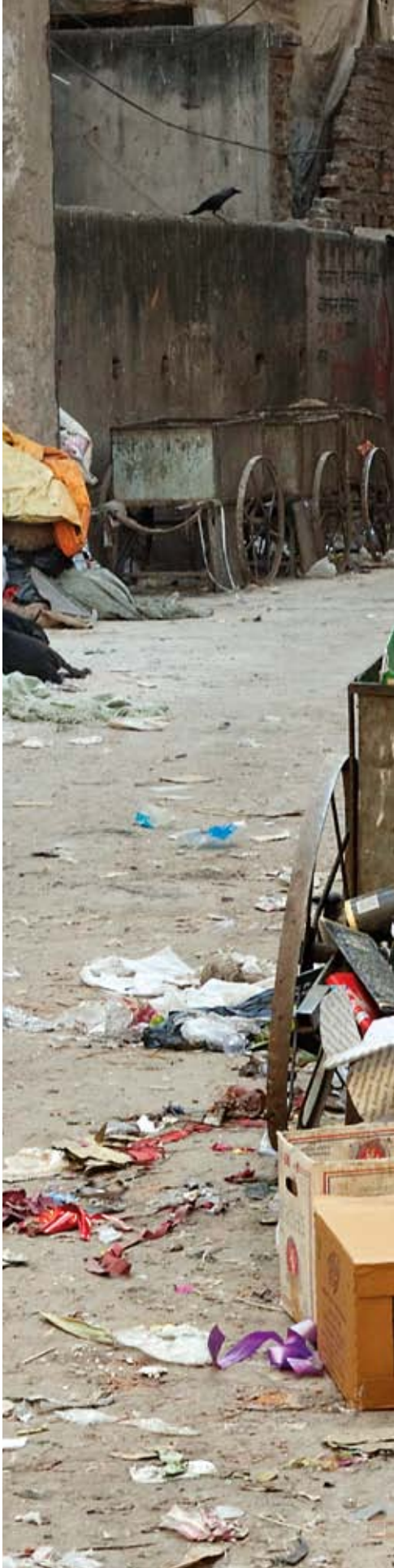
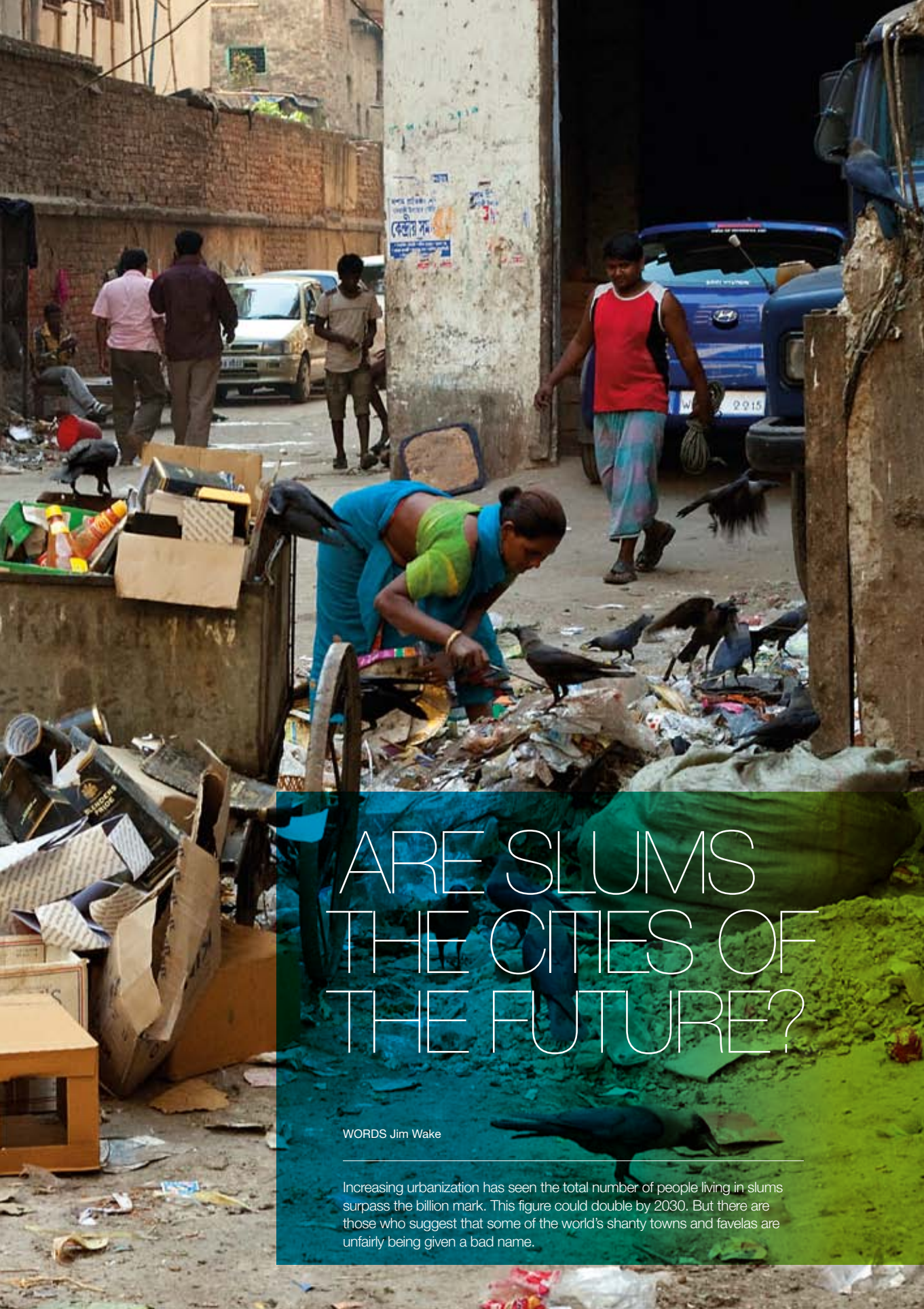
"All over the world people are leaving the land to go to the cities. And they know what they want. They want more excitement, more lights. They want to be richer. They also want to be brighter. They don't want to feel they're missing out. And most of them are missing out, of course."

When the future Nobel laureate VS Naipaul wrote those words in 1975, the global population was about four billion, with around 1.5 billion people – a little less than 38 percent – living in towns and cities. You may or may not agree with Naipaul's final analysis, but you have to give him credit for prescience. Now, 36 years later, half of the world's seven billion people live in cities, a billion of them in slums, shanty towns, squatter settlements and other more or less informal or illegal urban communities. Clearly, people have been leaving the land in search of more excitement and more lights.

That steady stream has turned cities such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Mexico City, Lagos, Cairo, Nairobi, Mumbai, Delhi, Dhaka, Karachi, Istanbul, Guangzhou and Jakarta – just to mention a few of the most prominent examples – into megacities teeming with overcrowded, chaotic, informal settlements. Some of them continue to grow at astounding rates – growth in Guangzhou, for example, is estimated to be around 4 percent, which adds a million people a year to the nearly 25 million now living in the metropolitan area. Delhi (population almost 24 million) is growing at 4.6 percent a year, and Karachi (population nearly 17 million) at 4.9 percent a year.

But amazingly, even more people are leaving the countryside for "second tier" regional centers – African cities like Kampala and Ouagadougou, Latin American regional centers like Tijuana in Mexico and Bélem in Brazil, and dozens of Chinese provincial "towns" with populations in the hundreds of thousands. In India, around 35 cities have more than a million residents.





# ARE SLUMS THE CITIES OF THE FUTURE?

WORDS Jim Wake

Increasing urbanization has seen the total number of people living in slums surpass the billion mark. This figure could double by 2030. But there are those who suggest that some of the world's shanty towns and favelas are unfairly being given a bad name.

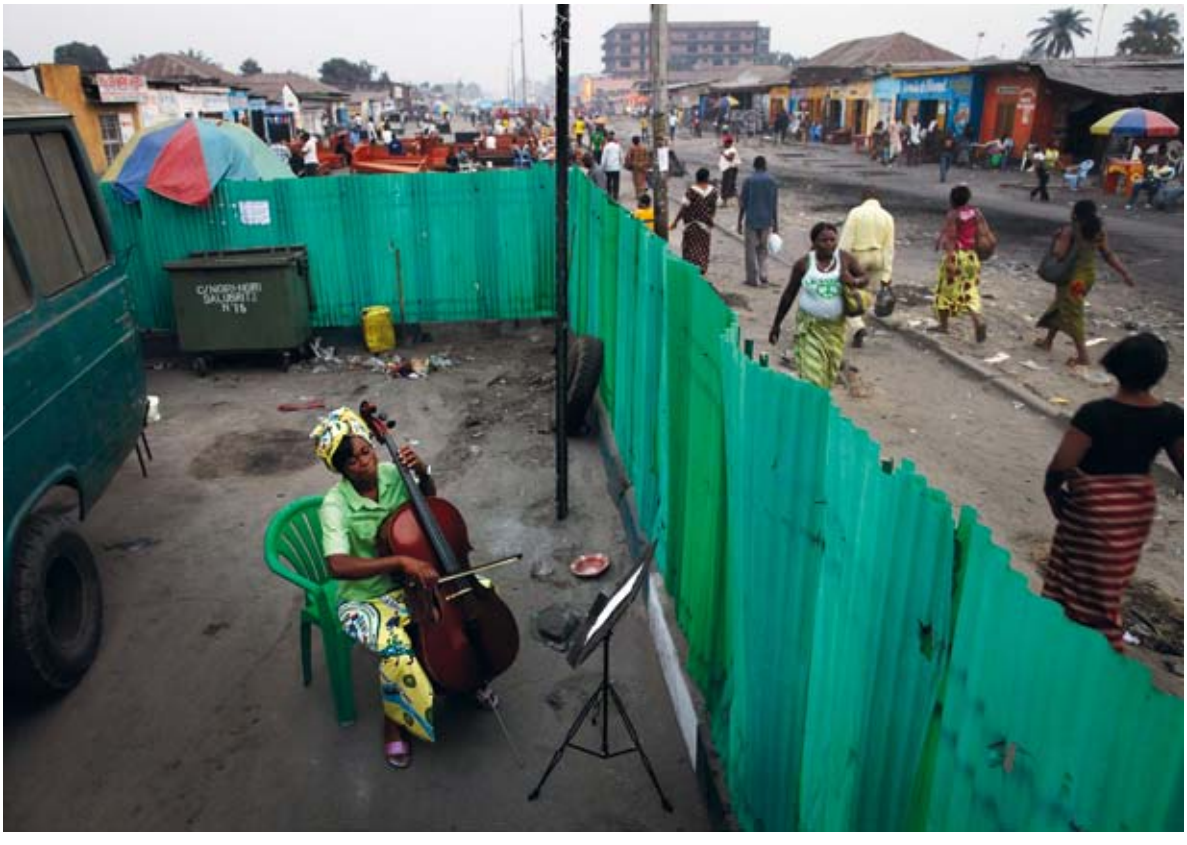
Previous spread: **A woman picking through garbage on the streets of Kolkata in India.** Photography: Tony Burns.

Below: **Josephine Mpongo, of the Kimbanguiste Symphony Orchestra, practicing the cello in the group's rehearsal space in Kinshasa, DR Congo.** Photography: Andrew McConnell.

This mass migration has led to dire warnings of a coming apocalypse, conjuring up images of the Mad Max movies, where crime is rampant and the established order breaks down. And it is indeed true that many, if not most, of the people who inhabit these informal communities lead very marginal lives, scratching out a living as street hawkers or carrying out menial tasks for subsistence wages. Whole families crowd into rooms of 15 or 20 square meters, without water, electricity, or toilets. It's also true that the economic policies that were supposed to rescue the nearly bankrupt economies of many developing nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America – the so-called "structural adjustment programs" (SAPs) – only served to further impoverish large segments of the population. Middle class bureaucrats, for example, who lost their jobs and ended up joining the ranks of the slum dwellers.

But the situation may not be as dire as it first appears. There's an argument given voice, among others, by a seminal report entitled The Challenge of the Slums, which was published by UN-Habitat in 2003. It says that slums are not the precursors of cataclysmic social breakdown, but rather incubators of growth and development. "Slums are the first stopping point for immigrants," write the report's authors. "They provide the low cost and only affordable housing that will enable the immigrants to save for their eventual absorption into urban society. Slums are also places in which the vibrant mixing of different cultures frequently results in new forms of artistic expression.

Out of unhealthy, crowded and often dangerous environments can emerge cultural movements and levels of solidarity unknown in the suburbs of the rich. Against all odds, slum dwellers have developed economically rational and



innovative shelter solutions for themselves." One person who has very definite and surprisingly sanguine ideas about the slums of the world is Robert Neuwirth, author of Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, a New Urban World. In the early part of the last decade, Neuwirth walked away from a steady, but ultimately unfulfilling, life as a journalist specializing in urban design and spent the best part of two years traveling to some of the most notorious squatter communities on Earth, living for extended periods of time in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, Mumbai and Nairobi.

Neuwirth had come to the conclusion that the "real story" wasn't about real estate development in New York, but about the billion people who were creating their own communities out of next to nothing. "This was a huge story," he says. "These are normal people, but they very seldom get covered as normal people. They get covered as this sort of aberration which separates them from the rest of us and I wanted to go in and investigate not how separate they are from the rest of us, but how similar they are to all of us."

Relying, as he puts it "on the kindness of strangers", he saw plenty of misery, but a great deal of dynamism and creativity as well. "When you read the literature, you think of them as slums, so I did have an expectation of crudeness and decay and despair, which is why, when I found communities that were substantially developed, it was quite amazing to me." There were the open sewers and the piles of rotting garbage, but also multi-story buildings made of reinforced concrete and brick – places where people did have water and electricity and toilets, and where community organizations acted in lieu of formal government. "Slums" didn't quite do justice to what he found. "I was pretty amazed as well by the level of commerce and energy and hyper-entrepreneurial zeal that exists in these communities."

As Neuwirth sees it, these informal settlements are the "cities of the future". He notes that Europe and the US have had their own history of squatters and informal communities, and that traditionally, they dealt with them with very little consideration for the welfare of the residents. "In the past there has been a sort of punitive attitude towards squatters – that these communities were to be thrown out and it didn't matter where these folks went or if they had a place to go to after you booted them out. But what if we had worked with those people to bring their communities in and fostered inclusive development, rather than throwing them out in favor of wealthier real estate interests? The countries of the developing world have a chance to do it differently, without penalizing these communities, but rather trying to create a kind of inclusive development that works with them to bring all kinds of infrastructure that traditionally they've been deprived of."

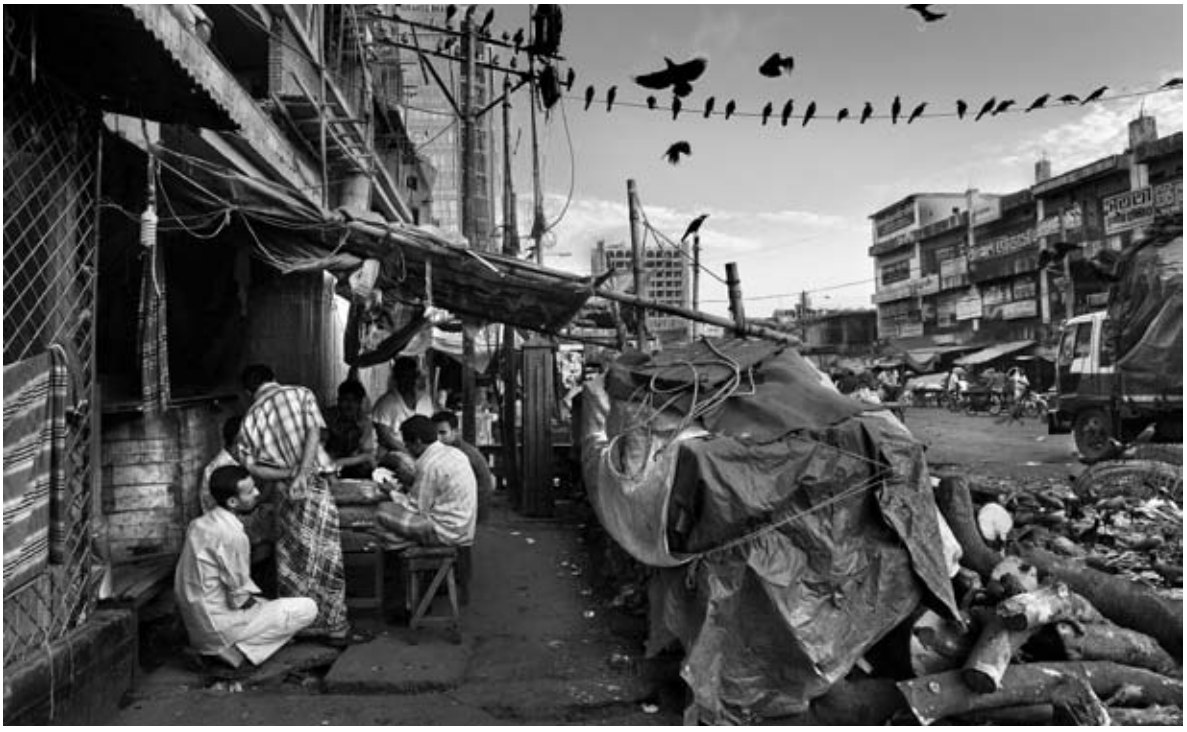
Contrary to what most people think, adds Neuwirth, squatters are usually quite pragmatic and willing to engage in dialog with governments to find solutions that address legitimate concerns about crime, sanitation and legal status, as long as government shows a willingness to work with them and recognize that these communities do have an intrinsic value – as sources of labor, for example. "It just seems outrageous in the 21st century that we can pretend that vast swathes of the urban population that are employed on low wages by people and are definitely part of the urban fabric can somehow be denied infrastructure. And it is bizarre that most of the people who serve the tourists staying in hotels in Rio at Copacabana Beach and clean their rooms are my friends living in Rosinha [the largest favela in Rio]. But nonetheless, they're the 'other', and so the government doesn't want to deal with them.

"And similarly in India, middle class and wealthy people employ an array of drivers and houseboys and cooks and maids and child care workers, all of whom are squatters, and they pay them next to nothing, but then they tell me things like 'squatter communities are just a bastion of crime.' And these are the same people who are taking care of their kids! So if they're criminals, why are you allowing them to take care of your kids?"

In any case, whatever governments do is not going to stop the mass movement of people from the countryside into urban areas. "To me, it's a fact of life," states Neuwirth. "We are an urban world and we're going to be an increasingly urban world. So the neighborhoods of the future in this increasingly urban world are going to be squatter communities. They're the ones that are developing the fastest and they're the places that the people with hopes and entrepreneurial zeal are moving to. Whether it's street markets or squatter communities, my argument would be that this is the urban challenge of the 21st century – that these communities, whether organized around street markets, or waterfront property, or waste areas where traditionally builders haven't built – these communities are the urban center of gravity. And increasingly, whether cities do better or worse is going to depend on the kinds of policies that people take towards these communities, how well these communities can develop themselves and how effectively urban governments can partner with these communities to incorporate them into the city."

That means looking at ways to develop basic infra-structure, such as safe water and sanitation, police and emergency services and so on. But Neuwirth says it also means providing the residents with "security of tenure" – an assurance that they won't get evicted – and access to politics, in the sense that they have some way to interact with the political systems in the places where they live. In a new book called Stealth of Nations, scheduled for publication in October, Neuwirth focuses in particular on those informal markets that are so much a part of the squatter communities.

"More than half of the workers of the world are now working in the informal economy, which of course means that maybe we ought to be looking at that as the 'real economy'. They are vital



**Men playing cards on the streets of Dhaka in Bangladesh, where 85 percent of the city's 13 million people live in slum conditions.**
Photography: Larry Louie.

to the growth of these cities and the growth of these communities. These street markets are incredibly active and are the centers of community development and wealth building in the informal setting, and incredibly important for the urban future."

Asked what he thinks about VS Naipaul's cynical take on urban migration – that "most of them are missing out" – Neuwirth expresses a deeply felt ambivalence. "Of course he's right – everyone in the city comes to the city with a great deal of hope and most of their hopes are not realized. But I think in some ways that's been true of migrations throughout history. And it also depends on what you think a realized hope is."

People come to the city with grand dreams, he concedes, and mainly end up struggling to survive. "But they get closer to what they want to do, and see more possibilities for education and maybe their kids being able to achieve more. It strikes me that we make these goals too high." By way of example, he recalls a man he met who grew up in a famous slums in Lagos. For 16 years he worked as a scavenger at a garbage dump. He saved enough money to buy himself a scale, and he became a "contract scaler". Then he saved some more money and he became a scrap dealer.

"For him," continues Neuwirth, "this is a huge move. We might look at him and say he's a poor soul in the most deprived conditions, but for him, he thinks he's doing great. The future is bright. So it all depends on what standpoint we're looking at it from – from the top down or the bottom up." A

## PAINTING A DIFFERENT PICTURE

Brazil's favelas – the shanty towns and squatter settlements where millions of urban poor and immigrants from the countryside live – are known all around the world. But not always for the best of reasons. When they make it into the headlines, it can be because of gang violence, police crackdowns, or because natural or man-made disasters strike. AkzoNobel is doing its best to paint a very different picture – quite literally – through an ongoing campaign called "Tudo de cor para você" (Everything in color for you).

The highly successful program involves painting Brazilian slums and deprived neighborhoods with the company's Coral brand of decorative paints, with more than 600 local painting events having been initiated over the last two years. While not all the neighborhoods qualify as "slums" – for example, 42 houses in the historic city of Ouro Preto were painted as part of the program – there is a heavy emphasis on engaging the poorer neighborhoods, where a minor upgrade in the form of the addition of color can make a big difference.

"Our mission is to add color to people's lives," says Jaap Kuiper, General Manager for AkzoNobel Decorative Paints South America. "But when I say color, I mean more than just paint. I mean color in terms of happiness, where the starting point is to make the world a better place." Each initiative, adds Kuiper, is a cooperative project involving AkzoNobel employees and community representatives at all levels. "It's a co-creation, whereby we work together with the community on the project design, we supply the paint and train youngsters from the neighborhood so they learn a trade. For us, of course, when the project is complete and the neighborhood has been painted, we get a lot of attention from local media, journalists and even the national media. It's a real win-win situation – you help the community, you inspire your own employees, the customers love it, and all the while you are strengthening your brand equity. That's what we call 'Marketing 3.0'"

To date, Tudo de Cor has touched more than two million people. AkzoNobel has donated more than 100,000 liters of paint and invested around €5 million, working in communities stretching from Fortaleza in the north to Florianópolis in the south. For the major projects, well-known public figures participate as ambassadors at celebratory events to mark the successful end of a project – like the former tennis star Gustavo "Guga" Kuerten, who served as ambassador in Florianópolis in July of 2011.

The most ambitious project to date is now getting underway in the Santa Marta favela in Rio de Janeiro. "This is the first time that a paint company has taken on the challenge of painting an entire favela, with 1,500 houses and 6,000 people," continues Kuiper. "That's not something you can do overnight, but our plan is to be ready by 2014 – before the start of the soccer World Cup. It's a really fantastic project for the community and I'm sure it will be a big boost for Coral as well. We are proving that if you want to make the world a better place, it doesn't have to conflict with your commercial objectives."

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