is beyond the urban infrastructure networks and far from centres of employment.

An important role of governments is to intervene in land and housing markets to ensure that the lowest income groups in the city have access to secure land and decent housing. Political will within government and civil society is essential to resolve the problems of slum populations.



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