# Homelessness in Developing Countries

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- Sponsored by DFID

- Takes a housing-focused approach

Villa el Salvador, Lima
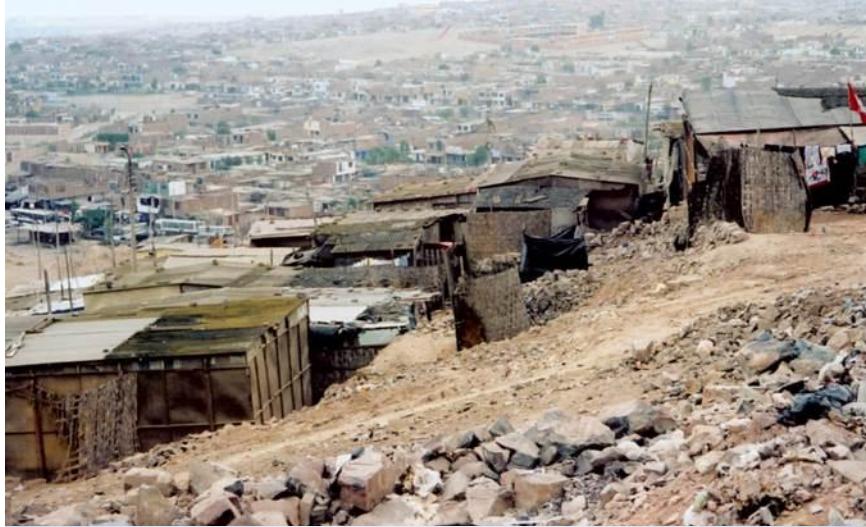
Squatters invaded this hillside and have built to differing standards. Are any of them so poorly housed as to be homeless?

Are these people homeless?

3

And these?

Mumbai

5

6

Cairo

8
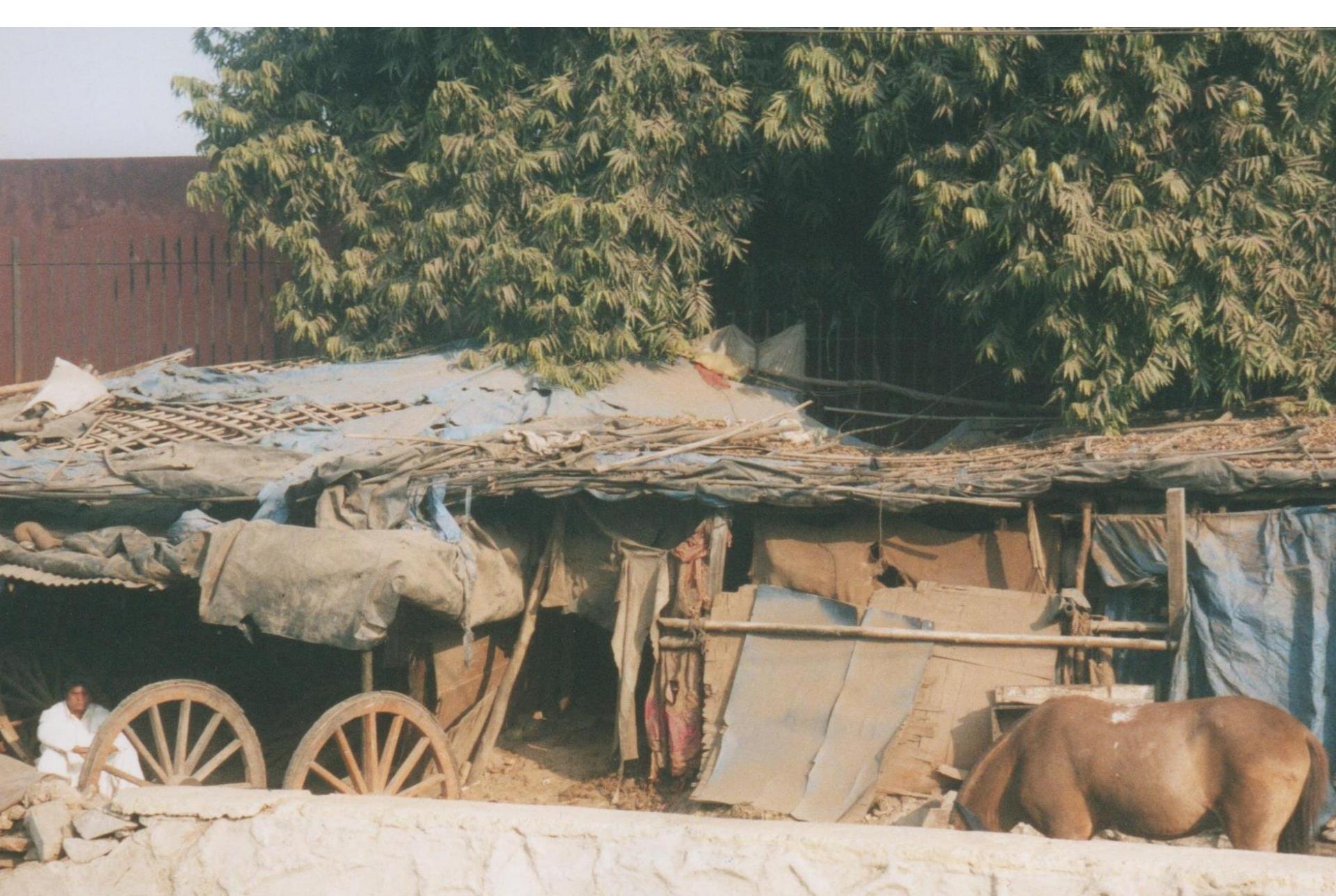
Addis Ababa

Monrovia

Malawi

11

Nine Countries studied

- Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia
- Egypt, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe
- Peru

**Mainly secondary sources and
small surveys where possible**

The nature of homelessness

Developed countries

- **homelessness is generally a result of personal or household circumstances**

Homeless people frequently need

- **a range of social support and welfare**
- **systems to help them access and retain jobs and the available housing and lift them out of homelessness.**

Developing countries

- **homelessness is generally a result of the lack of housing and a failure of the 'market' housing supply**

Homeless people need

- **an alternative to market housing**
- **access to secure land title**
- **demand-side subsidies**
- **less than whole dwellings.**

Negative perceptions of homeless people

Our study found that homeless people are generally perceived not as victims but as:

- Alcoholic and drug abusers

- Unemployed

- Criminal

- Personally inadequate

- Mentally ill

This largely false perception is perpetuated by popular media, by articles and cartoons

Characteristics of homelessness in developing countries

Homeless people in developing countries are:

- predominantly male
- aged 20 – 59
- low paid, unskilled workers
- the subjects, rather than the perpetrators of crime
- Some are children.

Street homeless people live in a range of locations including

- Disused buildings
- Pavements
- Railway and station buildings
- On open ground
- Public buildings such as shopping centres
- Rudimentary dwellings
- Their place of work

Characteristics of homelessness in developing countries

Health

Homeless people have poorer health than those who are adequately housed. They are vulnerable to

- **mental illness**
- **respiratory diseases, including TB.**
- **infected wounds and bites**
- **malaria and dengue fever**
- **enteritis**
- **sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.**

**They have little access to free medical care**

Causes of homelessness

The two fundamental causes of homelessness in developing countries are

- poverty, especially rural poverty; and
- the failure of the housing supply system

However, poverty and housing shortages alone do not necessarily lead to homelessness. A number of other issues make these things worse.

- Rural to urban migration
- Social causes
- Political unrest
- Eviction
- Unhelpful housing policies for a majority

The unhelpful policy context

NIGERIA

Percentage of households

- 100%
- 75%
- 50%
- 25%
- 0%

>$4.00/day
$2 – $4 per day
$1.25 – $2 per day

Nigeria is 46% urban

<$1.25 per day

No formal supply for this majority group
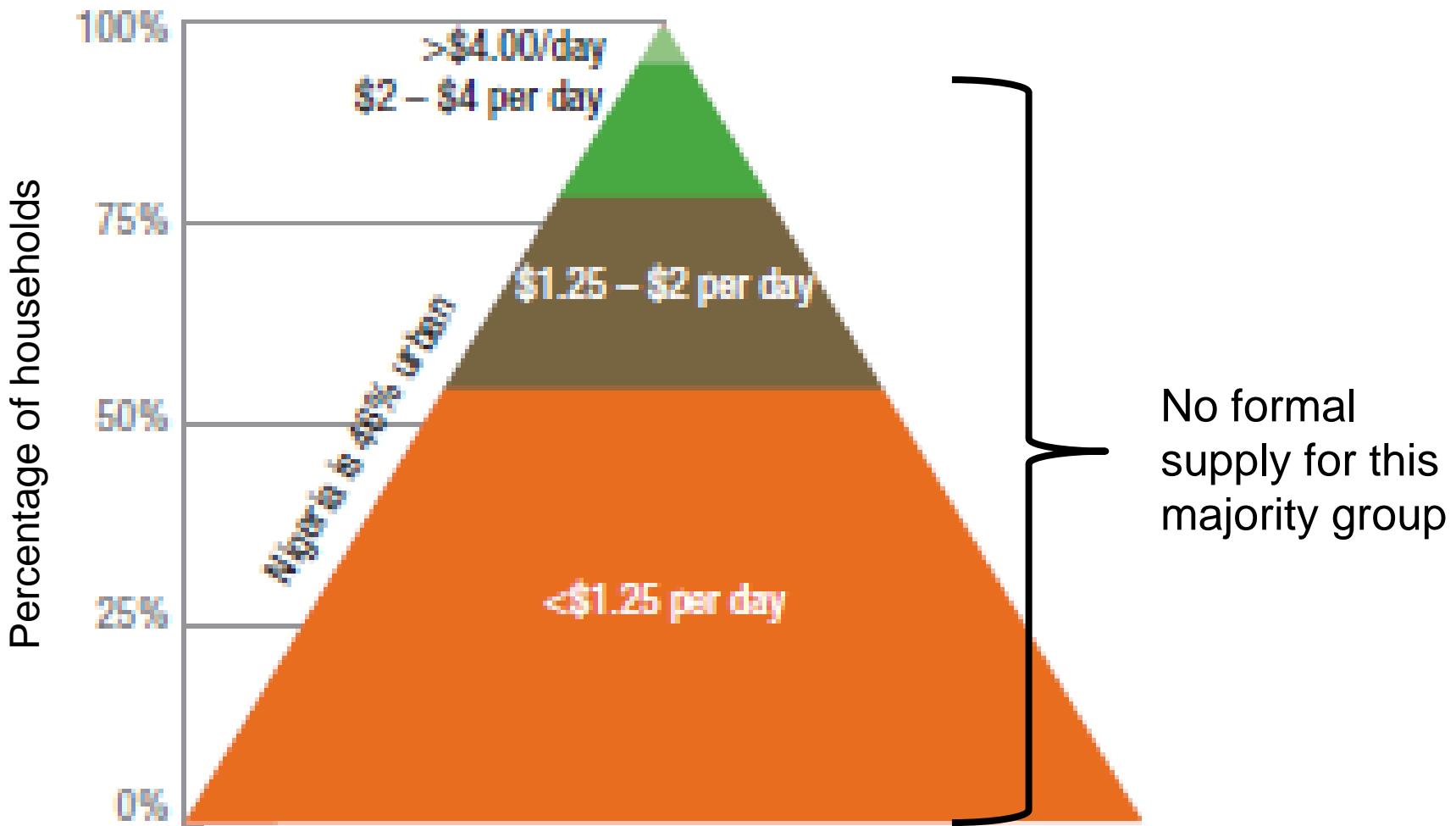
Causes of homelessness

From rural home to urban homelessness

- **Rural poverty has driven large numbers of people to seek employment in cities.**

- **Usually single men move to work and send money back home.**

- **Homelessness is often preferred to spending money on accommodation.**

- **May be joined by other family members.**

'Target migration' is common in some countries

In some countries, migrants come to the cities for a season. They sleep out under trees, in parks, on pavements.
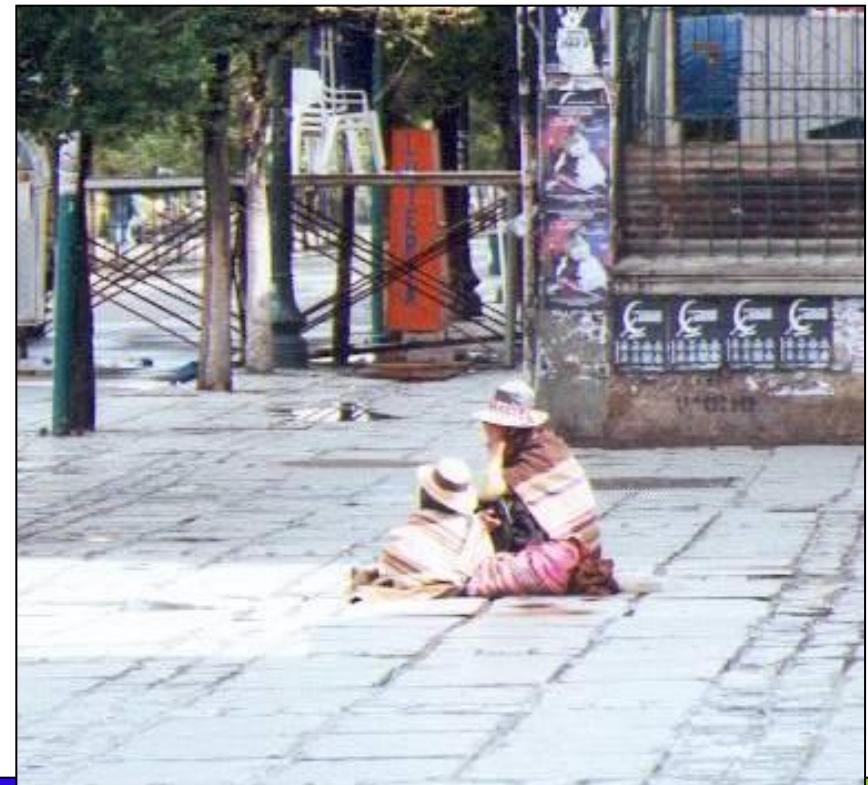
Social causes of homelessness

- **Marital breakdown or bereavement, especially for women and children.**
- **Cultural attitudes to women mean that they, and their children, may be thrown out of their homes by relatives if their husband dies or abandons them. This forces many women onto the streets.**

- **Family violence, especially for women and children.**
- **Victims of or escaping from family breakdown and violence. Street children often also tell of fleeing an abusive step parent.**

Social causes of homelessness

Deterioration of traditional extended families

- **Strong traditions of extended family support may be deteriorating (HIV/AIDS crisis).
  People are becoming reluctant to take in family members who lose their homes.**

Government 'social engineering'

- **e.g., China's 'one family, one child' policy to control the population growth. Some families who want more children choose to leave their household registration place and become part of the 'floating population'.**

Other causes of homelessness

Evictions

Governments use their powers to evict people to:

- Clear land for more valuable development
- Improve the city's image for special civic events

Often such evictions:

- Are violent
- Disrupt newly formed social networks
- Cause trauma amongst the evicted
- Affect women more than men
- Cause greater poverty amongst the evicted

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Other causes of homelessness

Political unrest

- **The reclaiming of farms by 'war veterans' in Zimbabwe, has resulted in many farm workers having to flee into the surrounding countryside.**

- **In Peru, political violence from terrorist groups such as the Shining Path and the Revolutionary Movement Tupac Amaru made many thousands of people homeless whilst trying to escape.**

- **In Iraq, Syria, Libya, etc., many IDPs.**

Springer's categorisation of homelessness
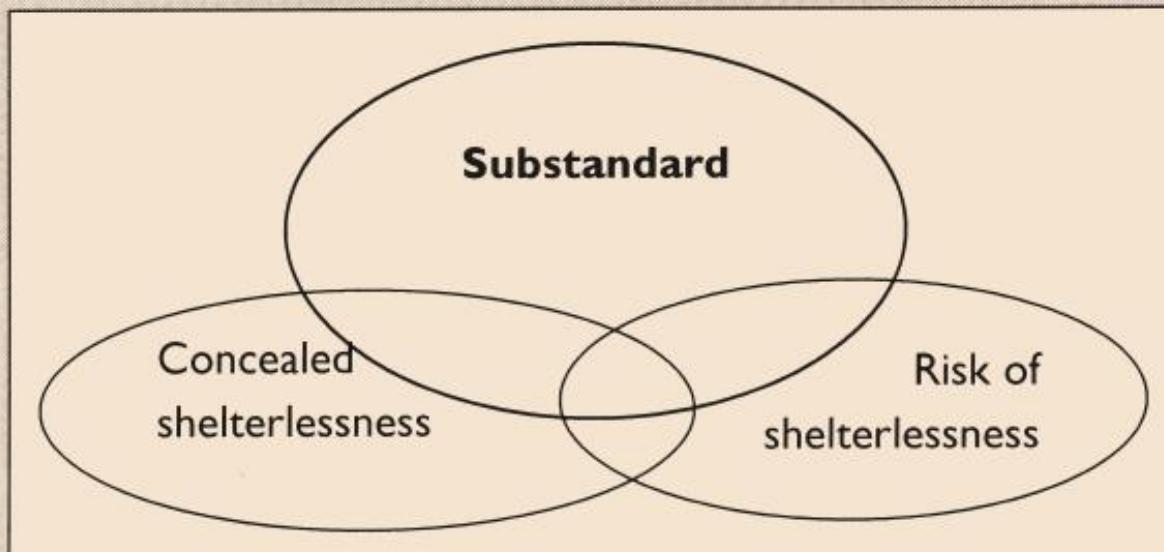
Note the gap bridged by mobility
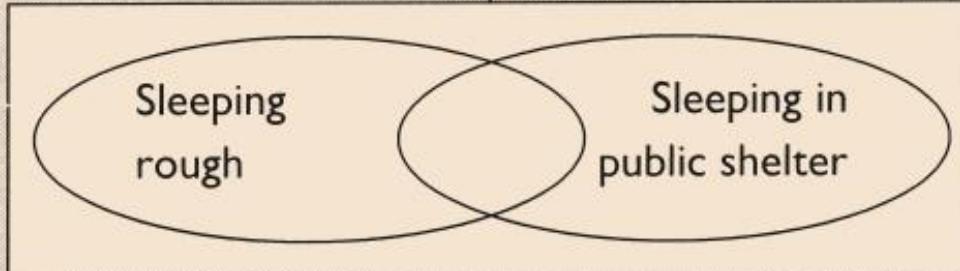
Modification of Springer for developing countries
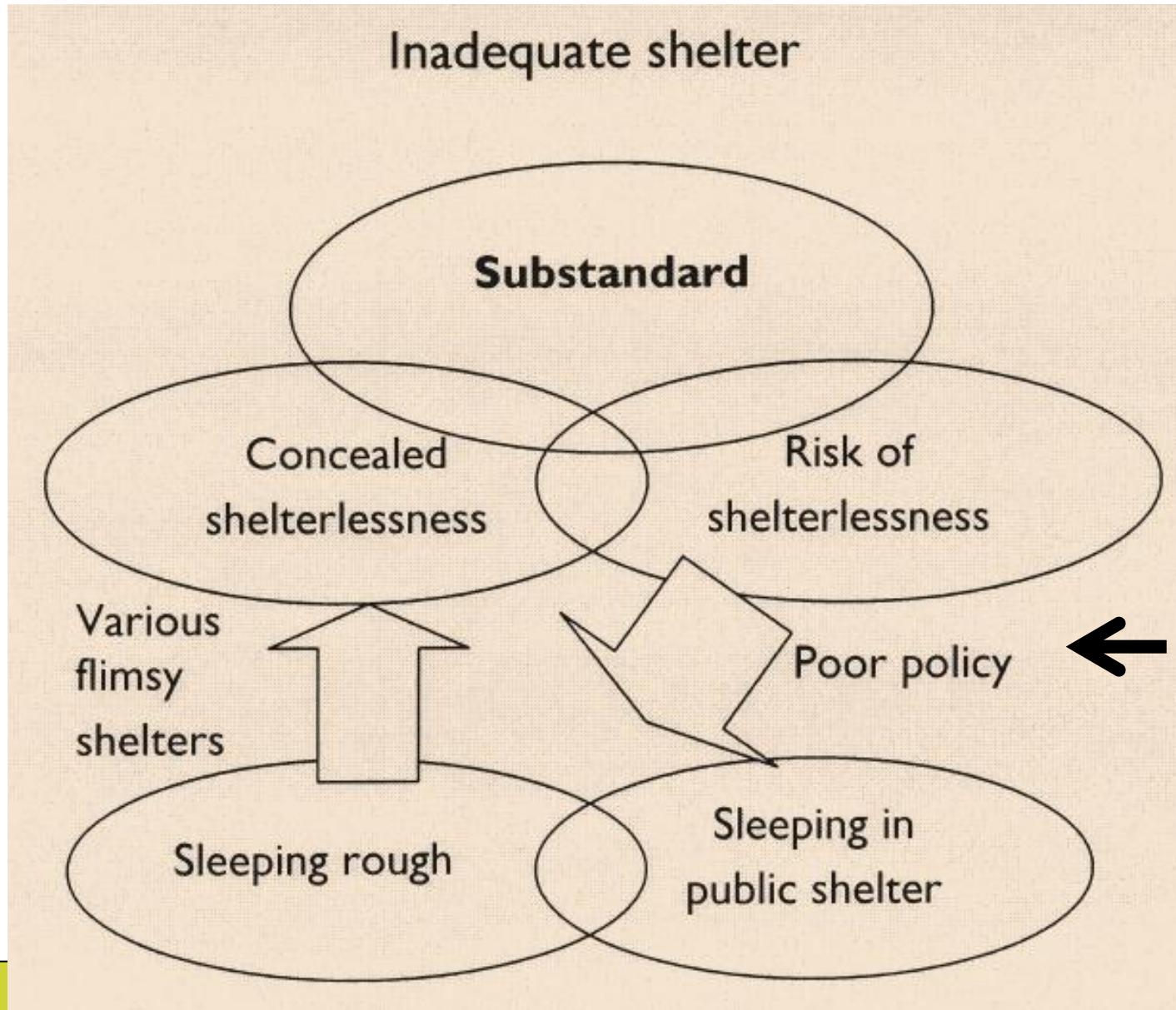
The gap is now bridged both upwards, through a series of flimsy shelters (upward trajectory) and downwards, by policy making housing more difficult for the poor

Interventions

Current interventions are limited and can be negative

Negative interventions include:

- Evictions
- Harassment and abuse
- Arrest and imprisonment

Positive interventions include

- Advocacy and legal aid
- Flexible educational support for street children
- Land tenure regularisation programmes
- Empowerment and participation in settlement relocation

Current interventions

Eviction to clear valuable land for development.

Street clearing when important events are to take place.

- In India, the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, is used to clear the streets of homeless people.

- Many other countries report similar 'cosmetic' clearing of the streets.

Few countries provide night shelters and those which do, for example India and South Africa, find they are often not well used because they:

- are dirty and unsafe

- do not provide safe storage for belongings or for rickshaws

Current interventions

Positive interventions

- Mainly provided by NGOs.

- Empowerment through self-enumeration

- Shelter rights campaigning

- legal advice

- one-to-one support to access a range of services, such as doctors.

- Allowing homeless people to settle on poor or low-value land and develop their own housing solutions.

What is needed
to help homeless people?

- A culture of care and support, rather than indifference and victim blaming

What is needed? (cont'd)

At the level of rough sleeping

A number of measures to support rough sleepers would include:

- **Legalising street sleeping**

- **an end to abuse by the authorities**

- **Easily accessible and appropriate free shelter (maybe in government-owned buildings, e.g., schools)**

- **Well maintained public water and sanitation points, in locations suitable for street sleepers**

- **Security 'lockers' for their belongings**

- **Safe refuge for abused women and children**

- **Free, accessible health, medical and legal support**

What is needed? (cont'd)

At the level of mass homelessness

- **More housing: the shortage of suitable housing is often the root causes of homelessness in developing countries. There is usually also a need for more housing of a type that the poorest households can afford.**

Housing should be:

- **cheap,**

- **built in labour intensive technologies to provide lots of work,**

- **situated close to sources of work**

- **serviced to a minimum level to keep costs down.**

What is needed? (cont'd)

- For those with a rudimentary structure, some security of tenure is important in order to allow them the develop their housing further and feel safe.

- This is the upward trajectory that might be a definitional issue.

- Not full security or title but some rights to occupy and access to services.

If you have been, thank you for listening

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