



World Habitat Day 2014: Voices from Slums



World Habitat Day is observed annually, on the first Monday of October. The Day was first designated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1985 and has been celebrated every year since 1986.

World Habitat Day is celebrated under a specific theme each year, to bring attention to UN-Habitat's mandate to promote sustainable development policies that ensure adequate shelter for all. *"Voices from Slums"* is the theme for 2014. It focuses on the global issue of people who live or have lived in urban areas marked by crowding, dirty, run-down housing, poverty, little or no water and sanitation facilities and social disorganization.



Characteristics of Slums

According to the UN-Habitat, an area is considered a slum if it is characterised by:

- ***Lack of access to public services*** – A slum generally lacks access to public services such as sewerage, water supply, roads, street lamps etc. or even if they exist, they provide poor service.
- ***Poor structural quality of housing*** - Houses in the slum area generally use substandard building construction



materials which are unable to withstand the elements and to protect dwellers from sun, rain and cold.

- **Over-crowded** – A slum generally has a high number of people within a small dwelling unit. Small houses or huts with narrow and dark street lanes characterise slums in most of the cases.
- **Insecure residential status** – Slum dwellers can lose their homes at any time.

Slums and the Environment



The conditions of slums negatively affect the health of persons living in the area as well as the environment. Due to overcrowding these areas face high levels of pollution. Also, land and water contamination are very prevalent due to improper disposal of all types of wastes, including human wastes. As a result, there are high incidences of infectious disease outbreaks like influenza, cholera, malaria, dengue and yellow fever.

People living in slums are also more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Since houses are often built with inadequate materials or other unsuitable building space, they are especially vulnerable to extreme weather events such as landslides, floods and earthquakes. In addition, the insanitary conditions exacerbate the impacts making it much more difficult for people in slums to recover.

The Way Forward

Across the globe, great efforts are being made to improve slums and improve the lives of persons who live there. The focus in the coming years is to develop cities using robust urban planning and regulation planning and to provide safe, affordable housing that is appropriate and adequate for our citizens' growing needs.

**You can share ideas and questions by sending letters to: “Our Earth, Our Environment”,
C/o EIT Division, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia,
GEORGETOWN or email eit.epaguyana@gmail.com.**