INTRODUCTION

“IT is a potential gold mine, if only it wasn’t seething with life and people”. Thus began Varun Singh’s article (1) about Mumbai’s slums. The article epitomizes the often conflicting objectives of the informal settlement stakeholders: the politician, the builder, the city slum dweller and the social activist alike.

Singh estimates the approximate value of the Mumbai slums to be in excess of $2 billion, making redevelopment an attractive proposition for all stakeholders of any kind.

CONCLUSION

Varun Singh’s attempt to value the Mumbai slums is perhaps a double edged sword. While itregularly quantifies and evaluates informal settlements, to make the reporting and data, and to map the corresponding spatial footprints would be a huge advantage to the city and to its ‘informal’ residents, helping allocate control and negotiating powers as appropriate. It would also give cities an objective framework within which to resolve conflicts. The new tools of urban science, the analysis of “big data,” and other technological advances will help inject much-needed objectivity into the assessment of the land dynamics of the city. In the absence of sufficient data and information, planners attempting to craft housing solutions for the poor while balancing market pressures will continue to face an intractable problem.
The private sector has a vital role in helping cities to avoid proliferation of slums through creation of affordable housing in the formal sector.

Land prices in India are, at times, much higher than the levels that can support mass real estate developments.

20% of energy access rate in Nairobi, where such rights do not exist

30% of Mumbai's land area covered by slums

Sources
1. iStock Photo
2. Shutterstrock
3. Getty Images

Opinion Piece
Increasing objectivity through data and evidence

In collaboration with MIT

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