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## ‘Slum dwellers have benefited, but not enough’

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*“Absolute number” increased to 827.6 million in 2010 over 10 years*

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*Achievements of China, India spectacular*

*Urban sprawl is symptom of a divided city*

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Chennai: Governments across the world have done well collectively to lift 227 million people out of slum conditions, surpassing the Millennium Development target by 2.2 times. The achievements of China and India in particular have been spectacular, commends the UN-HABITAT report on the ‘State of the World Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide’ released on Thursday.

This biennial report for 2010 appreciates China for improving the conditions of 65.3 million urban residents who were deprived of shelter and India for bettering the lot of 59.7 million since 2000. As a result, the proportion of people living in slum conditions came down from 37.3 per

cent in 2000 to about 28.2 per cent in 2010 in China and from 41.5 per cent in 1990 to 28.1 per cent in 2010 in India.

However, the report cautions, the progress in slum improvement is not satisfactory and efforts are inadequate, since the “absolute number” of slum dwellers in the world increased from 776.7 million in 2000 to about 827.6 million in 2010. Unless radical measures are adopted, the world slum population may grow by six million each year and the total slum population will reach 889 million by 2020.

The other challenges facing cities, as indicated in the report, include urban sprawl and emergence of massive urban corridors between mega-cities ‘that are merging to become massive conurbations.’

For example, the industrial corridor developing between Mumbai and Delhi will stretch over 1,500 km from Navi Mumbai to Dadri and Tughlakabad, expects the report. Though such corridors are advantageous because they improve business, real estate development and connectivity, they can also distort regional balance by limiting investment and improvement to cities of importance, preventing ‘diffused spatial development.’

Urban sprawl, a phenomenon hitherto linked with North American cities, is now witnessed in many cities in the developing countries and it is a ‘symptom of a divided city,’ the report says. Real estate development that is pushing a “world-class lifestyle” has led to a rapid increase of surface area of the city that is not commensurate with population growth. This has caused significant loss of prime farmland, negatively impacted infrastructure and affected the sustainability of cities. The report concludes that urbanisation in general has improved economic growth and contributed to reduction in poverty rates in Asia and Africa. Compared to rural inhabitants, urban residents have better access to services and jobs. However, if the cost of living is factored in, urban poverty would be on a par with rural poverty.

Though the residents acknowledge that urban reforms have happened, the majority of those surveyed (in 30 cities across the world) think that the reforms serve only a few. The report also says “the planning and policies appear to favour the empowered, mainly the local and regional economic elite.” It urges policymakers and planners to “understand that urbanisation can be a positive force for economic development, leading to desirable social and political outcomes.” To achieve that, city plans “must maintain ‘inclusiveness’ policies to narrow the inequalities that divide many cities of developing nations.”

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Written by Administrator

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