Addressing the Urban Poverty Crisis through Refugee Camps

Jayeesh Chennupati, University of Virginia, USA (jc6ebd@virginia.edu)

Abstract

The urban poor are similar to refugees. Socio-economic deprivation or environmental conditions force them to migrate to better their lives. Within urban areas, they find issues with security of tenure, access to water, nutrition, sanitation, and other deprivations similar to those that refugees encounter. The UN attempts to address these issues for refugees, but with conflict that lasts for decades, the UN's policy on providing temporary housing isn't an adequate solution. By providing permanent housing and attempting to create sustainable communities in refugee camps, the policy and technology employed for refugees can be translated to the urban poor.

By 2050, 68% of the world's population will live within cities ("68% of the World Population Projected to Live in Urban Areas by 2050, Says UN | UN DESA | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs" n.d.), placing a greater burden on limited resources. Current mismanagement has led to deprivations for the 1 billion people who live in slums compounding risks related to environmental degradation, climate change, conflict, and economic shocks. To make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (SDG goal 11) ("Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs" n.d.), a greater initiative to support the urban poor is needed.

Extreme Poverty and Housing Needs

A slum lacks one or more of the following creating a "household deprivation" ("SDG Indicator Metadata," n.d.):

1. Security of Tenure
2. Housing Durability
3. Sufficient Living Area
4. Access to Improved Water Sources
5. Access to Improved Sanitation Facilities

Other characteristics attributed to living in the slums encompass:

1. Increased Pollution ("Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs" n.d., 11)
2. Food and Greenery access (Vilar-Compte et al. 2021)
3. Health and Safety
4. Access to Electricity
5. Educational resources ("Why Do People Live in Slums?" n.d.)

Security of Tenure

"Safe, adequate, and decent housing is not only a basic human right, it is also the bedrock of human development especially for marginalized groups" (Jane Parry 2015). Land issues decide how social (gender inequality), economic (livelihood opportunities), and environmental goals (climate change) interact.

The urban poor provide an economic benefit to cities through construction, transportation, and other services provided through the informal economy. By integrating slums into urban development through secure housing, their contributions can be better leveraged as voters, taxpayers, and a source of investment for businesses as consumers.

To integrate the urban poor adequately, successful projects need a partnership between the community, private sector, and governmental organizations. Only through a partnership can innovative solutions be implemented with limited capacity and resources. By building resilient communities through secure land rights, a stable future is created.

Green Infrastructure Within Africa

Slums are naturally located near environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant spaces such as streams, wetlands, or low-lying riverbanks (Adegun 2021). In these areas, Urban Green Infrastructure meets a variety of functions, benefits, or needs (Jerome 2017). The benefits were explored within a case study of three different cities: Kya Sands - lacked any substantive improvements, Ruimsig – has space for services and infrastructure, and Cosmo City – a greenfield development. The benefits within these communities were:

1. Domestic gardens can improve food nutrition, security, and augment household income.
2. Community gardens serve as a space for social interaction.
3. Plants and trees provide environmental benefits with flood regulation and local climate moderation.

Integrating green infrastructure within communities is crucial, since a variety of functions can be met, and benefits can be accumulated in a sustainable manner.

Exploring Housing Issues in Krajan Kampung

Krajan Kampung has a high degree of urbanization due to increasing market trade. Factors affecting sustainable development was listed (Journal n.d.).

1. Clean Water
   a. Objection to local water company due to high fee
2. Sanitation/Sewage Management
   a. There are 54% of individuals who do not have a toilet and 22.35% of households without a septic tank
3. Waste Management
   a. No regular waste collection
   b. Garbage bins, garbage transport vehicles, and janitors aren't available
4. Economy
   a. Existence of Street Vendors isn't organized or managed

With each problem identified, an alternative for handling and prevention was presented, which requires coordination and communication between community members, private enterprises, and the government. Yet, there are levers to pull, such as creating a sanitation facility that can create significant change that does not require outside investments or technology to shape how a slum can transform into a safe and resilient community.

Similarities of the Urban Poor and Refugees

The urban poor are in essence refugees. Though they do not fall within the legal definitions of a refugee (individuals escaping violence) their reasons for migration, severe socio-economic conditions debilitating their livelihood and natural disasters ("Refugees | United Nations" n.d.), are still recognized by the UN. Can someone blame Rena, a mother of two, whose access to land was an island that disappears during floods, taking her belongings and endangering her family ("Why Do People Live in Slums?" n.d.)? Who can blame the economic migrants who can't harness the developmental progress of Africa in recent years due to recurrent internal instability, poor governance, mismanaged economies, and conflict (Nations n.d.) that a hundred million youth migrate for the thirty-seven

million available jobs. In addition to the economic refugees, there has also been an increase in refugees from sectarian conflicts, civil unrest, and environmental disasters.

Refugees face significant challenges similar to the urban poor. A well-designed refugee camp aims to address sanitation issues, access to clean water and nutrition, and opportunities to engage with the local economy. 78% of refugees also live in cities as the urban poor, where they face challenges related to shelter, sanitation issues, and harassment. Both the urban poor and refugees are groups who face the most extreme forms of deprivation.

Refugee Camps as Case Study for Urban Slums

Two-thirds of refugees live in protracted situations that last on average 20 years ("Refugee Camps: How a Temporary Approach Is Harmful to Health – Archive Global" n.d.). Camps meant to be temporary usually mirror permanent residence. Poor housing conditions within Sierra Leone refugee camps led to rodent infestations and the concurrent transfer of Lassa Fever (Bonner et al. 2007). Another study of Palestinian refugee camps found a significant correlation between living conditions and disease due to flooding and ventilation problems ("Health and Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees Residing in Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon: A Cross-Sectional Survey - ScienceDirect" n.d.). Permanent housing is essential for refugees to address their crisis and improve outcomes related to health.

To alleviate urban poverty, it is important to identify and invest in best practices for urban planning ("Urban Planning and Poverty in Developing Countries | HUD USER" n.d.). The UN is a perfect actor as it operates a wide variety of refugee camps in diverse geographical and cultural areas including Jordan, Bangladesh, and parts of Africa ("What Is a Refugee Camp? Definition and Statistics | USA for UNHCR" n.d.). The knowledge gained from providing refugees sustainable housing and access to economics markets in host communities in various circumstances can be used for the development of the urban poor.

Coherence of Policy and Technology

Policy is a steppingstone for the integration of refugees and the urban poor into governments and communities. As was covered initially, secure tenure rights can give a variety of advantages to individuals. Through housing, they are involved within urban planning, promoting the facilitation of sustainable cities. In addition to housing, incorporating green infrastructure strengthens the capacity and availability of resources that the community has from environmental benefits. Finally, in any community, problems similar to those in the Krajan Kampung study can be addressed through cooperation between governments and local enterprises. The UN can facilitate this conversation and create best practices by working with local governance and private entities. Through this action plan, lessons learned from refugee camps can be facilitated into UN deliberations regarding the urban poor.

Technology is another tool for creating sustainable communities in refugee camps. One promising solution is the expendable house ("Category Archive for 'Rumah Tambah' | Urban-Rural Systems" n.d.), a seed package that can be configured to the local social and environmental conditions. It emphasizes densification in the vertical dimension and provides rainwater harvesting, solar electricity, and inbuilt sewage and septic tank systems to avoid expensive and unreliable central pipe systems within slums. Besides a centralized unit of housing, community and urban planning can create spaces for women's collectives, community wellness centers, and educational facilities for children ("Urban-Rural Systems" n.d.). Lastly, technological tools such as low-cost vertical farms (Akinwolemiwa et al. 2018), water-purification bottles, and low-cost computers ("Solutions to Poverty and Hunger" n.d.) can aid the community in addressing nutritional deficiencies, sanitation issues, and education.

Intertwining technology in the process of building communities and enabling communities to be a part of the conversation in how to build a sustainable future enables individuals within refugees or slums to live healthier, sustainable, and freer life not being held back by their deprivations.

Policy recommendations/conclusions

1. The UN should focus more of its efforts into integrating permanent and sustainable housing within refugee settlements and treat them as innovation centers where policy recommendations 2 and 3 should be implemented.
2. The UN should exercise policy making by working with local governments and private enterprises to integrate refugees and the urban poor - people with the greatest needs who can also provide a great benefit.
3. The UN should deploy technology that can improve the facilitation of sustainable communities such as the expendable house and expand upon the capabilities of new technologies to address issues faced by the urban poor and refugees.

By treating refugee camps as an innovation center to learn how to integrate people experiencing extreme forms of deprivation, the lessons learned can be implemented to address the challenges that the urban poor face.

Acknowledgments

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