

Soul Action: Day in the Life

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Introduction

There is no 'standard day'. Every experience will be different, depending on a person's situation, for example:

- Do they have family? Are there people to look after them
- Does their family have money? Do they have to work or can they go to school?
- gender?
- age?
- race / caste / tribe / religion?
- health and / or disability?

The 'backdrop' to their lives is the one thing that everyone has in common (as for every community) - they will all experience the sights and smells, and navigate the environment, the instability, and other people. Some will flourish and others won't.

Useful website: **UN-Habitat** - the United Nations programme working towards a better urban future. Its mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all.

See also: Education Scotland Comic Relief Pack:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/resources/l/lifeinthelumsettlementsofnairobi/introduction.asp>

NOTE: Some of the statistics included in this guide are referenced in the footnotes. Others can be found easily online. Before using these statistics, it might be worth checking for complete accuracy as they are subject to change over time.

Characteristics of slum settlements

UN-HABITAT has developed a household-level definition of a slum household in order to be able to use existing household-level surveys and censuses to identify slum dwellers among the urban population. A slum household is a household that lacks any one of the following five elements:

- (a) Access to improved water (access to sufficient amount of water for family use, at an affordable price, available to household members without being subject to extreme effort)
- (b) Access to improved sanitation (access to an excreta disposal system, either in the form of a private toilet or a public toilet shared with a reasonable number of people)
- (c) Security of tenure (evidence of documentation to prove secure tenure status or de facto or perceived protection from evictions)
- (d) Durability of housing (permanent and adequate structure in non-hazardous location)
- (e) Sufficient living area (not more than two people sharing the same room)

Some Data

There has been a phenomenal shift towards urbanisation, with 6 out of every 10 people in the world expected to reside in urban areas by 2030. Over 90 per cent of this growth will take place in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.¹

In some cities, up to 80 per cent of the population lives in slums. Fifty-five million new slum dwellers have been added to the global population since 2000. Sub-Saharan Africa has a slum population of 199.5 million, South Asia 190.7 million, East Asia 189.6 million, Latin America and the Caribbean 110.7 million, Southeast Asia 88.9 million, West Asia 35 million and North Africa 11.8 million.

- Tilak Vihar (New Delhi Slum) is home to 5,000 people, mostly migrants who work as day labourers, rickshaw pullers and housemaids.
- In San Pedro Sula in Honduras it is estimated that 60% of children in the slums don't get to go to school and a staggering 22% are illiterate.
- Kibera, Nairobi: Population estimates range but it may be home to 200,000 (officially, in 2009) to 800,000 to over a million people. It is about 600 acres in size.

General Conditions:

Slums are generally regarded as a blot on the landscape and slum dwellers are stigmatised and regarded as second class citizens. At the same time, not everyone who is able to do well while living in slums chooses to move out, but prefer to live in the communities they know with the people their know, although they may make their houses more permanent and own more things, or move to 'better sections' of the slum. This can be seen in some of South Africa's townships, where people who have moved out may move back to their townships because that is where they feel at home - although they generally return to the 'better areas' of the township and not the more impermanent shanty areas.

¹ UN-Habitat

In some cities, the physical separation of residential areas from places of employment, markets, schools, and health services force many urban residents to spend increasing amounts of time, and as much as a third of their income, on transportation. In the developing world, and especially in African cities where walking can account up to 70 per cent of all trips, this low-density horizontal urban development causes further exclusion of the urban poor. Due to transport poverty, many residents cannot afford to travel to the city centres or to areas where businesses and institutions are located, depriving them of the full benefits offered by urbanisation.

There will be street kids in the slums, children who have run away from home, got separated from family, or seen parents die. There is a high prevalence of gang culture, drug culture and violence, including gender-based and sexual violence, in slums. Gangs may often provide community and family where traditional families struggle to survive.

Compared to rural areas, cities offer more diverse employment opportunities to increase financial independence; greater ease in accessing education at different levels, better access to healthcare; more opportunities to socialise outside the home; more prospects to take up community or political leadership roles and, most notably, more possibilities to redefine the traditional roles of men and women. Nevertheless, gender inequalities persist, therefore, women and girls benefit less from urbanisation and the urban space than men and boys. In fact, women and girls in cities will face a range of specific barriers and vulnerabilities: gender inequality, violence against women, poverty, unpaid care-work, limited control over assets, unequal participation in public and private decision-making, and barriers to education, employment, housing and basic services. Nowhere are the inequalities facing urban woman more evident than in informal settlements where women account for over half the population.²

It is estimated that by 2030, as many as 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18. All over the world, young people are finding it increasingly difficult to break into the labour market. Youth make up 25% of the global working age population, but account for 43.7% of the unemployed. This means that almost every other jobless person in the world is between the ages of 15 and 24

In the most violent slums, the police may refused to enter the slum or work. Drugs often provide a moment of relaxation (seems to be especially so for boys). Slums often operate as cities-within-cities, both in terms of law and order, and in economics. Police will take bribes to look the other way. The state does little to nothing, because it generally doesn't acknowledge that the slums exist. Crime and violence impact the on everyday life of city residents. Women and children are often the most affected, especially when fear hinders their access to services.

Some slums have some electricity, schools, clinics, and water and sanitation - but it is very basic and not well developed or safe (open wires, unhygienic, v basic education and healthcare). It is more common for people to use oil lamps, battery packs, or petrol generators, or neighbours may sublet electricity supplies from each other, using dangerous wiring. Use of oil creates noxious and unhealthy fumes, as well as a fire risk. Fires can rip through slums, due to the amount of cardboard used in construction, and the close quarters.

² UN-Habitat: <http://unhabitat.org/urban-themes/gender/> (22/04/2015)

While there may be toilets, there is unlikely to be proper or functioning drainage, causing open sewers. Slum often spring up around rivers which provide some drainage and water - but which quickly become toxic.

Infrastructure will be poor. If there are roads, they will not be well maintained - if they have been laid, there will be potholes. Often they will be dirt tracks, or narrow side lanes, sometimes paved with broken paving stones, with drains and sewers along the sides. People who have transport will have motorbikes or mopeds, or bikes. Public transport in and out and around varies - from riding on the back of bikes (usually around slums) to shared minibuses, and trains (in and out of slums to the rest of the city).

The local environment affects the slum hugely - e.g. nearby rivers might flood, if they are on hillsides, landslips might occur. One of the most immediately noticeable things about the slums is the smell: wood fires and charcoal, fried fish, excrement, rubbish, and the body odours of thousands of people living on top of each other.

“Although sustainable housing is often associated with wealth and affluence, it does not need to be so – genuinely sustainable houses are those that are inclusive and affordable for all. Sustainable housing is, however, yet to gain its due prominence in developing countries. It is rare that the social, cultural, environmental and economic facets of housing are addressed there in an integrated policy. In many developing contexts, the so-called pro-poor housing programmes often provide accommodation of poor standards, in remote locations, with little consideration to the residents’ lifestyle and livelihood strategies. In others, rapid housing developments create amplified carbon footprint and further negative impacts on the environment. Yet in most developing cities, decent and safe housing remains a dream for the majority of the population, while government considers affordable housing as merely a social burden.”³

Housing

A wooden frame with corrugated iron sheets on the outside and a lining of cardboard is the most common building construction. Buildings are generally 10ft x 12ft single-storey shacks. Less than 20% of them have a concrete slab floor. If it rains, you are likely to get as wet indoors as outside.

As slum dwellers earn, especially if they do well, they will add bits and pieces to their dwellings. This is more likely if there has been some government recognition of settlements. Buildings become more permanent, using bricks, wood, and corrugated iron for roofs, and people are likely to go higher (including building across lanes in the slum).

Less than 20% of slum dwellers own their homes. Often families will share a dwelling. As landlords generally don't own the land dwellings are built on, there is no security. Homes may have only one or two

³ UN-Habitat: <http://unhabitat.org/housing-slum-upgrading/> (22/04/2015)

rooms, possibly partitioned with curtains, or with only doorways (and not doors) between them. They will either cook in the building or just outside, on the pavement, or, if they are lucky, behind the dwelling.

There is almost always the threat of slum-clearance and redevelopment of the land by the state or private corporations, leading to forced evictions. For example, in Mumbai:

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2009/06/mumb-j13.html>

Work and economics

Unemployment is high - and yet there is no shortage of work taking place in the slums. Finding (and keeping work) generally requires hard work and entrepreneurial spirit.

Work may be inside the slum (small businesses and odd jobs) or outside the slums (usually low-paid work, as a street vendor, as a servant for more affluent families outside the slums, or unskilled work in a factory or as messengers). Wages pay for rent in the slums, some food and occasionally school fees - it doesn't easily allow people to move out of the slums. Most earn \$1-2 a day,

Girls are at risk of entering the sex trade. Some girls in the slums may already have been sold into the trade, taken from rural families. Girls as young as 9 may be working as prostitutes.

Many slums have their own internal economies. McKinsey & Co estimate that cities in emerging economies will create half the world's growth in the next 15 years.

System D: is a term used in Nairobi to describe the informal economy. It is a slang phrase pirated from French-speaking Africa from the word 'débrouillards', meaning effective and motivated people. Robert Neuwirth writes about System D in his book *Stealth of Nations* (Anchor, 2012) writes:

'What happens in all the unregistered markets and roadside kiosks of the world is not simply haphazard. It is a product of intelligence, resilience, self-organisation, and group solidarity, and it follows a number of well-worn though unwritten rules. It is, in that sense, a system....it distributes products more equitably and cheaply than any big company can.'⁴

Jua kali is a Swahili term originally used to describe people who 'work in the open sun' but is now used to include all artisans and business people who are in micro enterprises in Kenya. Key features include: small number of employees; low start-up capital; labour intensive; more non-automated production than its formal economy counterpart; labour and welfare unprotected and non-unionised; skills and training by informal apprenticeships; selling price affordable for the local population; raw materials from scrap and informal sources; unreliable power and insecure premises; low-quality goods; limited resources; distribution network fragmented; able to adapt quickly to new market conditions; coordinates and shares with local business network; culture embedded in Kenyan life and society.

Dharavi is the name given to an area of over 50 neighbourhoods east of Mahim and Bandra. It's estimated that these neighbourhoods of Dharavi contribute anything from US\$500 million to US\$1 billion to Mumbai's economy. In these slums you'll find a variety of well documented, ingenious recycling programs as well as a thriving textile and tanning industry.

⁴ Education Scotland pack on Slums for Comic Relief 2013:
http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/BackgroundInformationForTeachers_tcm4-746191.pdf

Food and drink

Food is available (including fresh fruit and vegetables) - the problem for most who live in slums is affording it. Cooking is often on wood and charcoal stoves

Alcoholism is big problem of slum life. In India, alcohol is cheaper to buy than food and it takes away the pain of hunger. Alcohol may often be illegal, homemade moonshine, sometimes topped up with dangerous ingredients (like methanol)

As slum houses tend not to have taps, residents have to find water elsewhere or buy it from water kiosks. In Nairobi, people pay approximately 2 or 3 Ksh per 20-litre container, which is about double what house owners with taps pay for water. Water supply is erratic and the water highly contaminated – it smells, has an unusual colour and has particles inside. Pipework is poorly maintained. Rusty pipes often break and water is then polluted by the open drainage lines and sewage lines that run parallel to the water network.

Rough outline of a day

(An example from Dharavi, Mumbai - from [Travel CNN](#))

If you are in a slum with a Muslim community, you will hear the call to prayer five times a day, either 'live' from the mosque or a recording. Chances are, you'll be up before the dawn call.

Rise around early, often before the sun is up (sunrise c. 6am for most countries in the equatorial regions), wash if / where you can find water, and head to school or work, generally on foot: anything up to two hours.

- If you are fortunate you may head to school - this is if your parents can afford to send you (fees, uniform), and is more likely if you are a boy, especially once you reach puberty.
- If you do attend school, you are likely to find concentrating

Work may include:

- begging, scrambling for odd jobs (bag carrying, watching bikes / vehicles for a fee), collecting or sorting rubbish - these are likely options for children who work, especially if they're on their own.
- small businesses (shops, catering, recycling...), construction within the slums or service work outside the slums.
- 40% of the Dharavi slum's population is the Mumbai police force.⁵

Afternoon

Your 'main' meal will be in the evening, but cooking starts now (if you're a girl). You will probably have eaten snacks during the day, e.g. samosas, chapatis, mandaazi (in East Africa). You might be able to take some time to play (cricket in India and other parts of the subcontinent, football in most other places). The main drink in East Africa and Asia during the day is chai (sweet, milky tea - spiced in Asia)

Girls working in the sex trade will start getting up after the night before. This is when people from Tearfund's partners (e.g. Oasis in Mumbai) are able to visit the girls.

Evening / Night

The main meal will might be maize porridge (known as ugali, pap, posho - depending on where you are) with some kind of stew (beans, vegetable, fish, meat, depending on what you can afford) in East Africa. In Asia it will be rice based.

⁵ <http://captainandclark.com/2013/01/29/life-in-indian-slum/>

Pimps and prostitutes start work. Older prostitutes, trafficked into brothels, are expected to service up to 20 clients a day, for which they receive only about 15 rupees (approximately 12 pence). If their children are not able to go to a night shelter, they are likely to end up sleeping under the bed while their mothers entertain clients.

After dark the risk of theft, mugging, and violent crime increase - especially around payday, when people have more money to spend on alcohol. If you're drinking, it will probably either be lager, or home brewed moonshine or chang'aa, which can be deadly.

Some children may sniff solvent before going to sleep to take the edge off the cold nights.

In some slums it may be too dangerous to go out to the toilet in the night, so people use bottles and bags, and dispose of the waste later.

Some Stories:

(1) Brazil

http://www.tearfund.org/en/blog/2014/06/football_flooding_and_favelas/

“This favela has an additional problem that affects the lives of its residents: a badly managed river that often floods, reaching heights of five or six feet up the walls of some of the poorly-built homes in the favela, forcing people out of their homes. Nilba is 44 years old and lives with her seven children in a two-roomed house. Between the eight of them, they share two beds. She, like many others in her community, dreads the rain. She told me that when it rained the dirty water from the polluted river had come into her house, reaching chest height.”

(2) Honduras

http://www.tearfund.org/en/blog/2012/what_life_for_a_teenage_girl_in_honduras/

(3) Brazil

http://www.tearfund.org/en/latest/2015/01/hope_among_the_ruins/

“For these boys the simple ambition was survival. We found that same fusion of fear and hope in the favela too. Walking between the shacks with no sanitation meant treading over burning rubbish, flowing human waste, rotting nappies and discarded furniture. It also meant stray dogs, gun-toting slum lords, wild pigs and the stench of poverty. In one tiny damp room we met a mother and some of her seven children who share two mattresses—often getting wet as the rain seeps in. The father had been murdered a few years ago.”

(4) Jakarta, Indonesia

<http://blogs.unicef.org.uk/2013/02/15/whats-life-like-for-children-in-the-slums-of-jakarta/>

Like any parent, Muratsih’s biggest fear is for her children. “Sometimes they hitch rides by hanging off the back of trucks, which is very dangerous,” she continued. “There are also problems with drugs and alcohol. But I like the sense of community. If someone dies round here, everyone goes to their funeral. You don’t get that in an apartment block.” After the interview, Muratsih took us to Venus Alley, to meet the families living there. She knew everyone by name.

(5) Kibera, Kenya

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2297237.stm>

"You remember all those plastic bags you were talking about. Well they're called flying toilets. At night, when it's too dangerous to leave your home, some people do their business in bags, and fling them out the door."

(6) [Kamrangirchar slum, Dhaka](#)

<http://noorimages.com/feature/daily-life-in-kamrangirchar-slum-dhaka/>

An estimated 400,000 people live in the Kamrangirchar Peninsula. Previously a dumping ground for Dhaka's waste, it is now a highly populated area where inhabitants live in houses made from wooden sticks above the dirty water. Toxic waste from Dhaka's industries is still directed into the river as daily life in the Kamrangirchar Peninsula continues. With families sharing rooms with up to ten people, this densely populated area, mostly comprised by migrants from other areas of Bangladesh, covers only three square kilometers and shares daily life like playing, working or cooking with a highly polluted river and soil.