

Segment Spotlight: Urban Poor

Phnom Penh, a city of squatters

Phnom Penh is one of the most unique cities in the world. It is the only capital city in recent history whose entire population has been evicted. During four years (1975-1979) of Khmer Rouge rule, the city was empty and its infrastructure neglected.

When the population started to return in 1979, the shape and structure of the city changed completely, as most of the new residents came from rural areas. Following Pol Pot's ousting by the invading Vietnamese, people began to emerge from the jungle into an empty, dilapidated city. They camped out in empty buildings and lit open fires to cook their rice. When all the houses and flats had been occupied, newcomers built shelters wherever they could find space: along river banks, railway tracks, on streets, in the areas between buildings and on rooftops.

These collections of dwellings, as the only solution to the city's critical shortage of affordable housing for the poor, became thriving communities and home to a new generation of city-builders. During the 80s, however, the city further deteriorated due to the lack of both financial and human resources.

With the arrival of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and their cash in 1992, the city entered a period of growth and dramatic change. Phnom Penh attracted a large number of migrants who arrived in search of economic

opportunities. Consequently, the city's population increased from 584,000 inhabitants in 1987 to more than 1 million over the following decade. This rapid growth was chaotic and disorganized. The neglected physical infrastructure still has an impact on the urban environment and living conditions of local residents.

Today, Phnom Penh is continually drawing in thousands of low income migrants who come looking for work in the city's factories, markets and construction sites. Although its growing economy depends heavily on the cheap labor

that these people provide, the city has been unable to offer them much in return by way of affordable housing or assistance and the urban poor are left to fend for themselves.

What are their needs?

At the physical level, Cambodia's urban poor struggle to find shelter, adequate sanitation, clean water, physical security and good medical care. Adequate work can be very difficult to find. The poor are often victimized as the wealthy and powerful pursue gains at their expense. Pray for social justice and relief from daily suffering.

Spiritually, most of the urban poor are lost in the common mixture between Buddhism and animistic beliefs and practices. The greatest need of Cambodia's urban poor is to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.



Fast Facts

Number of families living in slum areas:

35,000

Average daily salary:

1 US\$

Common health afflictions:

Tuberculosis, AIDS, malnutrition

% Urban poor families with no access to a toilet:

40%

