Environmental hazards in slums are the most common cause of ill health and mortality among the urban poor in developing countries – and the poorer you are, the greater the threat. Yet with policy makers in denial slums continue to grow. Slums are not inevitable - they are the result of failed policies, not poverty. Policies which anticipate urban growth and promote citywide inclusion strategies can pre-empt environmental degradation and health risks and help nations realize the positive impacts of urban growth.

Mark Hildebrand lived and worked in developing countries for over two decades, managing United Nations technical cooperation activities in urban development and slum upgrading worldwide. In 1998 he led international efforts to establish the Cities Alliance at the World Bank and managed the Alliance for its first seven years, building it into a global coalition of cities and their development partners. He also led preparation of the Alliance’s Cities without Slums action plan, subsequently adopted at the UN by the world’s heads of state in the Millennium Declaration in September 2000. He is currently senior urban advisor to a learning initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to strengthen organizations of the urban poor.