

**CIRCUMNAVIGATORS CLUB FOUNDATION**

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**The Myth of the Urban Advantage and the Crisis of Urban Slums:  
An exploration of land tenure reform programs and the relationship between NGOs  
and government**

**Executive Summary**

Urbanization is occurring at an unprecedented rate, such that by 2030, 2 billion additional people will be living in cities. A majority of this growth is occurring in the cities of the developing world, where economic, social, and political systems are often too fragile to effectively handle dramatic surges in population. While urbanization has led to many positive and negative changes, perhaps the most noted outcome is the proliferation of slum settlements. Currently, more than 1 billion people live in slum settlements in developing cities, and this number is expected to increase to 2 billion by 2020.

Though slum conditions vary, the conditions within slums are generally unfavorable. This study isolates the major problems of the slum as being poor perceptions of security and well-being, lack of infrastructure and municipal services, disproportionately high rates of violence and crime, low access to the political process, and excessive barriers to gaining credit or economic aid. Slums also pose substantial problems to other city dwellers through freeloading of private services, such as cable and electricity. In an attempt to mitigate these problems, a number of strategies have been employed, including slum clearance, infrastructural upgrading, and development from below projects, each of which has failed to stem the growth of slums or ameliorate the conditions within them.

Recently, land tenure has been proposed as a solution to these problems; scholars such as Alain Durand-Lasserve and Edesio Fernandes posit that land tenure will be effective because it addresses the underlying root of these problems: informality. In this paper, I

analyze this claim by focusing on land tenure regularization programs around the world. Specifically, I look at those currently being implemented in Guatemala City, Guatemala; Lima, Peru; Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil; Johannesburg, South Africa; Mumbai, India; and Bangkok, Thailand. I ask specifically *can* land tenure effectively address the problems that exist within the global slums?

This paper argues that land tenure is possibly, but not definitively, an appropriate way to mitigate the problems of the global slums. To determine this, I use a combination of qualitative data—gathered from interviews with slum dwellers, scholars, government officials, no-profit organizations, as well as case studies from around the world—and quantitative data gathered from these interviews. Based on this data, this paper explores how land tenure regularization programs in these specified cities have improved or impacted the variables discussed above, specifically, perceptions of security and well-being, infrastructure and municipal services, rates of violence and crime, access to the political process, access to credit or economic aid, and freeloading.

This paper ultimately finds that land tenure is an effective solution in improving infrastructure and diminishing freeloading. However, land tenure is less successful in reducing feelings of insecurity and increasing economic capabilities. Land tenure regularization is found to have little to no impact on illegality and violence or political participation within slums. This paper opens the door to further research, however provides no concrete answer as more research is required in order to determine how effective land tenure is. However, it does indicate that land tenure regularization should be included in slum upgrading programs in the future, as it does appear to be effective in solving some of the problems of the slums, which is important considering the rampant and rapid growth of slums around the world.