The Economic and Social Council

Promoting sustainable urbanization

MODEL UNITED NATIONS
THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THE HAGUE

Albane Marande
Jasmine Hull

Forum: The Economic and Social Council

Issue: Promoting sustainable urbanization

Student Officer: Albane Marande and Jasmine Hull

Position: President and Deputy President

Introduction

In 2011, the world population reached the seven billion mark, 12 years after the six billion mark. It took 123 years to double the world's population from one to two billion but only 33 years to cross the three-billion threshold. Although demographic growth has been slowing down this still has made a major shift in both the pace and scale of global demographics. An important facet of this shift was when more than half of the global population was living in cities and towns, thus making urban centres the dominant habitat for mankind. We can only imagine the implications it brought for the current and future dynamics of human development.

This change made the process of urbanization to be among the most significant global trends of the twenty-first century. Cities and urban place 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 norms, culture and aesthetics. Urbanization is thus providing the setting, the underlying base, and also the momentum for global change.

Interestingly, only 60 years ago or so, the number of people living in urban centres was slightly higher in the developed nations (58.5 per cent) compared to developing countries. By 1970, the proportion of people living in urban and rural areas was virtually equal at around 630 million. Today, of every 10 urban residents in the world more than seven are found in developing countries, which are also hosts to an overwhelming proportion of mankind. Beneath the above numbers are questions of needs, demands and capacities to deliver for this large world population whose life base is fundamentally changing. Not only do new cities have to be built and managed differently, but a whole set of relations and ways of thinking will have to be developed.

Definition of Key Terms

Squatter Settlements

Squatter settlements are any collection of buildings where the people have no legal rights to the land they are built upon. The people are living there illegally and do not own the land. They provide housing for many of the world's poorest people and offer basic shelter. They are often constructed with poor material such as plastic sheeting, corrugated metal, wood and cardboard. Squatter settlements are found in various locations, but are usually built on the edges of cities in the world's poorest countries or LEDC. Many of the people who live in squatter settlements work in the informal sector of the economy.

Urbanizations

Urbanization may be defined as the movement of population from rural to urban areas, the growth of cities in number and size and the increase of the share of urban population in total population. Such a definition should not overlook the fact that urbanization entails at the same time a transformation in the structure of the economy and proceeds in parallel with a certain change in human behaviour.

Sustainable Urbanization

Sustainability adds new dimensions to urbanization. Conversely, urbanization depending upon its pace, nature and patterns, may create numerous problems or opportunities that will need special treatment. Therefore, sustainable urbanization is the maximization of economic efficiency in the use of resources including air, water and soil, maintaining natural resources stocks at or above their present level, ensuring social equity in the distribution of development benefits and costs, and avoidance of unnecessary foreclosure of future development options.

General Overview

Challenges for Sustainable Urbanization

The rapid urbanization presents complex challenges. Cities have a central role in promoting economically and socially sustainable development and in contributing to the eradication of poverty, within the context of the post-2015 development agenda. Some key

problems that come with urbanization would be high population density, inadequate infrastructures, lack of affordable housing, flooding, creation of slum, congestion and crime.

Urban Informality

Many of the significant urban transformations of the new century are taking place in the developing world. In particular, informality, once associated with poor squatter settlements, is now seen as a generalized mode of metropolitan urbanization. Since 1985, urban scholars such as John Turner, have made a distinction between dangerous-illegal activities and "illegal" activities that people do in order to survive and get along each day. The latter type is called "informal". Since about 1995, urban scholar have gone one step further: they have documented how urban elites manage the boundary between activities that are considered formal versus informal- often for the benefit of upper classes.

The growth of urban population has more than proportionately involved rural migration to informal settlements in and around cities, known more commonly as "slums". Worldwide, at least 860 million people are now living in slums, and the number of slum dwellers grew by six million each year from 2000 to 2010. In sub-Saharan Africa, slum populations are growing at 4.5 per cent per annum, a rate which populations double every 15 years. The global expansion of urban slums poses questions for economic research, as well as problems for policymakers. On the map below we notice that the countries with the biggest slums are mostly less economically developed countries.
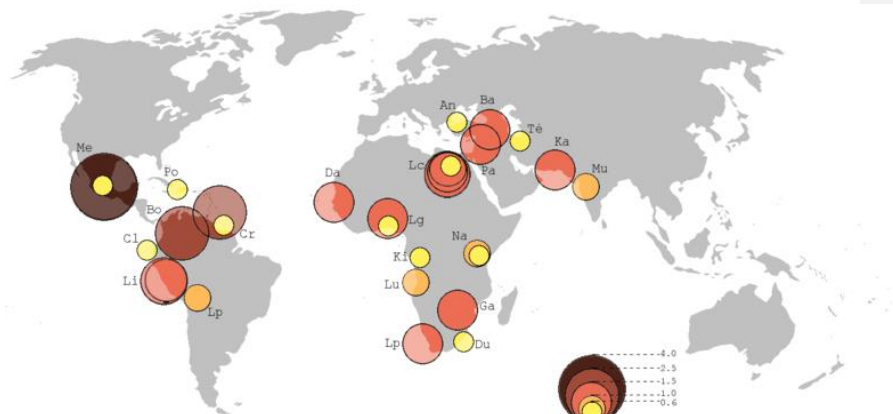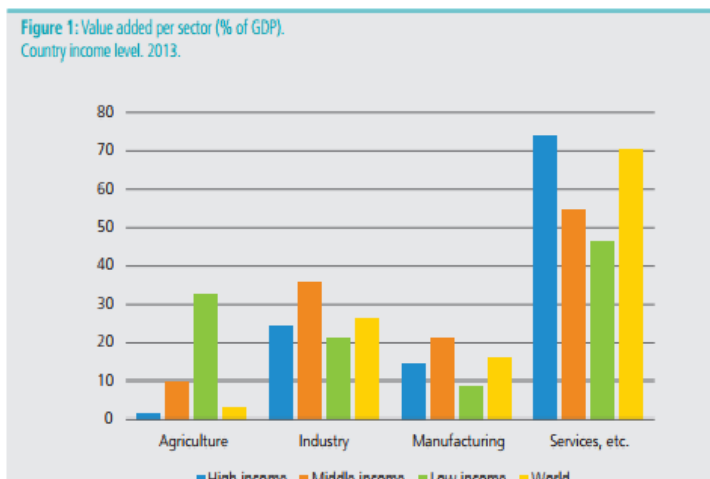

"Mega Slums Map", Munro Ferguson, 3/23/2009, http://cominganarchy.com/2009/03/23/mega-slums-map/

Economic Challenges

Despite the financial strains experienced around the world from the effects of the global economic crises, the overall contribution of cities as engines of economic growth and socio-economic development is evident, as they account for at least 80 per cent of the world's Gross Domestic Product. Employment creation is a top priority for cities, as employment is the key to unlocking the necessary resources to generate economic and social development and enhance environmental sustainability.

All countries now depend heavily on the productivity of urban economic activities for economic growth, with dome 75 per cent of future GDP growth now expected to come from cities and towns. Even after the global financial crisis in 2008, urban growth continued an even faster pace. This suggests that urbanization rates are not correlated with business cycles but are part of a longer term pattern. Within these global patterns, however, there are important regional differences, with the emergence of Northeast Asia now accounting for 24 per cent of global GDP and 35 per cent of global manufacturing. These new developments have determined and been affected by a new economic geography which includes megacity regions, subnational patterns of cities, and economic growth corridors. New patterns of production affect the paths of national development, not just urbanization, and also determine both their aggregate levels of output and the distribution of income within and across countries. Achieving goals in these areas depends on whether sufficient incomes and public revenue are available in cities. Both incomes and public revenue in turn depend on two crucial factors: employment and productivity.

Figure 1: Value added per sector (% of GDP). Country income level. 2013.

"Value added per sector", 2013, https://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Urban%20Economy%20Paper.pdf

Socio-spatial Challenges

Socio-spatial change, the drivers of which often lie outside the control of government, has primarily led to fragmentation, separation and specialization of functions and land use within cities. This has resulted in rising inequalities between rural and urban communities which poses significant challenges to sustainability through impeding efforts in poverty eradication and often intensifying non-inclusive economies growth and disparities in access to health, education and other social services.

The socio-spatial perspective in urbanism research addresses how built infrastructures and society interact. It assumes that social space operates as both a product and a producer of changes in the urban environment. Urban structure has an impact on social progresses, and this needs to be addressed in strategic urban planning.

Design features of urban infrastructures influence citizens' perception of the risk that this infrastructure is at, as well as the general perception of criticality of that infrastructure. Urbanisation studies strongly argue that differences between actual and perceived security are not influenced by the design of built environment, but that they mainly are mass media constructs. The perception of insecurity in cities depends *upon the sustainable amount and constant flow of information that urban residents receive from many sources*. (United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT): Enhancing urban safety and security. London: Earthscan, 2007, 19).

Many examples of community-enhancing constructions represent an "elitism of architectural choice" (Gottdiener, M. Hutchison) that may in the end increase societal gaps and perceptions of fear, as well as actual insecurity.

Socio-spatial challenges should not be underestimated because it causes inequalities which poses significant challenges to sustainability.

Major Parties Involved

African Union

Many African nations have struggled in recent years with the growth of slums and persistent poverty. The African Union aims to intensify international cooperation, within the

framework of the UN, to work towards common goals such as raising the living standards of African people and promoting sustainable development in economic, social and cultural matters.

Brazil

In Rio de Janeiro, over 1 million people live in favelas (slums). Urbanisation is confined by mountains, and many favelas are built on dangerously steep hills as it is the only available land within the city limits. Some favelas have running water and electricity, but there are still problems with overcrowding and disease. Many people move to these places from rural areas, looking for work; there are high levels of unemployment and many people are in the informal sector.

To solve this, local authorities have set up self-help schemes. Residents of the favelas are given low-interest loans to buy safer building materials such as bricks and concrete, and given tools and training, so that they may construct safer homes. The government does not have to pay for labour as the people living in these areas do the building work themselves. Improved transport links to the city centre are also helping the people living in favelas to gain better paid jobs. More rural investment creating job opportunities could prevent more people migrating to the favelas, so the overcrowding will not get worse.

In Curitiba, another Brazilian city, good urban planning has lead to sustainable growth. Green spaces along rivers have been protected and these act as a floodplain preventing buildings experiencing flooding. Urban growth is confined to key transport routes. This decreases urban sprawl and ensures that everyone has access to public transport into the city centre: nobody lives more than 400 metres from a bus stop, and triple section bendy buses allow the system to carry 2 million passengers every day. In poorer neighbourhoods it can be difficult for waste to be collected, so to keep these areas clean people can take their waste to centres and exchange it for bus tickets or food.

India

Many parts of Asia have experienced extreme population growth, particularly India and China. The population of Bangalore increased from 4.3 million in 2001 to over 8 million in 2011. Rural migration has resulted in urban expansion, a lack of infrastructure, housing, and open spaces. In just one year, from 2002 to 2003, the percentage of land area which

was parks and open spaces decreased by over a quarter. Good urban planning could ensure that public transport, safe housing, and open spaces are available for an even larger population in many cities.

In the early 1990s, India undertook structural reforms that attracted foreign investment, unlocked entrepreneurial flair and lifted millions into a burgeoning middle class. Yet while economy has been transformed, many social problems linger on. The new government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a clear mandate for change. Its objective being: economic growth for the benefit of all. Indi may already be the world's third-largest economy on purchasing power parity, but it ranks only 60th out of 148 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index, indicating that there is greater potential waiting to be unlocked. India faces several key challenges such as: education and skills (two thirds of Indian employers report that they struggle to find workers with the right skills), urbanization (it is estimated that by 2050 as many as 900 million people will be living in urban centres. Meeting their needs while safeguarding the environment will require innovative models of urban development), Health (according to a study by the Forum in collaboration with Harvard, India stands to lose $6.15 trillion due to non-communicable diseases and mental disorders by 2030), sanitation, gender, water scarcity and transparency are other challenges to face.

Nigeria

Nigeria has experienced rapid population growth. In order to promote balanced development of cities and towns across the country, in 1996 there was an increase to 36 states and 774 Local Government Councils to establish more urban centres. Universities and colleges were also created in most state capitals. These measures tried to prevent an influx of people into the largest cities of Nigeria which would worsen overcrowding. In July 2003 the Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban development was created, with goals including pursuing programmes of slum upgrading in urban centres, bridging the urban-rural divide, and building capacities for urban development and management.

Between 1990 and 2004, 7 million people migrated into Lagos, increasing the population from 7.74 million to 15 million. A lack of social services and housing development projects, alongside population growth, has resulted in the construction of more slum communities. Mixed-income housing built in the urban areas of Lagos would help people with lower incomes get a better quality of life and lessen inequality.

UN-HABITAT

A United Nations programme which focuses on promoting the development of sustainable urban areas and providing all people with adequate shelter. According to their website, they aim to tackle 'lack of proper housing and growth of slums, inadequate and out-dated infrastructure, escalating poverty and unemployment, safety and crime problems, pollution and health issues, as well as poorly managed natural or man-made disasters and other catastrophes due to the effects of climate change' ('UN-Habitat at a glance'). By offering expertise and cooperating with both governments and the private sector, as well as doing research, it is able to achieve this.

The World Urban Campaign (WUC)

Coordinated by UN-Habitat, the WUC is a platform with 180 partners which spreads awareness of sustainable and inclusive urban development and the Urban Agenda in order to influence policy making.

World Bank

The World Bank provides financial and technical assistance to developing countries to end extreme poverty and support the development of infrastructure. They believe in environmentally sustainable economic growth, achieved by providing low-interest loans and grants in combination with their knowledge and expertise.

Timeline of Key Events

Timeline of events in reverse chronological order leading up to present day.

Date	Description of Event
17-20th October 2016	Habitat III Conference held in Quito, Ecuador.
September 2015	Sustainable Development Goals adopted, including goal 11: to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
	Global population reaches 7 billion.

2011

9th September 1999   African Union Established.

1996   Habitat II Conference held in Istanbul.

1978   UN General Assembly creates mandate for UN-Habitat.

31st May 1976   Habitat I Conference held.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Sustainable Development has been the subject of many debates in the framework of the United Nations. For over 15 years this has been a recurring topic which chose its importance. The United Nations involvement in this matter has been grand, and many resolutions, treaties and events have been decided. We can therefore state some important resolutions, treaties and events:

- 17 sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development officially came into force, 1 January 2016

- Adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, September 2015

- High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, 2010

- United Nations Task team created to support preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda, September 2011

- Declaration on the Critical Economic Situation in Africa, 3 December 1984 **(A/RES/39/29)**

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The Sustainable Development Goals and before them the Millennium Goals have laid out guidelines for what nations, with the help of relevant organisations like the UNDP, UN-Habitat and World Bank, should be aiming to achieve by 2030. Goal 11 includes to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.

Countries such as Brazil have made efforts to upgrade slums, as is stated in goal 11. When slums are upgraded, residents are generally not forced to leave even if they are living on the land illegally. Houses are rebuilt out of safer materials and supplied with basic services such as water and electricity. Better sanitation stops the spread of disease. Transport into city centres is made easier, so people will be able to find better paid work. People start paying for water and electricity, or have to pay back loans for building materials, however the increased job opportunities generally help people to escape poverty despite these new costs.

By promoting economic growth in many regions of a country, including in rural areas, Nigeria attempted to prevent an influx of people into urban areas looking for work. This was not entirely successful, as the population of cities such as Lagos still increased rapidly resulting in slums and overcrowding.

Planning ahead for population growth by building infrastructure with a large capacity and affordable housing, as well as restricting urban sprawl in order to preserve open spaces, worked well for cities such as Curitiba.

Possible Solutions

Good urban planning making use of the expertise of relevant organisations, which increases the amount of affordable but safe housing available, is needed in order to combat the growth of slums in developing countries.

Urban planning and management should go beyond urban boundaries to improve rural-urban connectivity. It could be through investments in better infrastructure for transportation and communication, developing supply chains to create market opportunities.

Effective governance, policy-making and planning mechanisms are requires to effectively manage rapid urban growth. For example: a multi-sectoral planning and integrated

management approach could be adopted to engage multiple levels of governance and all relevant stake holders.

Culture is very important when it comes to sustainable urban development and management. Cultural heritage, industries, arts and crafts, sustainable cultural tourism, culture-led urban revitalization and cultural infrastructure can serve as strategic tools for poverty alleviation, revenue generation and inclusive economic development. Furthermore, shared urban public spaces where creativity creates social engagement, inclusion and security needs to be promoted.

ECOSOC has also to create opportunities for the wide range of stakeholders dealing with sustainable urbanization to exchange knowledge, find solutions and launch initiatives.

Bibliography

Janet E. Nichol. *Sustainable Urbanization.* Taylor & Francis. 2013. http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Think%20Pieces/18_urbanization.pdf

Keles, Rusen. *Sustainably urbanization and its policy implications: the case of Turkey, http://ressources.ciheam.org/om/pdf/a44/02001592.pdf*

UrbanPolcy.net, http://urbanpolicy.net/urban-informality/

Journal of Economic Perspectives- Volume27, Number 4- Fall 2013- Pages 187-210 The Economic Slums in the Developing World. http://hci.stanford.edu/courses/cs379l/2014/Urban-Slums.pdf

Policy Challenges. Challenges in Economic and Financial Policy Formulation. May 2014. https://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Urban%20Economy%20Paper.pdf

Sociospatial perspective- Securipedia. Sociospatial perspective, http://securipedia.eu/mediawiki/index.php/Sociospatial_perspective

United Nation Meetings: The Economic And Social Council. Chronology of International Events and Documents, 1947. http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/integration/pdf/ecosoc_vp_summary.pdf

"UN-Habitat at a glance". UN-Habitat, https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-at-a-glance/. Accessed 2 Jul 2017.

"About". World Urban Campaign, www.worldurbancampaign.org/about. Accessed 2 Jul 2017.

"GCSE Urban Environments", http://www.coolgeography.co.uk/GCSE/AQA/Changing%20Urban/Shanties/SquatterSettlementsCharacteristics.htm

Mehta, Viraj. "India's top 7 challenges, from skills to water scarcity". *World Economic Forum*, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/11/seven-key-priorities-indias-future/

Appendices

> **Commented [A1]:** These solutions are good but are simply being listed which makes them less clear to the reader.

The Sustainable Development Goal 11 includes to:

- ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

- enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

- reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

- substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

- support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials

Investment from the World Bank and more economically developed countries is supporting sustainable urbanisation, however problems still exist.