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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 68 (2012) 804 – 814

**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

AicE-Bs 2012 Cairo

ASIA Pacific International Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies

Mercure Le Sphinx Cairo Hotel, Giza, Egypt, 31 October – 2 November 2012

“Future Communities: Socio-Cultural &amp; Environmental Challenges”

## Conceptual Framework of Urban Poverty Reduction: A review of literature

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### Abstract

In the recent years, an extensive body of literature has emerged on the definition, measurement and analyzing of urban poverty. This paper provides a meaning and understanding for the term urban poverty and explores the concept of urban poverty, vulnerability, and urban poverty dynamics that underpin this meaning. It reviews ‘*who*’ is poor and ‘*why*’ they stay poor and what is known out there about policies in reducing urban poverty. Specific conclusions regarding towards the conceptual framework of urban poverty reduction issues are discussed. With the resources and literatures available today, however, there is no excuse for hundreds of millions still living in urban poverty around the world.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies (cE-Bs), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

*Keywords:* Urban poverty; vulnerability; poor; urbanization

### 1. Introduction

A small peasant and a landless laborer may both be poor but their fortunes are not tied together. In understanding the proneness to starvation of either we have to view not as members of the huge army of the ‘poor’, but as members of particular classes, belonging to particular occupational groups, having different endowments, being governed by rather different entitlement relations. The category of the poor is not merely inadequate for evaluative exercises and nuisance for casual analysis; it can also have distorting effects on policy matters (Sen, 1981). Commitments to poverty-reduction, national and international in the past few years back have reached levels that were not achieved 10 years ago.

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Commitments of each country in the world by the world leaders to ambitious targets for reducing global poverty and are focusing their attention on mobilizing resources and influencing policies that will provide pro-poor growth and therefore alleviate poverty. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are now comprise eight goals, eighteen targets 48 indicators (OECD, 2001). At their lead, as a global rallying call is goal 1-target 1: “Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day”. In an era of globalization, seeking to rapidly reduce poverty can produce two problems. First, such a focus will not meet the needs of all the different types of poor people. Second, such an approach encourages a focus on those poor whom the market can ‘liberate’ from poverty but neglects the needs of those who need different forms of support, policy changes, or broader changes within society that take time. Therefore, identification of many types of poverty reduction strategy that are most appropriate for countries (or urban areas) that have different mixes of poverty; chronic and transient poverty. In a country where poverty is largely a transient phenomenon, predominantly focuses on social safety. Limited unemployment allowances, social grants, workfare, micro credit, and new skills programs would be required. By contrast, a country like Malaysia, where a significant proportion of chronic poor are identified, direct investment toward basic physical infrastructure, and reduce social exclusion can significantly reduce poverty.

This paper addresses three main questions to create a conceptual framework.

- What is urban poverty? Subsequently it examines many different of conceptualization of urban poverty.
- Who is chronically poor? Based on few materials available, a brief of summary of the existing state is presented.
- And why are people chronically poor? The different factors and combination of factors that explain why poverty persists.

### *1.1. Definition of urban poverty*

Poverty is multidimensional, thus measuring it presents a number of challenges. Beyond low income, there is low human, social and financial capital. The most common approach to measuring poverty is quantitative, money-metric measures which use income or consumption to assess whether a household can afford to purchase a basic basket of goods at a given point in time. The basket ideally reflects local tastes, and adjusts for spatial price differentials across regions and urban areas in a given country. Money-metric methods are widely used because they are objective, can be used as the basis for a range of socio-economic variables, and it is possible to adjust for differences between households, and intra-household inequalities. Understanding urban poverty presents a set of issues distinct from general poverty analysis and thus may require additional tools and techniques. While there is no single approach in conducting urban poverty assessments, there are some common good practices that may facilitate the process of thinking through the design of a city poverty profile. While the dimensions of poverty are many, there is a subset of characteristics that are more pronounced for the poor in urban areas and may require specific analysis (Baharaoglu and Kessides, 2002).

- Commoditization (reliance on the cash economy).
- Overcrowded living conditions (slums).
- Environmental hazard (stemming from density and hazardous location of settlements, and exposure to multiple pollutants).
- Social fragmentation (lack of community and inter-household mechanisms for social security, relative to those in rural areas).
- Crime and violence.
- Traffic accidents.

- Natural disasters.

Measuring urban poverty can be carried out using a number of approaches summarized below. Regardless of the methodology chosen, the data should ideally be comparable across cities, and allow for disaggregation at the intra-city level. This will capture vast differences between the poor in small towns and mega cities, or between urban slums areas within a given city.

- Income or Consumption Measures: Both are based on data that assess whether an individual or household can afford a basic basket of goods (typically food, housing water, clothing, transport, etc). Consumption is generally considered to be a better measure than income because incomes tend to fluctuate over time; there are problems of under-reporting (particularly income derived from the private and informal sectors). (Chen and Ravallion, 2000). Money metric measures can be adjusted to account for the higher cost of living in urban areas when measuring poverty.
- Unsatisfied Basic Needs Index: This approach defines a minimum threshold for several dimensions of poverty classifying those households who do not have access to these basic needs. They include characteristics such as literacy, school attendance, piped water, sewage, adequate housing, overcrowding, and some kind of caloric and protein requirement. If a household is deficient in one of the categories, they are classified as having unsatisfied basic needs.
- Asset Indicators: This has been used increasingly with the Demographic and health Surveys (DHS), a standardized survey now administered in approximately 50 countries. A range of variables on the ownership of household assets are used to construct an indicator of households' socio-economic status. These assets include: a car, refrigerator, television, dwelling characteristics (type of roof, flooring, toilet), and access to basic services including clean water and electricity. (Falkingham, J. and C. Namazie, 2002).
- Vulnerability: This approach defines vulnerability as a dynamic concept referring to the risk that a household or individual will experience an episode of income or health poverty over time, and the probability of being exposed to a number of other risks (violence, crime, natural disasters, being pulled out of school). Vulnerability is measured by indicators that make it possible to assess a household's risk exposure over time through panel data. These indicators include measures of; physical assets, human capital, income diversification, links to networks, participation in the formal safety net, and access to credit markets. This kind of analysis can be quite complex, requiring a specially designed survey.

Household surveys or census in general disaggregated by income group; (1) location (within the city), (2) household size and structure, (3) demographics, (4) education levels, (5) household expenditure patterns, (6) employment (status, occupation, hours worked), (7) housing characteristics (tenure status and physical condition) and also access/quality or affordability to infrastructure (water, sewage and energy), health care, education and social services are the standard urban poverty profile for cities.

Though the urban poor are quite diverse across regions, countries and even within cities, they tend to face a number of common deprivations, which affect their day to day life. The main issues raised in the literature include: (1) limited access to income and employment, (2) inadequate and insecure living conditions, (3) poor infrastructure and services, (4) vulnerability to risks such as natural disasters, environmental hazards and health risks particularly associated with living in slums, (5) spatial issues which inhibit mobility and transport, and (6) inequality closely linked to problems of exclusion. And since 2000, the United Nations and World Bank have compiled and reported data on the progress of nations and regions with respect to a uniform set of targets and indicators. These targets and indicators were agreed upon within the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework, and countries' progress towards them has been monitored. The additional quantitative targets are needed because income poverty measures provide vitally important but incomplete guidance to redress multidimensional poverty. The multidimensional poverty index (MPI) is an index of acute multidimensional poverty. It reflects

deprivations in very rudimentary services and come human functioning's for people across 104 countries. Although deeply constrained by data limitations, the MPI reveals a different pattern of poverty than income poverty, as it illuminates a different set of deprivations. The MPI has three dimensions: health, education and standard of living. These are measured using ten indicators. Poor households are identified and an aggregate measure constructed using the methodology proposed by Alkire and Foster (2007, 2009). Each dimension is equally weighted; each indicator within a dimension is also equally weighted. The MPI reveals the combination of deprivations that batter a household at the same time. A household is identified as multidimensional poor if, and only if, it is deprived in some combination of indicators, and deprivation criteria are presented below and explained with detail in the following section.

#### *1.1.1. Health*

- Child mortality: if any child has died in the family
- Nutrition: if any adult or child in the family is malnourished

#### *1.1.2. Education*

- Years of schooling: if no household member has completed 5 years of schooling
- Child school attendance: if any school-aged child is out of school in years 1 to 8

#### *1.1.3. Standard of living*

- Electricity: if household does not have electricity
- Drinking water: if does not meet MDG definitions, or is more than 30 minutes walk
- Sanitation: if does not meet MDG definitions, or the toilet is shared
- Flooring: if the floor is dirt, sand or dung
- Cooking fuel: if they cook with wood, charcoal or dung
- Asset: if do not own more than one of radio, television, telephone, bike, motorbike or refrigerator and do not own a car or truck.

To sum up, urban poverty focuses on the durational aspect of poverty and has a particular interest in poverty dynamics at individual and household levels rather than aggregate and/or average poverty trends across populations. The analysis of urban poverty thus requires longitudinal data and as most existing datasets are quantitative and based upon income or consumption conceptualizations of poverty, it has been dominated by money-metric approaches.

### *1.2. Who is chronically poor?*

There is no body of theory at present that allows a deductive answer to this question. Initial findings identified a number of categories of individuals, households and social groups who are particularly likely to suffer chronic poverty:

- Those experiencing deprivation because of their stage in their life cycle ( example., older people, children and widows: see Barrientos, Gorman & Hesloop, this issue; Harper et al., this issue):
- Those discriminated against because of their social position at the local, regional or national level, for example, marginalized castes, ethnic, racial or religious groups, refugees, indigenous people, nomads and pastoralists, migrants (see Mehta & Shah, this issue; Sen, this issue);
- Household members who experience discrimination within the household for example female children, children in households with many other children, daughters-in-law, those with long term or severe health problems and highly challenging disabilities and impairments (see Yeo & Moore, this issue; Lwanga Ntale, Ndaziboneye & Nalugo, 2002);

- People living in remote rural areas, urban ghettos and regions where prolonged violent conflict and insecurity have occurred (see Amis, 2002; Bird & Shepherd, this issue; Goodhand, this issue).

An inductive approach requires definitions of chronic poverty which are relevant for local, regional or national contexts.

Table 1. An indication of the percentages and numbers of chronically poor people in 10 low-income developing countries

	Number of Absolutely chronic poor (millions)	Number of relatively chronic poor (millions)
Bangladesh, rural (1970-77)	10	
Bangladesh, rural (1987-89)	11	
China, rural (1978-89)		88
China, rural Sichuan (1991-95)	72	
China, rural southwest (1985-90)	220	
China, urban (1997)		
Cote d'Ivoire (1987-88)	3	
Egypt (1997-99)	12	
El Salvador, rural (1995-97)	1	
Ethiopia, rural (1994-95)	17	6
India, rural (1974-83)		n/a
India, rural (1968-70)	n/a	n/a
India, rural Tamil Nadu (1977-85)		96
India, semi-arid rural (1975-83)	280	
Indoneisa, rural (1997-98)	19	
Pakistan, rural	16	11
Papua New Guinea	1	

(Source: Developed from Yaqub, 2003)

The population denominators were taken from World Development Indicators, 1990 and 2000. Figures have been rounded to nearest million. The number of absolutely poor has been averaged where there are two incidence figures. There are many countries with significant populations which do not yet figure in this enumeration. In Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe to name a few. In South Asia, Pakistan. Most of the rest of Asia has not been included, nor has Latin America. If these were incorporated then the total number of chronically income poor people in the world (for example those who have been poor for at least five years, but for many for all of their lives) would probably range from 450 million to 900 million. Who is poor and who is not? A reasonable starting place is to compare each individual's achievement against the respective dimension-specific cutoffs. But specific cutoffs alone do not suffice to identify who is poor.

The 'uidimensional' method aggregates all achievements into a single cardinal variable of 'well being' or 'income' and uses an aggregate cutoff to determine who is poor. In this case, a person is poor if the

monetary value of the achievement bundle is below the cost of the target bundle. The most commonly used identification criterion of this type is called the union method of identification. In this approach, a person I is said to be multidimensionally poor if there is at least one dimension in which the person is deprived. The other identification method of this type is the intersection approach, which identifies person I as being poor only if the person is deprived in all dimensions. It has also been emphasized that these approaches are fundamentally addressed to individual achievements; social interactions and interdependences are considered only from the mechanical point of view of appropriately scaling household resources to take into account different household structures.

### 1.3. *Why do people stay poor?*

There are a vast range of theories why does poor people stay poor. Globally, there are radicals who argue that the persistence of poverty is an inherent element of capitalist development (Fine, 2002). At the other extreme come neoliberals who theorize that poverty persists because of obstacles to capitalism and distortion in local, national and global markets (Dollar & Kraay, 2000). Lipton (1977), in an influential but highly criticized volume, argued that ‘urban bias’ was the underlying source of continued poverty. While such broad sweeping theories have great intellectual interest there is not grand theoretical framework yet proposed that can explain the persistence of poverty in general, or the persistence of poverty for countries or social groups in particular.

In order to understand the persistence of poverty over generations, it is possible to adapt the livelihoods framework to take into account the intergenerational transfer, extraction and absence of transfer of different forms of poverty-related assets, as well as the effects on such transfers of broader structures, processes, policies, and institutions; shocks and trends and livelihood strategies (see Table 2: Moore, 2001a, 2001b). Table 2 should be conceived of a complex web of interactions rather than a set of discrete factors.

Table 2. The intergenerational transmission of poverty-related capital from ‘parent’ to ‘child’

What factors affect transmission?
Norms of entitlement determining access to human capital, particularly education, health care and nutrition
Economic trends and shocks ( for example, commodification, shifts in terms of trade, hyperinflation)
Access to and nature of markets for example nature of labor market (employment opportunities for children, young people and women; labor migration as livelihood strategy); access to financial market
Presence, quality and accessibility of public, private and community-based social services and safety nets
Structure of household and family, including headship as well as gender, birth position, marital status and age of ‘child’ and ‘parent’
Child fostering practices
Education and skill level of ‘parent’
Intent/attitude of ‘parent’ and ‘child’
HIV/AIDS pandemic; other diseases regionally endemic; associated stigma
Nature of living space for example security/conflict/violence, stigma, remoteness, sanitation

Ascending households experience the opposite dynamic but they are not ‘the flipside of the coin’. Sen (this issue) finds that the factors associated with building up household assets and ‘escape’ from poverty are different from declines. Of great importance are the household’s stage in the life cycle, the dynamism and nature of the local economy and the capacity, or good fortune to avoid shocks. As stated, the



understanding of why poor people stay poor is strengthening but we need to extend this knowledge if policies to effectively tackle chronic poverty are to be developed.

## 2. Urban Poverty in Malaysia

One of the two fundamental objectives of the Malaysian Government's New Economic Policy is "... to eradicate poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race". (Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975, 1973). In Malaysia, the incidence of absolute poverty has traditionally been determined by reference to a threshold poverty line income (PLI). This PLI is based on what is considered to be the minimum consumption requirements of a household for food, clothing and other non-food items, such as rent, fuel and power. There is no separate PLI for urban and rural households. The proportion of all households living below this threshold is the proportion living in poverty – that is the poverty rate. And this poverty rates are available for household categories only: they are not available for individual separately. The concept of hard-core poverty was first used by the Malaysian government in 1989 to help identify and target poor households whose income is less than half of the PLI. It is one indication of the severity of poverty. The term hard-core poverty in Malaysia does not; however indicate the duration of time spent living below the poverty line. In addition to absolute poverty, the concept of relative poverty is used to assess income disparities between income groups. It is measured here by using income disparity ratios of income groups (top 20 per cent and bottom 40 per cent), and urban and rural dwellers. Overall the status of poverty and income distribution in Malaysia, poverty incidence has dropped from 52.4% in 1970 to 5.1% in 2022, increased slightly to 5.7% in 2004 (reduction of about 46.7% in 34 years or 1.4% per year. Rural poverty incidence is higher, decreasing from 60% in 1970 to 11.4% in 2002, 11.9% in 2004. Meanwhile, urban poverty is relatively lower, reducing from 22.3% in 1970 to 2% in 2022, 2.5% in 2004. The number of poor households decreased from 574,000 in 1990 to 267,000 in 2002, increasingly to 311,300 in 2004. Below, table 3 showed that the comparison between rural/urban poverty, 1970-2004 (Chamhuri, 2007).

Table 3. Comparison between rural and urban poverty, 1970-2004

Year	Rural poverty (%)	Urban poverty (%)
1970	60.0	22.3
1985	27.3	8.5
1990	21.1	7.1
1995	15.3	3.7
1997	10.9	2.1
1999	12.4	3.4
2002	11.4	2.0
2004	11.9	2.5

Note: Nationally, the urban poverty incidence is low, at 2.5% in 2004

### 2.1. Malaysia's poverty line (PLI)

Malaysia's Poverty Line Income (PLI) is based on the minimum requirements of a household for three major components: food, clothing, and footwear, and other non-food items such as rent, fuel and power; furniture and household equipment; medical care and health expenses; transport and communications; and

recreation, education, and cultural services. For the food component, currently the minimum expenditure is based on a daily requirement of 9,910 calories for a family of five persons, while the minimum requirements for clothing and footwear are based on standards set by the Department of Social Welfare for welfare homes. The assumed family of five consists of 1 adult male, 1 adult female and 3 child of either sex aged 1-3, 4-6, and 7-9 years. The other non-food items are based on the level of expenditure of the lower income households, as reported in the Malaysian Household Expenditure Survey (HES). The PLI is updated annually to reflect changes in the levels of prices by taking into account changes in the Consumer Price Indices. The PLI is calculated to reflect differences in prices and household size in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The incidence of poverty is monitored through the Malaysian Household Income Survey (HIS). The HIS is conducted once in every two or three years and is primarily designed to collect information on household earnings, income sources, and other social data, such as education, health, water supply, electricity, housing and mode of transport. Poverty rates, as measured using Malaysia's PLI, differ from those implied by the one US dollar a day (purchasing power parity) poverty line used by international organizations. The latter has fixed purchasing power across countries and, therefore, facilitates international comparisons more readily. There are always conceptual and empirical problems in deciding what constitutes a minimum standard of living, as well as data problems in measuring it. In comparison with the US\$1 PPP standard poverty line, the Malaysian PLI, when converted on the basis of US\$1 PPP, results in a higher poverty rate because of its higher standard of living below which households are counted as poor. The current methodology classifies households as poor if their incomes are insufficient to meet the needs of around 5 persons. This may well exaggerate poverty rates of small households and underestimate the poverty rates of larger ones. The methodology for computing the PLI and poverty measures in Malaysia is under review.

Table 4. Poverty line incomes, 1990-2002 (RM per month per household)

	1990	1995	1999	2002
Peninsular Malaysia 370	425	510	529	
Sabah	544	601	685	690
Sarawak	452	516	584	600

Note: Adjusted based on an average household size of 4.6 in Peninsular Malaysia, 4.9 in Sabah and 4.8 in Sarawak

(Sources: Malaysia, Economic Planning Unit, five-year plans, various years)

### 3. Urbanization: Increasing Poverty and Inequality

In Malaysia, overall urban population increasing from 50.6% (1991), 55.6% (1996), 57.3% (1998), 59.2% in 2000 and expected to increase to 65% in the future. Higher urbanisation rates in some states, for example Kuala Lumpur (100%), Selangor (89.4%), Penang (86.1%), Perak (67.8%) and Johor (56.4%) in 2000. Urban migration, especially inter urban migration and rural-urban migration, expected to continue with larger towns attracting majority of migrants and foreign labour. Although in Malaysia the urban poverty rate is very low, rapid urbanization that has occurred over the decades means that the number of the urban poor is now considered significant. Due to massive urbanization in Malaysia, some factors and consequences occurred and still occurring until now. (1) increasing urban diseconomies for example pollution, congestion and also diseases (2) escalating economic and social costs for example rentals, transport, housing, land and space, drugs, crime, social problems etc. (3) uneven distribution of development benefits between urban areas and urban-rural areas. (4) urban issues and problems such as



inadequate amenities, shortage of housing – quality of life will deteriorate. (5) issues of unsustainable living in cities for example environmental deterioration, congestion, living space, waste disposal, sanitation and squatters (6) burden of employment generation, increasing unemployment and incidence of poverty and lastly (7) micro-studies of squatters, low cost flat dwellers and petty traders also shows that the incidence of poverty amongst them is still high.

Table 5. Urban population, Malaysia 1995-2000

Year	total population (Billion)	urban population (Billion)	percentage of urban population	percentage increasing
1995	20.347	11.15	54.8	
1996	20.861	11.64	55.8	4.2
1997	21.335	12.097	56.7	3.8
1998	21.846	12.561	57.5	3.7
1999	22.316	13.033	58.4	3.6
2000	22.823	13.511	59.2	3.5

(Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1995)

Table 6. Poverty incidence among squatters in Kuala Lumpur

PLI	Number	Percent (%)
PLI RM405/month		
Very poor	11	5.5
Poor (including very poor)	25	18.2
Non-poor	162	81.8
Total	198	100
PLI Rm500/month		
Very poor	13	6.6
Poor (including very poor)	29	21.2
Non-poor	156	78.8
Total	198	100
PLI RM750/month		
Very poor	23	11.6
Poor (including very poor)	60	41.9
Non-poor	115	58.1
Total	198	100

(Source: UKM-YPEIM, 1996)

Table 7. Incidence of poverty among Kuala Lumpur city low cost flat dwellers

PLI	hard-core poor	poor (including hard-core poor)	non-poor
PLI1			
RM465/month	0.5	2.3	97.7
PLI2			
RM750/month	2.0	14.0	86.0
PLI3			
RM850/month	2.2	21.0	79.0
PLI4			
RM1500/month	14.0	55.0	45.0

(Source: UKM-DBKL, 1999)

Table 6 and table 7 show the incidence of poverty among squatters in Kuala Lumpur and the Kuala Lumpur city low cost flats dwellers. In the 10th Malaysia Plan, the Malaysian government just recently declared that the PLI for the urban poor is RM3000. Based on this, more research is required to help the urban poor out of the Poverty Line Income and increase the quality of life of the urban poor especially in the city of Kuala Lumpur.

#### 4. Conclusion

Urban poverty should be treated more as relative poverty and distributional issues. Malaysia's NVP foresees the country becoming a fully developed nation by 2020. Interactions between the public and private sectors are important as they will strengthen national commitment for further development of the economy and also for realizing that vision for sustaining Malaysia's development and for eradicating poverty. Sustaining economic growth to provide employment opportunities and further improve the standard of living of the population especially in an urban areas is a continued challenge in an increasingly competitive and open economic environment. In Malaysia, some new categories of poor persons are emerging, partly as a result of the country's rapid economic growth and related social and demographic changes. These are likely to include, inter alia, single female-headed households, and the elderly especially those not covered by pension schemes and living in rural areas away from their families. With the rising of urbanization, the number of poor in urban areas is significant, even though urban poverty rates are low. The urban poor include migrants from rural areas, foreign workers and also the unemployed. The remaining urban poor in Malaysia are less accessible and may not be amendable to conventional poverty-reducing programs. In addition to that, being able to identify those who are poor, there is also a need to be able to assess the changing determinants of poverty. By this means, more effective policies aimed at reducing poverty among target groups are being formulated.

Initial findings identified a number of categories of individuals, households, and social groups who are particularly likely to suffer urban poverty: (1) those experiencing deprivation because of their stage in life cycle, (2) those discriminated against because of their social position at the local, regional or national level, (3) household members who experience discrimination within the household, (4) those with long term or severe health problems and highly challenging disabilities and impairments and (5) people living in remote rural areas who moved to urban areas, urban ghettos, and regions where prolonged violent conflict and insecurity have occurred. Most of these literatures focus on analyzing urban poverty on the national and international level. It tackles the problems of urban poverty, and answering specific

questions such as the location of the poor in the city, the differences between poor areas, the effectiveness of specific programs in reaching the poorest and to design an effective best practices urban poverty reduction programs and policies. Answering these questions is critical specifically for large sprawling cities with highly diverse populations and growing problems of urban poverty. Understanding urban poverty distinct a set of issues from the general poverty and requires additional tools and techniques. Specific conclusions regarding towards the conceptual framework of urban poverty reduction issues are discussed. With the resources and literatures available today, however, there is no excuse for hundreds of millions still living in urban poverty around the world.

## Acknowledgement

The writers would like to acknowledge the support given by the Universiti Teknologi MARA during the carrying out of this research.

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