Urban Poverty Group submission to the Commission for Africa

December 2004

The Urban Poverty Group is a network of NGOs, university departments and consultants in the UK with a shared commitment to tackling urban poverty worldwide[1]. This submission highlights the fact that key development issues of urban poverty and the challenge of city development are hardly addressed in the Commission for Africa's consultation document. With Africa set to be predominantly urban by 2030, urban poverty is, and will be, a crucial issue that the Commission simply cannot afford to ignore.

Urban poverty, slum upgrading and human settlement development are not well addressed or understood in African Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, nor are they adequately prioritised in current international development processes.

The Commission should firmly address this growing challenge in its recommendations. By addressing these challenges, the Commission can and should add something new and positive to the development discourse in Africa.

Shacks and the Sheraton: In Kampala, as in many other African cities, wealth and poverty sit side by side

(Photo by Homeless International)

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[1] The UPG is currently co-ordinated by Homeless International. For more information about the UPG, please contact Malcolm Jack: *malc@homeless-international.org*

Our response

Publicity material for the Commission for Africa event at the World Urban Forum in September talked of rapid urbanisation and the issue of slum formation as being major challenges facing Africa. It also talked of the need for urgent action in the shape of innovative mechanisms to finance slum upgrading. It is with surprise and disappointment, therefore, that we note that the Consultation Document makes no mention of the need for such financing mechanisms. Not only that – it fails to mention slums at all.

This omission is totally at odds both with the current situation and with future trends.
- o Fully 72% of those living in Sub-Saharan Africa's cities live in slums: the highest proportion in the world.
- o Huge numbers are involved, with this percentage representing nearly 190 million people. Nor is the situation set to improve – if urgent action is not taken then it is set to get significantly worse.
- o Currently 37% of Africans live in cities, but by the year 2030 this ratio is expected to have risen to 53%.[2]
- o If the proportion of people living in slums remains static, which would be an achievement in itself, then this will likely mean a doubling of the number of slum dwellers to well over 300 million, given projected population growth overall.

The growing concentration of people in urban areas in Africa presents particular challenges:
- o In many places there has been urbanisation without economic growth, leading to growing unemployment, social exclusion and leaving the informal sector as the only escape from chronic urban poverty.
- o Severe public health conditions in slums, leading to levels of infant mortality that are equal to, and sometimes worse than, those find in rural areas.
- o The ongoing threat of eviction due to the lack of tenure security, inadequate housing and consequent social and economic dislocation.

Kibera, in Nairobi, Kenya, is one of the largest slums in Africa, with a population of around 700,000 cramped together in corrugated iron or mud brick shacks

(Photo by Building and Social Housing Foundation)

Instead of recognising this challenge and seeking ways to address it, however, the consultation document merely makes a vague reference to the movement of rural people to cities and then gives no consideration to impact or to solutions. Under Area 6 it talks of effective action against poverty requiring an understanding of "*the characteristics of poor people, the nature of their poverty and where they are*" but it seems to see this as merely an analysis to be made in the future. The facts suggest that the challenge of urban poverty needs to be recognised and addressed now.

Whilst the document talks of the importance of economic growth, meanwhile, it fails to recognise the key role of urban centres as drivers of growth. Cities therefore need proper investment, accountable administration and efficient and accessible public services. Communities can play a central role, working with each other, local authorities and the public sector. These issues need international recognition and the drive that can come from this recognition. Only then will it be possible for the growing numbers of urban dwellers to achieve an acceptable quality of life.

We appreciate that the consultation document is merely a framework and does not cover the full range of discussions held or plans being considered. We are pleased to see the strong focus on water and sanitation for example, since less than

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[2] Figures taken from *Habitat Debate* Vol., 10, No. 1, March 2004

20% of Africa's urban population are connected to sewers. We are nonetheless deeply concerned that, as far as the document allows us to judge, urban poverty and the challenge of slums does not appear to be any kind of a priority, despite clear trends towards the urbanisation of poverty in Africa.

The omission of strategies to tackle the issue of slums is currently a serious flaw when the Commission For Africa seeks to provide "*a _coherent_ set of policies to accelerate progress towards a strong and prosperous Africa.*"

Our recommendations

Governments in Africa have committed themselves to tackling the key challenges of urban poverty through the Habitat Agenda, which sets the goal of adequate shelter and related services for all. Tackling urban poverty is also key to meeting the Millennium Development Goals, most obviously Target 11, which aims to have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, but also, amongst others, Target 10, which aims to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation and adequate drainage are major issues in slum settlements such as Avenor in Accra, Ghana

(Photo by Homeless International)

Although these stated commitments exist, however, government policies are often not geared to meeting them. A recent study of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, the majority from African countries, found that they consistently ignore urban poverty both in their analyses and in their solutions.[3] This is attributed to flawed measurements of poverty which mean that the urban dimension is routinely underestimated, as explored in full in another recent study.[4]

The Urban Poverty Group therefore strongly recommends that the Commission for Africa take a key role in highlighting this disparity and in engaging seriously with the challenge of slums. This also implies that investments in city development should be better focused on the needs of the poor. Given the lack of national and international attention to, and understanding of, the urbanisation of poverty in Africa, this is an area where the Commission could add significant value both to local processes and to bilateral and multilateral approaches.

Examples of specific measures that are likely to be needed in order to address the challenges are:
1) Altering existing urban land and housing policies so that they facilitate pro-poor upgrading.
2) Identifying innovative community-based pilot projects, disseminating lessons and providing the finance needed to take them to scale.
3) Reshaping urban governance to enable genuine partnerships between public, private, customary and civil society stakeholders.

The UPG would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues in more detail.

We recommend that the particular challenges of slums/human settlements should therefore be addressed as a new action area under 'human development, culture and inclusion'.

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[3] Diana Mitlin (2004) *Understanding urban poverty: What the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers tell us*. IIED, London.
[4] David Satterthwaite (2004) *The under-estimation of urban poverty in low and middle-income nations*. IIED, London.