

## **The Face of Urban Poverty: Explaining the Prevalence of Slums in African Countries**

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One of the most enduring manifestations of urban poverty in African countries is the proliferation of slums and squatter settlements. About 62 % of the urban population in Sub-Saharan Africa resides in slums. These settlements have the most deplorable living and environmental conditions, characterized by inadequate water supply, squalid conditions of environmental sanitation, overcrowded and dilapidated habitation, hazardous location, insecurity of tenure and vulnerability to serious health risks. It is in recognition of the challenges posed by the proliferation of slums that Target 7.d of the Millennium Development Goals seeks to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. Given that this target hardly makes a dent on the magnitude of slums, a revision of the target has been proposed, whereby in addition to substantially improving the lives of slum dwellers, concerted efforts should be made to provide adequate alternatives to new slum formation by prioritizing slum prevention programmes and proactive planning.

This paper contends that any attempt at improving the lives of slum dwellers and providing alternatives to new slum formation in Africa, must be preceded by a proper appreciation of the factors that underlie the formation and proliferation of slums. Currently, there is an apparent lack of understanding of the forces driving the proliferation of slums in African countries. The implication of this is that attention has focused disproportionately on the rapid urban growth as the major factor driving the proliferation of slums in Africa. While the rapid pace of urbanization plays an important role, there are other economic, social, political and institutional factors whose impacts are not known with much degree of certainty.

The purpose of this paper is to account for variations in the prevalence of slums among African countries. In this respect, the paper addresses the following questions. What factors apart from the rapid pace of urbanization explain the prevalence of slums among African countries? What is the link between urban development policy and proliferation of slums? What is the linkage between the incidence of slums and the macroeconomic environment? How will the current economic crisis affect the prevalence of slums? What role does the regulatory framework governing the allocation of residential land play in the proliferation of slums? The answers to these questions are central to identifying the challenges that African countries face in stemming the development of new slums and providing adequate alternatives to slum formation.