Millennium Development Goals: critical review

Options how to deal with Global Slum PoliciesExcerpts from Habitat-Jam selected by Knut Unger

Howshould/can NGOs and social movements which struggle for the right to housing deal with Millenium Development Goal (MDG) 7 target 11?

1. Criticize/fight/overcome the concept of â[][]slumsâ[][]

One global term for a very complex and varied phenomenon is inadequate and misleading

Each country has its own term, even in Brazil different regions use different terms, they don't use the term favela all over Brazil. This is how it should be. In South Africa we talk about informal settlements, we try to avoid the word 'squatter settlement' or particularly 'squatter camp', because that was a derogatory word used by the apartheid government.

There is a big question whether global target setting (which requires definitions) makes any sense for a complex issue such as inadequate living conditions. Its not one disease that can be eradicated by 2020. Its something we need to first learn to live with (not wish away), in order to understand (in all its diversity, very much at a local level) so it can be strategically addressed - and many different strategies will be needed for many varying conditions. Simplification in the sense of the term 'slum' does not help. (Marie Huchzermeyer, SA at Habitat Jam)

Exclusion of homeless

â[][]Slum-targetsâ[][] do not identify homeless people under others living under very precarious conditions within regular settlements.

In the north â[][]slumâ[][] doesnâ[][]t resonate with struggles claiming housing rights, but alludes to the â[][]hot chaos of the southâ[][]

For women to CLAIM their rights (eg: to adequate housing), language has to resonate with experience. So, if the term 'slum' doesn't resonate, I wonder if women will tune out ... my real point isn't about semantics, rather, are we sure to address the housing/living conditions of Canada's poorest people (women) if we are using terms like "slum dwellers'. When I hear the term I donâ[][]t immediately think about Canadian women, i think about women / people in the south. (Leilani Farha, Women group, CANADA at Habitat Jam) Its true that slum does not conjure the image of the image, but rather alludes to the hot chaos of the south. And housing rights for women in the north are as desperate as housing in the south. (paris marshall smith, Youth / Student, CANADA)

Our slums are just urban villages

In Indian context I think slums are nothing but densely populated villages located in urban areas. So instead of calling them slums we should call them urban villages. (Lokendra Thakar, Expert, INDIA at Habitat Jam)

â[][]Slumâ[][] unnecessarily replaces 'informal settlement' and stigmatises peoples squats

Although even the term 'informal settlement' is coined from a regulatory angle (Marie Huchzermeyer, SA at Habitat Jam) it is obvious that nearly all debates on improving so called â[][]slum formationâ[][] within the MDG 7,11 discourse in fact are dealing with informal squatter settlements in the â[][]southâ[][] and not with other

phenomenaof deprived neighbourhoods, for instance in large scale housing schemes or city centres, which was the original us of the term âslumâ. Without any objective need the debate on regularisation of informal settlements (especially security of tenure) and their improvement was replaced by the stigmatising and imprecise term âslum improvementâ, which at the same time sound totarget on more than securing informal settlements (many of which do not show extreme housing violations and thus cannot be blamed as slums) and less (because we find many housing rights violations outside informal settlements). In fact the use of the term âslumâ mainly stigmatises informal settlements which are a main solution of housing problems in many southern cities.

Even âInformal settlementsâ creates a misconception that someone is working to change the situation

Female friends in the south prefer to call their 'slums' settlements without the informal attachment because for many it is not a temporary situation. Women bear children and raise them in conditions of informality that put themselves and their offspring at continuous risk and the title of informal only creates a misconception that someone is working to change the situation. (paris marshall smith, Youth / Student, CANADA at Habitat Jam)

Inaccuracy in measuring those in desperate need of development focus

The use of the term âslumâ in the MDGs is demeaning, misleading and has led to a vast inaccuracy in measuring those in desperate need of development focus. (The UN sets 5 criteria on slum definition and if you don't meet one you live in a slum).(Don Haszczyn, Non Governmental Organization, HUNGARY at Habitat Jam)

Describing downtrodden people as slum dwellers in its own is discriminating

In-as-much we are trying to better lives of the downtrodden people in our societies, by describing them as slum dwellers, less privileged or underprivileged in its own is discriminating. (zablon onguko, Media, KENYA at Habitat Jam)Using the term has material effects

How would changing the word change the lives of the people who live in these housing conditions?Language has power so we should not underestimate the effect of using different words. They can create the opportunity to reshape our thinking! (David Thorns, Expert, NEW ZEALAND at Habitat Jam)

They call it "slum"before they bulldoze it!

The "slums" of my youth in England were bulldozed to make way for high-rises that became the "slums" of the 90s. They too are being demolished and the original "slums" are back in fashion. The social, cultural and economic context of our homes is the issue. (Peter , Non Governmental Organization, CANADA)

Slum target usedto justify eradication of informal settlements

It has been very harmful in South Africa that the MDG to improve the lives of slum dwellers (which is linked to the 'Cities Without Slums' initiative of Cities Alliance) is quoted by politicians to justify a campaign to eradicate informal settlements. Marie Huchzermeyer, Academics / Research, SOUTH AFRICA at Habitat Jam

Significant slum improvement is perceived as an unreachable goal

The current definition has led to an unreachable goal and thus led the global community to decrease its

attention in this area - try getting any EU or USAID support for a housing program in the developing world... (Don Haszczyn, Non Governmental Organization, HUNGARY)

Targeting slum dwellers casts light on housing conditions without addressing what causes them.

The problem with trying to improve the conditions of "slum dwellers" (I believe that was the term) is that it casts light on housing conditions without addressing what causes them. People who live in slums are not much different from people who live anywhere else, they are, for the most part, ordinary people trying to make the best life they can out of what they've got. The problem is, they've got almost nothing. And as much as we would like to think otherwise, in Canada anyhow, we still think of assets/affluence as a limited substance. Nationally, we are hung up on tax cuts - getting more money into our pockets and we don't understand that a tax increase to benefit the poor would make the whole country more affluent in the end - affluent in every way. (Stephanie Farrington, Academics / Research, CANADA at Habitat Jam)

Instead Slum policies we need redistribution of wealthto invest in inclusive policies

NZ had an election recently at which the political parties were all trying to outdo each other in giving away money - tax cuts was the most popular - mostly in a manner that was repressive and would further open up differences between richer and poorer members of society. We need accounting measures that show the true cost of not including people and maintaining their life worlds and not enabling them to participate and then maybe we can move from this obsession with maximising individual wealth and create a more inclusive social world. This is both a political and a social and an urban project! (David Thorns, Expert, NEW ZEALAND)

â□□Targeting slumsâ□□ tries to replace the recognition of the right to housing

â□□Targeting slumsâ□□ is the opposite of what social movements struggled for when they called for the recognition of the right to housing, and end of forced evictions, the end of social apartheid.

The real meaning of â□□slumâ□□ is a declaration of war by the good and wealthy against the â□□breeding centresâ□□ of the evil poor

How does the general discourse â□□ not the sophisticated UN Habitat speak â□□ understand the term â□□slumâ□□? Just go to Wikipedia: â□□Slums are usually characterized by high rates of poverty and unemployment and are breeding centres for many social problems such as crime, recreational drugs, alcoholism, and despair. In many poor countries they are also breeding centres for disease due to unsanitary conditions.â□□ Breading centres of disease, crime, drugs, alcoholism, poverty ! The thrilling origin of all the ugly, the dangerous, the ill, terrorists! The ultimate clash against our civilisation! A declaration of war: Thatâ□□s the real meaning!

2. Criticize Target 11

MDG target is hopelessly inadequate,

The number of slum dwellers is expected to double until 2020.

Under these conditions the MDG 11, 7 is totally inadequate. There are interpretations of the MDG task force that the original meaning included a provision of alternatives to slum formations at the same time. But it is unclear how this interpretation gets implemented.

MDGs tend to replace human rights based goal settings

The rights to adequate shelter, basic services etc. are indivisible and universal. They exist for each individual independently from the place, the type or technical signification of settlement, independently from quantitative targets. The fact, that these rights get violated permanently is blaming the international community.

MDG 7,11tends to become an isolated target

MDG 7,11tends to become an isolated target, not integrated within the overall approach on human settlement improvement. Slum improvement cannot be separated from the overall goal to improve the living conditions of all the billions of people living in poverty, inadequate housing conditions, unhealthy settlements or insecure tenure.

MDG 7,11gives up the struggle for â□□cities for allâ□□

When during the 90ies social movements struggled for the right to housing, organization, participation it was a struggle for another frame of global development and this global development also required a deep change of what we call cities and settlements. The place where the people live and organize, struggle and survive. While overcome of poverty of course was a priority the target was the city as a whole. The Habitat Agenda spoke about equitable city and slogan was â□□cities for allâ□□.

Look what the MDG 7 target 11 â□□ the only reference to the habitat in the MDGs â□□ had done to this orientation. Until 2020 the living conditions of at least 100 Mio. Slum Dwellers shall be improved! Thy nebulously say â□□improveâ□□, they do not say â□□Everybody has he right to a decent dwellingâ□□. They say â□□Slum Dwellersâ□□, they do not say â□□the homelessâ□□, â□□the badly housedâ□□, the â□□excludedâ□□ or â□□evictedâ□□. They even do not say â□□security of tenure must be guaranteedâ□□ and the even do not use other precise and well introduced terms. Further more they do not address that more than 850 million people suffer from more than one violation of human rights. They even do not say â□□develop alternatives to the development of new bad living conditionsâ□□. They just reduce the whole problem to 100 million of at least 850 million now and 2 billion in 2020, not counted all those poor, badly housed, homeless and displaced persons who live outside significant settlements which fit into the image of slum

3. Understand/analyse reasons for the concept and target settingMDG 7.11 reflects the realpolitik of exclusion of economical irrelevant inhabitants

MDG 7.11 reflects the realpolitik of urban settlements in a globalizing world: a substantial proportion of their inhabitants are viewed by governments, and by the so-called middle class, as disposable because they are unlikely to be relevant to the global economy either as producers or as consumers. (Ted Schrecker, Expert, CANADA at Habitat Jam)

â□□Slumâ□□ is an image painted by shocked European middle classes, a discursive and material construction of separation, class rule and control

"Slum" is an image about masses of poor living together , originally painted by upper middle class people who were shocked about the other side of their wealth, the dangers for morality and ruling powers which raised from the concentration of poor.

The origin of the social war concept of â□□slumsâ□□ lies back in the history of industrial urbanisation in Europe when middle and upper class people where shocked by the massive agglomeration of uncultivated proletarians in their backyards, when they started to separate themselves into gated communities outside the industrial centres, thus producing the image they feared and needed in order to legitimate their class driven privacy and privileges. â□□Slumâ□□ is a discursive construction as well as it is a an urban construction! A construction of separation, of class rule, of control. From the very beginning it is legitimating paternalistic reforms as well as police control, forced evictions and bulldozing.. A term which reproduces the exclusion every day, reproduces it in the paternalistic view on â□□save the children from those dangerous districtsâ□□ up to â□□help them to help themselves â□□ but keep them outsideâ□□.

It is an image which of course reflects experiences,a strong myth which not only affects the thinking and

perception of dominant classes but of all levels if society, including media, research, NGOsâ¦It is not unimportant that this image even was adopted by âslum dwellersâ themselves, in an affirmative or subversive way.The originally subversive affirmation of the bourgeois slum per/conception by the slum dwellers themselves have built a source for cultural production and innovation, which, like Rap, then became an important industry at world markets. This was one way to universalise the concept of dangerous slums, which at the same time fell back on the cultural identities of the urban villages themselves. âSlumâ today is an industry not only producing cheap clothes and other goods, but even drugs and â cultural identities which by specific forces within the same industrial system are used to legitimate the continuation of the social war against the poor.

Today the richer minority in the world - including myself - is fearing the massive urbanisation by the global under-classes. It`s getting out of control. Of course we do not want to give rights to these masses. We just want them to continue with the production of images we can fear and profit from.Paternalistic images of helplessness, mud, criminality and even help-your-self.Only if it comes to direct touch the global upper-class calls for cleanageThey then turn "cities without slums" into criminalization of street vendors, evict so called informal settlementsâ¦.

MDG 7,11 was a counter attack against the social contract achieved in the Habitat Agenda

Habitat Agenda 1996 in its is very compromising text speaks about the RIGHT to adequate shelter and the many related rights, the access to services, equitable human settlements, partnership of major groups, about informal settlements and urbanization of course but hardly uses slums as a prominent term to target action. What happened within the following 4 years that this provisionally committing texts which tried to capture the complexity of our citiesâ agendas was replaced by the simple enemy target âslumâ?

Some forces before the UN Millennium Deceleration succeeded to erase what over 50.000 participants 4 years before had negotiated in Istanbul, by replacing any clear reference to human rights through an allegedly technical term which in reality means nothing else that they have quitted the social contract with the civil society of the 90ies. Back the wheel to the cellar-corps of conservatism, beautified by some neo-liberal workfare rhetoric.

The UN in the MDGs has given up to struggle for the social rights of each person. They also have given up the struggle for equity within the cities. They just want to claim some quantitative goal, which hurts nobody, does not question the social polarisation in the world and within the cities but gives enough space to jam around years after years about small technical steps for the improvements of slum dwellers by themselves. It so far is a total repetition of what the paternalistic European conservatives did when they started to think about some improvements of catastrophic hygienic situations in the slums of the working class at the end of the 19th century. With a slight difference: The neo-liberal paternalism of today even has given up to care about the construction. All should be done by themselves or the markets.

4.Improve the targetProportional targets

Ana Tibaijuka earlier in 2005 had called for a review of MDG 11, 7 orientating on a proportional figure of improvements. What had happened to this proposal?

Habitat International Coalition earlier in 2005 had called for precision of the target: At least halve he proportion of slum dwellers in the urban population, between 1990 and 2020. Specify each countryâs numerical commitment to this goal.

Criteria and indicators for identifying slum improvements

Criteria and indicators for identifying slum improvements must become more precise, comparable and operational at country levels. The five indicators developed by UN Habitat build a good basis for the development of minimum standards for access to water and sanitation, security of tenure, durability of construction and adequate living space.

Precise minimum standards â though guided by international principles - must recognize the cultural

environment. For that reason the exact indicators and targets must be identified at country levels, through participative processes, which include slum organizations and civil society, and which have to be negotiated with international facilities.

â… should be used astargets independently from â slum formationâ Because each of the five criteria expresses a violation of basic human rights they should not only be used to identify â slumsâ but build the basis to set up targets for each of the elements. By this method even the problem of excluding of â non-slumâ substandard conditions could be solved. Example: If you identify populations which have minimum access to water and sanitation but live in a totally overcrowded house without security of tenure, this is a problem which must be addressed equally. The five criteria further more must be accompanied by the other internationally agreed elements of the right to adequate shelter,- in particular affordability, liveability and access to all basic services.

Orientate on the full set of housing rights based criterion

Target 11 should orientate on at least halving the proportion of people who lack one of these basic needs and rights:
(a) access to water, sanitation and other basic services,
(b) security of tenure,
(c) durability of construction,
(d) affordability of shelter, facilities and services
(e) adequate living space or shelter at all
(f) accessibility of shelter and facilities.

At the same time the right to organize independently and to participate in decision making must be guaranteed.

Specific programs should strengthen the international institutional capacities to address violations of the right to adequate shelter, especially evictions and of the right to organize.

Include solidarian economy

I think we should review more carefully the 5 items overcrowding, poverty and social exclusion, inadequate water and sanitation, exposure to risk, insecurity of tenure. I ask, for instance, what does it change if I have the security of tenure of my housing? Maybe I have to pay taxes and I donât have money. Probably, solutions are aligned with poor people creating their own efficient way to get incomes to live and improve there slums, not in informal economy but solidarian one. (Mercedes Castillo, Academics / Research, COLOMBIA at Habitat Jam)

5. Make use of the target/concept

Use â slumsâ to blame international community: If housing is a right... we should not have slums.

The type of resources necessary to provide adequate housing is not given the priority that it should. If housing is a right... we should not have slums. (womeninconstructionjahc , Women group, JAMAICA at Habitat Jam)

Break down the concept of "slum" to the elements that create it

We must break down the concept of "slum" to the elements that create this condition. By working to address these elements we may work to create fully functioning neighbourhoods that meet the needs and aspirations of all citizens. (Lower Mainland, Non Governmental Organization, CANADA at Habitat Jam)

6. Criticize Neo-liberal slum upgrading in practiceResults of land privatisation

Jobs alone won't improve people's lives in a context in which more and more land is privatised and traded in an upwardly spiralling land market. The evidence from countries in which globalisation has advanced with positive spin-offs of job creation is that, with accompanied land privatisation, housing conditions for the newly employed has worsened. They become tenants in the most miserable housing stock. Marie Huchzermeyer, Academics / Research, SOUTH AFRICA

âSlum upgradingâ often serves an underhoused middle class

Those that are best able to predict the impact of proposed slum upgrading are the slum dwellers themselves. All too often, they correctly predict and fear displacement, as much 'slum upgrading' (e.g. the planned slum upgrading for Soweto-Kibera in Nairobi) ends up improving the lives of non-slum dwellers, as it provides units that are desirable to an underhoused middle class. Marie Huchzermeyer, Academics / Research, SOUTH AFRICA

People are afraid of âSlum upgradingâ

The experience of previous attempts to "upgrade" the slums, in particular in Nairobi, have resulted in the type of scenario that you are describing and people are therefore very cynical about and afraid of such interventions. More should be learned from previous mistakes and people in the settlements must be given the chance to a) be provided with comprehensive information on what will happen in their areas and b) influence the scope of interventions. PeopleÂ´s right to information must be acknowledged! Kristina Flodman, Private sector / Business, SWEDEN

7. Breaking it down to practical alternativesSecurity of tenure by occupancy permits

Occupancy permits can be more affordable than rent, and can be more secure than freehold title, as they are not as attractive to the better off. Tenure is only secured for the poor, if it is secured from the market, which always seeks to trade housing/land to those that are better off. Henando de Soto is blind to this reality and it is sad that so many governments, and UN-Habitat, seek his advice. Marie Huchzermeyer, Academics / Research, SOUTH AFRICA

8. Globalize Slum StrugglesTarget the ghettos of the rich

Reduce inequalities within cities and our global city by targeting the gated communities and ghettos of the rich through redistribution of the wealth and land they robbed. In Nairobi 40% of the people live on 5% of the land while 60% live on 90% of the land ...the remaining 5% is golf course.