

# Housing the Urban Poor

## *Difficult issues and urban myths*

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# **Myth 1: *Urbanization is negative and should/can be stopped***

*“urbanization is source of violence, loss of values, sprawling on valuable rural land, increase of discomfort, negative impact on environment, diverts governments from fighting rural poverty which is worst than urban poverty, etc.”*

## **Reality: Urbanization is positive, even if it means poor population coming in urban areas.**

- It benefits the city but also helps alleviate poverty including rural poverty (where land is reaching its bearing capacity).
- Urban-phobia needs to give way to proactive and pro-urban policy.
- 2005 Millennium summit asks for pro-active strategies to offer alternatives to slum formation

## ***Myth 2: Slums are the product of attitude of poor people who defy the law.***

Slum upgrading is not, thus, the responsibility of governments. *“Slum dwellers were not invited to squat and invade the city; they break the law, why should we send the message that we are awarding them from breaking the law? They should be evicted to ensure that the rule of law is respected (Operation Murambatsvina).”*

# Reality: Slum formation is the visible face of economic and social policy failures, not the deliberate intent of the poor.

- The poor are subject to the urban penalty while contributing to the urban development.
- Governments need to correct their policies.
- Need for a strong political will, the commitment of budgetary resources and implementation of inclusive strategies involving the poor.
- It is up to local authorities to respond and take up the challenge, it is their responsibility.

# Myth 3: Affording secure tenure incites urban poor to migrate to the city and invade and squat public (or private) land.

*“If slum dwellers are given security of tenure or relocated by the government, then others will come again and squat the vacated areas. In this case should we keep adopting a permissive attitude? This will start a never ending process!”*

# Reality: Slums develop even under the most adverse conditions.

- Evictions will only make life of urban poor worse;
- they will create new slums under more difficult conditions. (Algiers 1986, Zimbabwe 2005, Mumbai 2005).
- Instead in-situ upgrading is always less costly. If relocation is necessary, negotiated solutions can provide good options (MUTP).

## **Myth 4: Making land affordable to the poor conflicts with land markets.**

*“If land is given to the poor for a price below the market value, this will crowd out the private sector and hamper urban growth. The poor will be tempted to sell the land and get the market value and then return back to slums.”*



# Reality: affordable land can be made available in compliance with land market

## Needs:

- Transparent market,
- Minimal infrastructure, ( realistic norms and standards)
- Options include the definition of areas needed for urban growth in the long term (15 to 20 years), design of an arterial road network and purchase of the right of way and provision of minimal quality roads (Solly Angel/Ecuador).

# Myth 5: Only massive and heavily subsidized housing programmes can solve the housing problem of the poor.

*“Provision of massive housing programmes, heavily subsidized, will reduce the housing shortage and eventually provide housing for the poor”.*

# Reality: Gentrification, miss-allocation of resources

- urban poor cannot resist gentrification if they do not have decent source of income.
- Also increases risks of benefiting to other/better off segments of population.
- Risk is reduced if population is asked to contribute using diverse means of efforts (sweat capital/micro-credit schemes).

# Myth 6: High rise buildings can efficiently shelter the poor and ease the land burden.

*“In order to avoid using scarcely available land, build high rise dwellings for the urban poor so as to reduce land consumption”.*

# Reality: a society in transition

- Most of slum dwellers make a living using space near their shack.
- High rise dwellings will impose on the poor different social and economic patterns.
- Provision of small plots (from 35 to 80 m<sup>2</sup>) can prove to be as efficient in terms of density and will leave room to extension.
- Is a successful approach to social inclusion.