

Millennium Development Goals and the City

The United Nations in September 2000 launched a concerted program, committing itself to the most challenging and vexing problems we got from the twentieth century. The world leaders committed themselves to the issued of extreme poverty, disease and environmental degradation faced by the mankind world over. The Secretary General Mr. Kofi Anan in his paper 'We the peoples: the Role of UN in the 21st Century' represented the mankind and offered recommendations of how these challenges could be met through global co-operation and action. The paper became the basis for the Millennium Declaration to become the eighth Millennium Development Goals or MDGs. The MDGs are a set of eight goals and eighteen targets that are committed to achieve sustainable development for the world's poorest people. The eight goals are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

The first seven goals focus to eradicate poverty, disease and environmental degradation whereas the eighth goal is essentially a commitment of global partnership to achieve the first seven goals. These eight goals acknowledge that the mankind faces all forms of poverty, there are curable diseases that still threaten lives, people die of hunger and malnourishment, conscious degradation of our environment continues, people basic amenities like water and shelter and all this rampant with the ongoing economic boom, when have modern technology at our disposal and the world is well connected

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globally. Modern science has given us the potential and techniques to address these problems. Whether it is carbo-protein rich foods that can cure malnutrition, or it is anti-malarial and anti-retroviral drugs to cure diseases or it is water shed management or water harvesting to make potable water available to all. Man and science together have made it possible to have solutions to these problems.

But the reality deceives us. This is not to say that not much improvement has been made, but the progress is uneven and the growth has been slow. Slow growth, low educational achievement, poor health and civil disturbances have been the main obstacles.

As per World Bank estimates, roughly 1.1 billion people were living in extreme poverty in 2001. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that worldwide they're as more than 840 million people who are chronically undernourished most of them living in low income countries. HIV has affected more than 60 million people worldwide. WHO estimates (WHO 2002) that 300000-500000 million cases of malaria occur each year? To make it worse, in this rapid urbanizing world, the movement of people of the cities that put pressure on land and there is grave lack of basic facilities like shelter, drinking water leading to growth of slums. The United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN Habitat 2003) estimates that in 2001, 924 million people lived in slums, where they lack basic services, lived in over crowded and substandard housing and are exposed to unhealthy living conditions and hazardous locations.

The MDGs call for improving the lives of at least 1000 million slum dwellers by 2020. Much can be done to improve the lives of slum dwellers by improving basic infrastructure, giving them shelter

facilities, healthy living conditions and empowering them to control and manage their own lives. The 8th MDG, which is to develop a global partnership for development, commits to create an environment in which rapid, sustainable development is possible. Also after 1996 under the Habitat Agenda, The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements linked human settlement development with the process of realization of human rights in general and the right to adequate housing in particular. The realization of human rights in general and the right to adequate housing in particular. The realization of human rights has been elaborated in the International Bills of human rights comprising the Universal Declaration of Human rights, International Covenant on Civil and political rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

UN Habitat and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human rights, through their joint United Nations Housing Rights program is currently working on a set of housing rights indicators would provide a picture of progress at the national and global levels, would inspire the governments to respect these rights and prepare a public policy which is pro-poor.

Elements of housing rights indicators are:

1. Habitability (sufficient living area, durability)
2. Accessibility to services (water and sanitation)
3. Affordability of housing
4. Security of tenure
5. Legal frame work
6. Housing assistance to the poorest, access to information etc.

Countries the world over like France, Kosovo, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Russia, Uganda, UK and USA have given due recognition to the housing rights. The Government of France in its law 90/449 on housing provides an example how national

legislation mandates public provision of affordable housing for those in need. Financing is guaranteed by the State.

Another example is the constitution of South Africa in which Article 26 of the Constitution contains provisions closely mirroring the right to adequate housing as articulated in article 11(1) of the International Covenant on economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In a country like India where nearly 41 million live in slums comprising 21.8 million males and 18.8 million females. This includes 5.5 million infants and children in the age group of 0-6 years. The housing conditions of slums in cities are worse and there is dearth of even basic facilities. The government has taken certain initiatives for the development of infrastructure as well as improvement of environment, but much remains to be done. The Government of India is obliged to respect and protect the human right to adequate housing. The Indian Constitution enumerates the fundamental rights and duties of the state and protects individual liberty by guaranteeing economic, social and political justice for all.

Although the right to property has been omitted from the set of fundamental rights protected by the Constitution, the right to adequate housing is recognized

and protected as a subset of other fundamental rights. Article 21 provides that no person be deprived of his or her life and personal liberty. The courts have held that the right of life encompasses the right to live with human dignity.

The Supreme Court affirms that living with dignity necessarily entails that the core amenities of life are readily accessible. Thus, the right to shelter is a constitutional guarantee. But the ground level scene of urban poor in slums is very unpleasant. On top of that there are forced evictions and slum dwellers are rehabilitated to the outskirts of the city. This policy of rehabilitating them has been condemned time and again; and the policy of in-situ up-gradation has been adopted by providing the slum dwellers the basic amenities at same place and giving them 'pucca' (permanent) shelter at affordable rates. But the process and procedure is long and complicated, as too many public agencies have to be involved.

There is need for realization and recognition of housing rights, political will and a social policy of the Government to provide additional, institutional, physical human and financial resources. Above all it is required that the poor be part of the

policy. Let the poor come together and co-operate, create assets for themselves and maintain and manage them too. The development of housing and infrastructure can be done by making co-operatives for slum dwellers and urban poor.

The importance of co-operatives and co-operative like organizations has been acknowledged by the UN Habitat. The paragraph 56 to Habitat agenda recognizes co-operatives as stakeholders at local level that to complement and supplement the governmental efforts in providing housing rights to the poor.

Over the century, co-operatives have emerged as the movement of the weak and the less privileged. Co-operatives being micro level organizations are closer to poor and thus are accessible to them and the poor too can easily associate with them. Though there are other micro level organizations like NGOs and civil society organizations but are few have plunged themselves to providing housing and shelter to the poor. Most of them have focused on either health or education sectors. Housing co-operatives can prove to be the best mechanism for providing shelter to the homeless.

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