The State of Homelessness in the Developing World

Dr Suzanne Speak

School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape

Newcastle University, UK.

Forms of Homelessness

In the developing world, homelessness, runs along a continuum, running, broadly, as follows:

- 'Rough/street sleeping', - literally lying down on the street, under a bridge or in a public place to sleep at night. (Temporary / shorter term)

- Pavement dwelling, whereby a regular 'pitch' is used over a longer period of time and some very rudimentary shelter of card, cloth or plastic is erected. (Temporary / shorter term)

- Squatting in the same derelict building on a regular, long term basis. (Temporary / shorter term)

- Living in abjectly poor and dangerous, informally built shelter (including boats and other floating platforms), which is without services and which fails all tests of adequacy. (Probably most common form, Longer term / permanent)

- Living in temporary refugee camps and without the foreseeable possibility of returning home.

Cyclical migration and street sleeping

Longer term, street sleeping
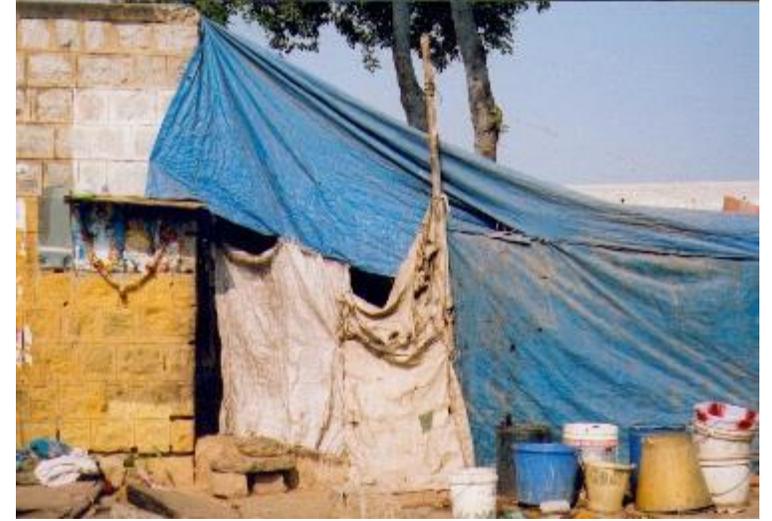
Pavement dwelling
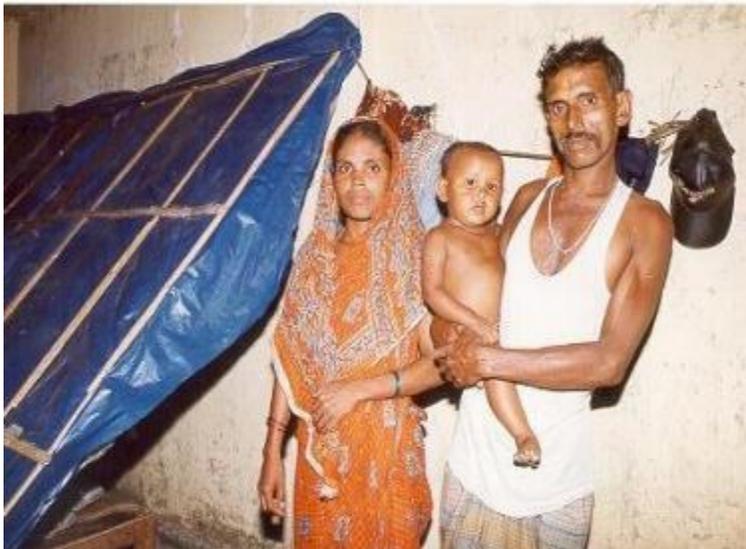
Squatting in disused building

Semi-permanent inadequate housing

Permanent inadequate housing

Structural Drivers of Homelessness

- Economic –
  - Poverty or loss of home and livelihood through climate change, economic / agricultural change, war/civil unrest which drives migration/urbanisation.

- Socio- cultural –
  - changes to traditional extended family responsibilities, increased lone parent households, ageing, raised and unrealistic aspirations of the young

Structural Drivers of Homelessness

- Political - legislative
    - War/civil unrest/displacement, vote banking, clientism, corruption, political manipulation, anti-poor legislation 'world city' representation, failure to uphold land and property rights for women and children, especially girls

- Failure of the housing system to provide for the increase of low income people
    - Inappropriately located, poor quality, badly managed shelters, for street sleepers
    - peripheral 'low income' housing, too expensive for the poor, constraints on housing finance lack of flexibility or progression within the housing/shelter system and market
    - Anti-poor land use policies, including evictions in favour of development for higher income grops or commercial uses

Characteristics - Demographic

The socio-cultural context of a country significantly influences the characteristics of its homeless population. However, there are some generalisations:

- Rough sleeping / pavement dwelling - Largely male, lone, working age
  - Especially in Islamic countries, where women's homelessness is hidden
  - More women in part of Sub Saharan Africa, India and Latin America
  - Increasing numbers of older people

- Squatting –More women and children owing to added security

- Abjectly inadequate housing, informal settlements / refugee camps – families with children
  - Many more women and many female headed households. These are dominant on some areas

Characteristics - economic

Not necessarily the poorest in society and almost always working, generally within the informal economy.

- Street sleepers /squatters
  - daily labouring, rickshaw cycling, portering, handcarts, rag picking, waste collection/ recycling

- Inadequately housed
  - Catering, street trading, small retail, small manufacturing, textile work, domestic work
    - Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Iraq – higher forms of employment e.g. shop work, catering, domestic service, (reflecting different education levels)
    - Higher education/employment/ skill amongst internally displaced, who may have held skilled jobs prior to war

Interventions and Approaches

Overtly negative and punitive

- Use of legal instruments to support arrest and imprisonment e.g. Bombay Prevention of Begging Act (India) for city 'clean-up campaigns'

- Removing access to water for drinking and washing (e.g. Joburt Park, South Africa)

- Beatings and 'disappearances' , especially children of the street

   (e.g. Brazil, 2009)

Ostensibly positive and supportive

- Night shelters, especially in winter. Often poor, dangerous, badly managed ad in very peripheral locations

- Relocation to mass 'low income' housing – often very small, with limited services and too far from livelihood opportunities

- Repatriation of children of the street

Interventions and Approaches

- Positive and supportive
  - Pro-poor land use frameworks
  - Secure land title – even for un-bankable land
  - Community participation in relocations /collaborative, - in-situ upgrading
  - Innovation by private sector – e.g. DLF in Gurgaon developing low income housing for maid, service staff families including schools, clinics
  - Economic support and innovative infrastructure solutions to remove barriers to areas of economic activity
  - Outreach support to children of the street -