

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS IN THE POST-2015 UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

A. Introduction

A historic milestone was reached in 2009 when the global population living in cities and towns crossed the 50 per cent mark, thus making urban centres the dominant habitat for humankind. This shift has tremendous implications for the current and future dynamics of human development. Most outstanding in this process is the rate at which urbanization is occurring in developing countries. Only 60 years ago or so (1950 to be precise), the number of people living in urban centres was slightly higher in the developed nations (58.5 per cent, or 426.9 million) than in developing countries. Today, of every 10 urban residents in the world more than seven are found in developing countries, which also accommodate an overwhelming proportion of humankind (82 per cent of the world's population). Moreover, of the 187,066 new city dwellers that will be added to the world's urban population every day between 2012 and 2015, 91.5 per cent, or 171,213, will be born in a developing country.

The rapidly increasing dominance of cities as the habitat of humankind places the process of urbanization among the most significant global trends of the twenty-first century. Cities and urban places in general now occupy the centre stage in global development. Significantly, cities and towns are a major factor in environmental trends and sustainability processes. They now profoundly shape and influence social and political relations at every level, determining advances and setbacks in modes of production and providing new content to social norms, culture and aesthetics. Cities have become a major locus of power and politics, consequently influencing national development and policy outcomes. Urbanization is thus providing both the setting and momentum for global change.

The shift towards a dominantly urban world is not simply a demographic phenomenon characterized by an anticipated population movement and change from one locale and profile to another. Rather, it is a transformative process permeating many aspects of global development. It is also a force which, if effectively steered and deployed, can potentially help the world to overcome some of the major global challenges at present, including climate change. Governments recognized this in paragraph 134 of the Rio+20 outcome document, "The Future We Want":

134. We recognize that, if they are well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies. In this regard, we recognize the need for a holistic approach to urban development and human settlements that provides for affordable housing and infrastructure and prioritizes slum upgrading and urban regeneration. ...

The inclusion of the urbanization factor in determining the post-2015 global development agenda is thus fundamental if evolving positive processes, salient contextual factors, and the powerful momentum prevailing at this advent of the new millennium are to be

harnessed. In addressing the urbanization phenomenon, a post-2015 UN Development Agenda should therefore go beyond the demographic dimension and should address the main challenges and opportunities that are shaping twenty-first century cities and towns, including how these affect and contribute to sustainable development.

By highlighting these main trends and factors, Section B below explains why sustainable urbanization is critically important for achieving sustainable development. Section C proposes a sustainable urbanization goal that could be considered for inclusion in the 'Post-2015 UN Development Agenda' as part of the post-Rio+20 'Sustainable Development Goals', both of which are currently under discussion by the international community.

B. Factors Shaping Twenty-first Century Cities

The main factors shaping twenty-first century cities and towns include: firstly, the demographic challenges of rapid urbanization, declining urban population in some parts of the world, ageing and increasing multicultural composition; secondly, the environmental challenges of climate change and cities' excessive dependence on fossil fuel; thirdly, the economic challenges of uncertain future growth that the current global financial crisis has engendered, as well as increasing informality in urban activities; fourthly, increasing spatial challenges, such as socio-spatial fragmentation, urban sprawl, unplanned peri-urbanization and the increasing geographical size of cities; fifthly, social factors, such as increasing urban poverty, inequality and exclusion; and finally, institutional factors related to governance and the changing role of local government.

The table below presents, in more detail, the trends and factors shaping twenty-first century cities and towns that the 'Post-2015 UN Development Agenda' and the UN 'Sustainable Development Goals' must seriously consider.

FACTORS SHAPING 21ST CENTURY CITIES

1. Demographic factors

- Cities are now the dominant habitat of humanity, with more than 50% of the world's population now urban and expected to rise to 60% by 2030
- Rapid urbanization is concentrated in developing countries, with 90% of the world's urban population growth between now and 2030 predicted to be in developing countries, mostly Africa and Asia
- Internal urban population growth is now more important than rural-urban migration, in terms of contribution to rapid urbanization
- Most future urban growth will be in towns of between 100,000 and 250,000 people
- Ageing is an increasingly important urban population trend in developed and transition countries
- Decline of the population of individual cities ('shrinking cities') is increasingly evident in some developed and transition countries
- Young people, or the youth, now dominate the urban population of developing countries

2. Environmental factors

- Cities contribute significantly to climate change, i.e. up to 70% of greenhouse gas emissions, mostly because of the concentration in them of industrial production and construction activities
- The impacts of climate change and natural disasters (of rising intensity) on cities are increasing, i.e., a fourfold increase in natural disasters since 1975, with cities and their inhabitants becoming more vulnerable to the effects of climate change
- Affordable fossil fuel (oil) at stable prices during much of the twentieth century (up to the 1970s) encouraged car use and, alongside other socio-economic factors, urban sprawl
- Access to clean water, sanitation and waste management continues to be poor in developing countries: fewer than 35% of the cities in developing countries have their waste water treated and, worldwide, 2.5 billion and 1.2 billion people lack safe sanitation and access to clean water respectively

3. Economic factors

- The global economy has been relatively weak since the beginning of the present financial crisis in 2008
- But many developing countries are witnessing high economic growth (over 7%) since 2010, thus improving the ability of those countries to attract investment in adequate urban basic services and housing for the poor
- Unemployment has been increasing all over the world (6.2% or 205 million people were unemployed in 2010)
- Youth unemployment is 2 to 3 times higher than adult unemployment globally
- Cities are increasingly becoming dominant in economic terms, and they now account for 70% of the world's GDP (55% in low-income countries, 73% in middle-income countries, and 85% in high-income economies)
- Energy price volatility and increasing demand for petroleum are posing challenges for national and urban economies, especially in developing countries
- The informal economy has been expanding in both developing and developed countries, encompassing in the former areas such as land and housing, transport, retailing and manufacturing

4. Spatial factors

- Most urban dwellers (62%) presently live, and will in the foreseeable future continue to live, in small and medium-size urban settlements of less than 1 million people
- Rapid urbanization in developing countries has resulted in uncontrolled peri-urbanization, most of it informal and in the context of weak urban planning systems
- Urban densities are generally declining in developed countries, mainly as a result of affordable fossil fuel use and car dependency, as well as preference for suburban socio-economic lifestyles, often with negative impacts on urban-rural environments and disadvantaging those without both private vehicles and access to public transport
- Urban planning and design in both developed and developing countries has followed the modernistic model, producing sprawling mega cities, hypercities and large metropolitan regions and urban corridors that are resource (especially energy) inefficient, segregated, less inclusive, and economically less competitive

5. Social factors

- Urban poverty is increasing globally (urbanization of poverty) and inequality is rising
- In developing countries, urban poverty and inequality are manifested in slums, accommodating close to 1 billion people and where levels of vulnerability are increasing,

especially among women and children

- Social exclusion, residential segregation and persistent pockets of poverty are now common in many developed country cities
- Urban crime rates are increasing in many parts of the world, which might be, amongst other factors, a manifestation of social inequalities that need to be dealt with through policies of inclusion
- The numbers of refugees (11-12 million in 2011) and internally displaced persons (26 million in 2008) have been increasing globally during the last two decades

6. Local governance factors

- Rapid urbanization and urban sprawl have led to the emergence of large metropolitan regions in many parts of the world, for which a more adequate governance model is required
- The urban political system has been expanding from 'government' to 'governance', which in developed countries represents a response to the growing complexity of governing in a globalizing and multi-level context and the need to involve a range of non-state actors in the process of governing
- The promotion, mainly by multi-lateral institutions, of the concept of governance in developing countries as a policy measure, along with decentralization and democratization, is increasingly influencing the ways in which cities are developed
- The increasingly wider economic role of urban centres and their governments has come adrift from their geographically-bounded administrative roles, thus encouraging re-scaling to the city-region level and introduction of multi-level and collaborative governance
- During the last few decades there has been a growing unwillingness on the part of many communities to passively accept the planning decisions of politicians and technocrats that impact on their living environments
- In many cities difficulties in 'delivering consensus' are now emerging due to increasing societal divisions, partly resulting from international migration and the growth of ethnic minority groups, as well as growing income and employment inequalities that sometimes intersect with ethnicity and identity

C. Proposed Sustainable Development Goal: 'Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements'

It is proposed that a goal on 'Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements' be included in the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda', as part of 'Sustainable Development Goals'. The overall goal and related targets below are proposed as a starting point for discussion.

Overall Goal

To promote cities that are environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive, economically productive and resilient.

Targets

National Urban Policies

By 2030, increase to 50% the number of countries adopting and implementing inclusive national urban policies to coordinate ministerial and sectoral efforts at different levels of

government for sustainable urban development, territorial cohesion and urban-rural linkages.

Urban Sprawl

By 2030, halve the rate of increase of global urban land cover.

Public Space

By 2030, increase by half the number of cities engaging in place-based, gender-responsive urban design, land use and building regulations to increase public space to 40% of urban land area.

Housing & Slums

By 2030, halve the proportion of people living in slums at the city level as part of incrementally achieving the right to adequate housing without resorting to forced evictions.

Citizen Participation

By 2030, increase the proportion of urban residents voting in local elections to 60% or more and increase the proportion of towns and cities using participatory approaches in public affairs.

Urban Safety

By 2030, halve the rate of urban violent crime.

Urban Job Creation

By 2030, increase by 50% the number of cities adopting and implementing specific and inclusive policies to improve the lives of urban dwellers through urban job creation focused particularly on youth and women.

Urban Mobility

By 2030, increase by 30% the percentage of urban residents with direct access to non-motorized transport infrastructure or living within 500 meters of mass transit options that provide access to places of employment and services in order to reduce by half the average time and expenditure of urban dwellers in commuting to workplaces.

Urban Energy

By 2030, increase by 30% the share of renewable energy sources in cities, increase by 40% the share of municipal waste that is recycled, ensure sustainable energy access for all and improve energy efficiency in all public buildings by 50% and all residential buildings by 20%.

Urban Water and Sanitation

By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe drinking water supply and halve the proportion of untreated waste water and unmanaged solid waste in cities.

Urban Resilience

By 2030, increase to 20% the number of cities adopting and implementing policies and plans that integrate comprehensive and measures to strengthen resilience.

ANNEX

Background Notes to Proposed Sustainable Development Goal

- The above proposal follows on the recognition of the importance of sustainable urbanization in the Rio+20 outcome text *The Future We Want*, paragraphs 134-137.
- It also builds on MDG Target 7D, which aimed to 'achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020.'
- The new GA Resolution A/C.2/67/L.22 '[e]ncourages giving appropriate consideration to sustainable urbanization in the elaboration of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.'

Methodological Notes on the Proposed Sustainable Development Goal

- Before the end of 2013, and in consultation with regional and local authorities and relevant civil society organizations, a methodology of universal benchmarking will be established for this SDG that accommodates differential interpretations of targets along regional and/or national lines. Baseline figures remain to be specified.
- The targets as recommended in this SDG represent a mixture of process and outcome. Policies, for example, will indicate early commitment whereas outcomes will measure the impact that those policies yield.
- The relative scales of cities and human settlements vary widely. For example, in 2000 there were 3,646 cities in the world with populations of 100,000 or more. Though sustainability goals are universally applicable, certain targets may be more relevant for particular subsets of cities.
- A slum is defined at the household scale, as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who are deprived of one or more of the following: (1) durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions; (2) sufficient living space, which means not more than three people sharing the same room; (3) easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price; (4) access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people; and (5) security of tenure that prevents forced evictions.
- Gender equity must serve as a guiding principle in all targets. At a minimum, baseline and subsequent progress measurements should disaggregate data by gender wherever possible to monitor whether the targets are being reached across segments of society.
- For all targets cities will have to establish specific policies and plans, which will require inclusive priority setting with the consultation and participation of a broad group of stakeholders.