



# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

## of health in urban settings

**THE ISSUES:** Social determinants of health refer to both specific features and pathways by which societal conditions affect health and that potentially can be altered by informed action. In other words, health is shaped by the conditions of daily life in which people are born, grown, work and age, as defined by the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health.

Half of the world's population now lives in cities, with almost one billion people living under life-threatening conditions in urban slums – areas that are unplanned or that have substandard housing and service provision. Around 60% of the population of Greater Cairo lives in such areas, experiencing poorer health and social conditions than other Cairo residents. These and other inequities are systematic, produced by social norms, policies and practices that tolerate or actually promote unfair distribution of and access to power, wealth and other necessary social resources.

**SOLUTIONS:** The Commission's report, Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health, is a global call to action that provides new approaches to tackle social determinants of health and therefore reduce inequity in health outcomes. This huge undertaking aims to achieve three main goals: 1) support policy change by promoting models and practices that effectively address the social determinants of health; 2) support countries in placing health as a shared goal to which many government departments and sectors of the society contribute; and 3) help build a sustainable global movement for action on health equity and social determinants.

In order to address the widening gaps in health equity, particularly in urbanized environments, a rights-based approach is needed to end the marginalization of urban dwellers. Such an approach should involve the full participation of residents, working in collaboration with civil society organizations, local

government and other agencies to supply services that residents pay for, such as water, electricity and solid waste removal.

**ACTIONS DURING 2010:** Support will be continued for efforts to give residents in deprived urban areas an effective "voice" in addressing social determinants of health and health inequities:

- Developing a model to support linkages and building trust between civil society organizations and agencies responsible for providing services, especially health and solid waste disposal;
- Publication and dissemination of the results of a capacity-building project in El Hagana, a disadvantaged area of Cairo;
- Launching the Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach, which is based on the recognition that a population's health is not merely a product of health sector activities, and that closing the health gap is a shared goal across all sectors;
- Strengthening national efforts at Intersectoral Action (ISA), with focus on urbanization. Structures to facilitate intersectoral action are being established by a growing number of countries in the Region in order to bring all stakeholders together for the sake of improving the health of citizens;
- Encouraging health impact assessment, which enables government to consider carefully the potential impacts of decisions on health and health inequalities.

**THE WAY FORWARD:** Following the recommendations of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, the way forward will focus on working with residents to improve the conditions in which they live, work and age. The World Health Day 2010 campaign is an opportunity to promote building bridges between civil society, government and private enterprise; listening, learning and acting together to improve the social determinant of health.



World Health Day 2010  
Urbanization and Health



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