Research Report

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Forum: *Economic and Social Council*
Issue: *Slums in South and Central America*

Position: *Deputy chair*

Introduction

Although inhabited by millions, Latin slums lack basic public goods while they are plagued by violence and ruled by gangs. Inhabitants of slums live in bad conditions. There is a lack of sanitation, infrastructure, clean drinking water, electricity and medical care. In the 19th century, slums began to grow and became a pain in the neck of most governments in South and Central America.
There have been many attempts to eradicate slums in this region, but in order to be effective, these policies need to overcome many challenges. One of these is the suspicion of the inhabitants of slums towards the government. They believe that the government wants to use the land on which they live for other uses than housing, and they are afraid that they will lose their home.
Another attempt to resolve the issue is to "upgrade" the slums. However, improving for example the infrastructure is not enough to solve the problem. A great deal of money has to be invested by the government, in order to improve the slums in such a way, that they become proper homes.
People who live in slums often came to the city from rural areas in search for employment. They usually have had a life of poverty on the countryside and decided to migrate to the city hoping that they would find a better job. In the city, there are not enough jobs to provide all the migrants, so they cannot afford urban housing and they are forced to live in a slum. The life they have there is not much better than the life they used to have in the places they came from.

Definition of Key Terms

Slums
"A slum is a heavily populated urban informal settlement characterized by substandard housing and squalor. While slums differ in size and other characteristics from country to country, most lack reliable sanitation services, supply of clean water, reliable electricity, timely law enforcement and other basic services. Slum residences vary from shanty houses to professionally-built dwellings that because of poor-quality design or construction have deteriorated into slums." [1]

1 (Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slum)

Favela
"A favela is a slum in Brazil, within urban areas. The first favelas appeared in the late 19th century and were built by soldiers who had nowhere to live. Some of the first settlements were called *bairros africanos* (African neighbourhoods). They were the places where former slaves with no land ownership and no options for work lived. Over the years, many former black slaves moved in."

South and Central America
The part of the continent America below the United States.

The central American countries are (in alphabetical order):

- Belize
- Costa Rica
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Panama

The south American countries are (in alphabetical order):

- Argentina
- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Chile
- Colombia
- Ecuador
- Falkland Islands (Malvinas)
- French Guiana
- Guyana
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Suriname
- Uruguay
- Venezuela

General Overview

The United Nations five characteristics defining a slum:

1. Inadequate access to safe water
2. Inadequate access to sanitation and infrastructure
3. Poor structural quality of housing
4. Overcrowding
5. Insecure residential status

In the 19th and 20th century, slums were very common in Europe and the USA. Nowadays, slums are rarely found in developed economies, and predominantly in urban regions of developing and undeveloped parts of the world. About 33% of the urban population in developing regions, or about 863 million people, lived in slums in 2012, according to UN-HABITAT. The percentage was the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa (61,7%), South Asia (35%), Southeast Asia (31%), East Asia (28,2%), West Asia (24,6%), Oceania (24,1%), Latin America and the Caribbean (23,5%), and North Africa (13,3%). Among individual countries, the percentage of urban residents living in slums was the highest in the Central African Republic (95,9%). Between 1990 and 2010, the urban population increased, but the percentage of people living in slums dropped. The city with the largest slums in the world

is Mexico City.

In the slums of Latin America, 117 million people live in poverty. The megacities in this region, for example Mexico City, Bogota, Rio de Janeiro and Lima, generate overcrowded living conditions, without access to clean drinking water, medical services and it is hard for the people who live there to meet their basic nutritional needs. As people live so close to each other in slums, diseases, such as tuberculosis, are easily spread.

Slums usually begin at the outskirts of a city. The city may spread past the original slum, enclosing the slum into the urban perimeter. New slums are formed at the new boundaries of the city, creating a mix of formal settlements, industry and slums. This makes the old slums valuable property. At their start, slums are typically located in least desirable lands close to a city. In cities located in mountainous areas, slums begin on slopes that are difficult to reach or at the bottom of valleys. They are mostly out of sight of the city, but close to natural water sources. In cities located near lagoons, lakes or rivers, slums often start at the banks or a dry river bed; in flat terrain, slums start at undesirable places, close to trash dumps or close to a railway.

These strategies protect slums from getting notices by government officials, as they are out of sight. Initial homes are shacks or tents that are easy to install, but as the city grows, they expand. Newcomers pay the local gangs for the right to live in the slum. The construction materials change into more lasting materials, like bricks, as the accommodations become established.

The original slums expand next to centers of economic activity, such as schools, which the inhabitants rely on. Established slums that are surrounded by the city cannot expand horizontally. Therefore, they grow vertically by adding extra rooms on top of existing houses. These can be used for a growing family, but also to rent to newcomers in the slum. Some slums name themselves after important people, like leaders of political parties or well-known historical figures.

By 2030 about 3 billion people will be in need for proper housing and access to basic infrastructure. Unfortunately, in the developing world we live in today, supply is often limited by bad governance systems or human resource deficiencies. So far, the lack of urban planning has resulted into a huge housing backlog, which has led to the development of slums in several big cities. Due to problems in formal housing and land delivery, more and more people end up in slums.

The population of slums is made up of people who migrated to the big cities in search for a better life. Slums in South and Central America were formed prior to the domination of real estate interests and the dense occupation of cities. A lot of people moved to the big cities, like Rio de Janeiro, after the end of slavery and urbanisation in Latin America increased. These people moved to the cities from the countryside with little or no money, so they were not able to afford the rent of a proper house. In the 1920s the favelas in Brazil grew so big that they formed a problem to the whole society. At the same time, favelas became a local category for poor people living on hills.

It wasn't until 1937 that the slums in South and Central America caught the public attention, when the Building Code (Código de Obras) recognised their existence. The

housing crisis of the 1940s forced the urban poor to build hundreds of houses of poor quality. Urbanisation in the 1950s caused many people from the countryside to move to the big cities. Those who decided to move to Rio the Janeiro chose an unfortunate time: the change of the capital of Brazil from Rio to Brasília in 1960 marked a decline for the former capital, as industry and employment options started to dry up. These new migrants were unable to find a job, and therefore unable to afford urban housing, so they ended up living in favelas. The city did not provide sanitation and proper infrastructure, so these parts of the city were soon associated with poverty and bad living conditions. In the 1970s, Brazil's military dictatorship pioneered a favela eradication policy. This forced the displacement of thousands of residents, and many were moved to public housing projects. Poor public planning and lack of investment later resulted into the disintegration of these projects into new favelas.

By the 1980s, worries about eradication began to give way to the violence associated with drug trade. Changing routes of production and consumption caused Rio to be the central point for cocaine destined for Europe. The drug trafficking through slums bring in money, but they also cause gangs to rival for dominance. As the inhabitants of the slums usually obey the gangs out of fear, interference from the government is not very useful. When bringing the state to the slum, governments need to take into account the next two things: to better establish the physical presence of the state and to realign the allegiance of slum inhabitants from criminal gangs toward the state.

Most people who live in slums work in informal economy. This way, they don't participate in the economy of the country, and they will never be able to get a position higher up in society and probably will never get out of the slums. The slums are also extremely vulnerable to natural and unnatural hazards. The lack of control on building materials used, poor maintenance and uncoordinated design make them prone to damage during earthquakes. Some slums risk man-made hazards, such as collapsing infrastructure, toxic industries and traffic congestion. Fires are another hazard to the inhabitants, as the streets are often too narrow to allow quick access to fire trucks.

Slums are always faced with opposition from the public. They are growing at a faster rate than cities as a whole. The explosive growth caused government removal programs, but the police have no control over people living in slums.

Some governments have sought to simply remove slums. This strategy for dealing with slums is rooted in the fact that slums usually start illegally on someone else's property. They are not recognised by the state. As the residents violate another's property rights, they have no legal claim on the land. Critics say that slum removal ignores the social problems that cause slums. The inhabitants need a place to live in the informal economy. Slum removal gets rid of the slum, but not of the problems that it creates.

Slum relocation strategies rely on removing the slum and moving the inhabitants elsewhere, sometimes to free housing. This strategy sees the slum as just a place where poor people live. In reality, a slum is often integrated in every aspect of a person's life, like source of employment and social life. Slum relocation takes away the opportunities for the poor to earn money and generates economical insecurity.

Major Parties Involved

All countries in South and Central America, but mostly Mexico and Brazil, as they have the most and the largest slums. (for a list of the countries see the defention of the key therms)

UN-Habitat
''The United Nations Humans Settlements Programme is the UN agency for human settlements and sustainable urban development. It is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.''[2]

Timeline of Events

1937	Slums under the attention of the public, as the Building Code recognised their existence
1940s	Housing crisis, which forced people to build houses of poor quality
1950s	A large growth in urbanisation caused many people to move from the countryside to big cities.
1970s	Brazil's military dictatorship pioneered a favela eradication policy, which resulted in the disintegration of the project's houses into new favelas.
2007	President Lula (Brazil) announced the Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento, a four-year investment plan, which includes the promotion of urban development for the favelas.

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Human_Settlements_Programme

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

- The Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento, a four-year investment plan, which includes the promotion of urban development for the favelas.

- A favela eradication policy, which resulted in the disintegration of the project's houses into new favelas.

- Single-family homes: in Salvador, Brazil, the slums were upgraded with single-family homes. This was done by moving families from their informal settlement into single-family homes in newly developed areas.

- Slum relocation.

Possible Solutions

- Expanding projects like the single-family homes, as mentioned above, to other cities and countries.
- Establishing the physical presence of the state in slums, to make sure that the slum inhabitants do not obey the criminal gangs anymore.
- Upgrading slums, for example establish reliable sanitation, infrastructure and electricity. A great deal of money is necessary for this solution.
- Creating new jobs for slum inhabitants, so they can make enough money to afford a house outside the slums.

Useful documents

General information about slums: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slum

Appendix/Appendices

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slum

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Favela

http://unhabitat.org/urban-themes/housing-slum-upgrading/

http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2012/02/02-latin-america-slums-felbabbrown

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Human_Settlements_Programme