



Slums are an all too common sight in many of the world's major cities. But the extent of the citizen's plight all too seldom makes the news.

The crisis of poor infrastructure, overcrowding, few resources and poor sanitation facilities is exacerbated further by a high disease and morbidity burden, characterized by high levels of malnutrition among children and the aged and high rate of communicable diseases like typhoid, malaria, dysentery and tuberculosis, with most families being unable to afford medical care. Health facilities are also limited, unequipped and mostly understaffed.

In Kenya, Paul Odero, a 27-year-old father of two and a resident of Mathare slum, told IRIN News: "Here we share everything because nobody can afford anything of his own. We share latrines, and these people selling food near the latrine have no space to put their kiosks. We have no place to dispose our garbage, and we just throw it anywhere. At times, you find children playing with used sanitary pads because the woman and girls who use it have nowhere to take it to. The children get diarrhoea and many die."

In 2012, in a span of just six months, at least three children died from electrocution while playing with illegally connected power lines. In the same year, an illegal electricity connection caused a fire that destroyed some 300 houses, leaving thousands without shelter.

The open dumpsites and the fumes emanating from them have meant respiratory infections are rampant.

The running noses among small children you see do not mean their mothers don't care. They do, but the health risks associated with poor waste disposal means their children are constantly suffering from respiratory infections. It is that bad, Mary Muiruri, a community health worker, told IRIN news service.

"It looks simple but many women in the slums cannot go to work because they are constantly looking after sick children. Such people can't come out of poverty because how do they get income?"

Extremely poor people living in urban slums are forced, on a daily basis, to significantly compromise their long-term well-being to meet their short-term survival needs.

Around a billion people living in the world's cities today reside in deprived areas, with few or no basic amenities. In Afghanistan, Chad, Ethiopia and Nepal, more than 90 percent of urban populations live in such deprived areas, according to UN-Habitat.

According to the UN World Health Organization, children in Nairobi slums are two and half times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than in other areas of the city.

According to Concern Worldwide, "The skyrocketing costs of food [have] pushed an already desperate people into extreme poverty, rendering them incapable of feeding their families or paying for basic services such as healthcare, rent and school fees."

Lack of jobs for many of the young inhabitants in the slums has meant they often turn to crime to make ends meet.

As rural populations migrate to urban areas, looking for new economic and job opportunities, cities will continue to grow, and governments will need to increase efforts to ensure that urban infrastructure like housing is able to cope with the growth.

Source: [IRIN News](#)