

Population Dynamics and Target 11 in MDG 7

Panel Contribution to the Population-Environment Research Network Cyberseminar on
Population Dynamics and Millennium Development Goal 7
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I am very pleased to join in this discussion of population dynamics and MDG 7 and have enjoyed contributions thus far. In my capacity as an associate to the UN Millennium Project Task Force 8, charged with providing recommendations to the Secretary-General on Target 11, I am able to report that much of Dr. Martine's concerns with the Target were shared by the Task Force.

More specifically, in the Task Force 8 report, *A Home in the City*, we proposed that the Target itself be realigned with its original intention, found in the Cities Without Slums initiative – which was to stop new slum formation, in addition to improving the lives of current slum dwellers. The Task Force itself offered the following formulation: “By 2020, improving substantially the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, while providing adequate alternatives to new slum formation” (2005:3).

It is also important to point out that Target 11 itself does not call for improvements in the environmental conditions alone for 100 million slum dwellers – but for improvement in their lives – which is of course a more wide-reaching target. In short, this calls for improvement in the physical and non-physical living conditions of slum dwellers, recognizing that both are required for the achievement of either.

A few more specific comments to the text submitted to this seminar. Dr. Martine was correct to point out that “urbanites tend to be better off than their rural counterparts.” However, I think that in every opportunity we have, it is important to highlight that averages and statistics play tricks on us. As many in this discussion know and have studied (here, I would defer specifically to Dr. David Satterthwaite's pioneering work), the health conditions of slums dwellers often match that of their rural counterparts.

It is also important to point out that the urban poor are among the most efficient users of environmental resources, as such it is the urban expansion of the more affluent segments of society that arguably could cause the greatest environmental stresses.

Regarding land, I could not agree more with Dr. Martine's point that markets alone “cannot be trusted to provide social and environmental solutions”, and that planning is required to achieve the *full intentions* of Target 11. My wording here regarding the

Target is also intentional – as I disagree with the position that the MDGs or Target 11 shifts attention away from the heart of the matter.

The MDGs are far from a narrow prism, though their interpretation or acknowledgement unfortunately is indeed too often of a narrow nature. The Goals are purposefully wide-reaching in their substantive meaning. They are complimented by targets and indicators that are meant to facilitate proactive planning – i.e., in order to achieve MDG 7 by 2015 or 2020, what needs to be done today, a year from today, etc.; and further, how might we measure the results of such actions.

Most actors concerned with Target 11 already agree that improvement for 100 million slum dwellers is only a drop in the bucket, and are already looking at ways to plan alternatives to future slum formation. The greater challenge is thus in convincing those outside of “the choir”, so to speak, to acknowledge the importance of urban at all. Here, I am perhaps a little more optimistic than my colleague. Dr. Martine was correct to point out that political administrative tenures pose a special obstacle to long-term planning and interventions, but luckily several groups – both within and outside of political administrations - are and have been dedicated to improving the lives of slum dwellers.

A quick glance at the composition of Task Force 8 provides a snap shot of such actors, including Slum Dwellers International, UN-HABITAT, municipal and national housing/community development representatives, researchers, etc. Such groups have successfully highlighted attention to the challenges faced by slum dwellers for decades. The challenge is to support efforts at linking up the excellent work of these existing players and helping them move their efforts up to scales that could significantly impact the lives of 100 million slum dwellers today as well as the urban poor of tomorrow.