A Vision for a Sustainable Urban Future: Policy, Information and Governance

6

Managing urban growth has become one of the most important challenges of the 21st century.[1]

Urbanization offers significant opportunities to reduce poverty and gender inequality, as well as to promote sustainable development. Yet, without effective approaches in preparation for the massive increase in the number of poor people, slums will multiply and living conditions will continue to deteriorate. If cities persist in the uncontrolled expansion of urban perimeters, indiscriminate use of resources and unfettered consumption, without regard to ecological damage, the environmental problems associated with cities will continue to worsen.

How can cities avoid calamity and make the most of their opportunities? Increasingly, it is hoped that *improved urban governance* will be the answer.

The term "urban governance", formerly equated with urban management, has come to be understood as both government responsibility and civic engagement.[2] Generally, it refers to the processes by which local urban governments—in partnership with other public agencies and different segments of civil society—respond effectively to local needs in a participatory, transparent and accountable manner.

Good governance will indeed be essential in our urban future; however, its concerns and planning horizons must extend beyond *current* needs. In many developing nations, present urban problems are only the beginning. As globalization continues, massive future urban growth is both inevitable and necessary, but the way it grows will make all the difference. Cities need a longer-term strategy for expected change.

This Report has repeatedly made the point that effective responses to the urban challenge must also add a spatial dimension to this longer-term outlook. Therefore, integrating social and environmental concerns for urban growth within a broader vision of time and space is critical for sustainability.

Several processes will affect the exercise of urban governance. All accentuate the responsibility of local governments, traditionally the weakest link in the public sector.[3]

First, the increasingly globalized nature of economic relations is shifting some trade and production, and thus economic growth, away from the largest cities.

◀ *This street in Beirut, Lebanon, overlooking the Mediterranean offers commerce, recreation and, on this day, moments of late afternoon serenity.*
© Paolo Pellegrin/Magnum Photos

Enterprising local governments have the option to build on their comparative and locational advantages and thus help local firms to attract foreign direct investment to their cities.

Second, national governments are devolving some of their powers and revenue-raising authority to local governments in most developing countries. This opens up new opportunities for local governments to take a more active role in social and economic development.

Third, closer attention to human rights and the rise of civil society, along with movements towards democratization and political pluralism, have also given local-level institutions more responsibility in many countries.[4] This trend toward democratization helps to strengthen urban governance by increasing popular participation and making local administration more accountable.

Finally, these trends towards localization and decentralization become more important because half of all urban demographic growth is occurring in smaller localities. These have the advantage of flexibility in making decisions on critical issues, such as land use, infrastructure and services, and are more amenable to popular participation and political oversight. On the other hand, they tend to be under-resourced and under-financed. They also lack critical information and the technical capability to use it.

The scale of the challenge arising from these converging trends is clear: Much needs to be done in order to turn urbanization's potential into reality. Doing so calls for a broader vision. Smaller localities particularly need help. These concerns will be the subject of the next section.

What Can We Do?

International organizations, including UNFPA and UN-Habitat, can do at least three things to help national and local governments, as well as civil society movements, to promote a better future for cities and their residents in the developing world.

First, they can help to bring about necessary changes in policy outlook by influencing planners and policymakers in developing countries to accept urban growth as inevitable and to adopt more proactive and creative approaches. These approaches should build on, rather than discourage, the efforts of poor individuals and groups to gain more secure, healthy and gainful homes and livelihoods in urban centres.

Second, they can help indicate a better way to reduce rates of urban growth, thereby giving policymakers more leeway to tackle urban problems. The major component of this

◀ *A Buddhist monk uses an ATM cash machine in Chiang Mai, Thailand.*
© Martin Roemers/Panos Pictures

growth in today's developing countries—natural increase—can best be addressed through poverty reduction, promotion of women's rights and better reproductive health services.

Third, international organizations can help policymakers and the different segments of civil society make better decisions regarding the urban future by encouraging them to generate and use solid sociodemographic information.

A Vision for the Urban Future

Dealing effectively with expected urban growth will require an open mind. The evidence overwhelmingly points to the need for policymakers at all levels in developing countries to accept urbanization as a potential ally in development efforts. Evidence-based policy dialogue is needed to help convince them that urbanization is not only inevitable, but that it can be a positive force. Key arguments include the following:

Cities have important advantages:
- Although urban concentration increases the visibility and political volatility of poverty, it has definite advantages over dispersion. These advantages are economic, social and environmental as well as demographic.

- Economic competition is increasingly globalized; cities are better able to take advantage of globalization's opportunities and to generate jobs and income for a larger number of people.

- Cities are in a better position to provide education and health care—as well as other services and amenities—simply because of their advantages of scale and proximity. Poor governance, and decisions prompted by a negative attitude to urbanization and urban growth, explain why these advantages do not always materialize.

- Urbanization helps to hold back environmental degradation by offering an outlet for rural population growth that would otherwise encroach upon natural habitats and areas of biodiversity. Cities are worse polluters than rural areas, simply because they generate most of a country's economic growth and concentrate its most affluent consumers. But many environmental problems could be minimized with better urban management.

- From a demographic standpoint, urbanization accelerates the decline of fertility by facilitating the exercise of reproductive health rights. In urban areas, new social aspirations, the empowerment of women, changes in gender relations, the improvement of social conditions, higher-quality reproductive health services and better access to them, all favour rapid fertility reduction.

Getting policies right in curbing urban growth:
- Most urban growth is occurring in small and medium-sized cities. This trend will continue into the foreseeable future. As noted above, governance issues in these cities are critical. Small and medium-sized cities have greater flexibility in dealing with rapid growth but fewer resources. More emphasis thus needs to be placed on helping these cities grow sustainably.

- The primary component of urban growth is usually not migration but natural increase in the cities themselves. The most effective way to decrease rates of urban growth is to reduce unwanted fertility in both urban and rural areas. Poverty, coupled with gender discrimination and sociocultural constraints, shapes the fertility preferences of the urban poor and limits their access to quality reproductive health services.

- Neither history nor recent experience gives any support to the notion that urban migration can be stopped or even significantly slowed. Opposing migration and refusing to help the urban poor for fear of attracting additional migrants merely increases poverty and environmental degradation.

- A large proportion of urban growth, whether from migration or natural increase, is made up of the poor. But poor people have both a right to be in the city and an important contribution to make. This has to be a clear point of reference for urban policymakers.

- It is critical to support the individual and collective efforts of low-income residents to secure better homes and livelihoods in urban areas, and to give them the opportunity to participate in policy processes, as well as to negotiate solutions to their problems.

Poverty, sustainability and land use:
- Many cities could reduce social problems by planning ahead for the needs of the poor. In particular, poor people need serviced land to build and improve their own housing. In this, greater attention must be given to securing the property rights of women. Having a secure home and a legal address is essential for people to tap into what the city has to offer. The most effective way to achieve this is to provide land and services for the poor *before the fact*. This requires learning to live with inevitable growth and planning for it.

- Planning for the land needs of the poor is only one aspect of the broader issue of land use, which will become more urgent as the urban population grows. The aim should be to minimize the urban footprint by regulating and orienting expansion before it happens.

- The interactions between urban growth and sustainability will be particularly critical for humankind's future. Cities influence global environmental change and will be increasingly affected by it. This calls for a proactive approach, aimed at preventing environmental degradation and reducing the environmental vulnerability of the poor. It is particularly critical in developing countries, whose urban population will soon double, and in low-elevation coastal zones.[5]

The critical importance of a proactive approach:
- Given the prospects of urban growth, only proactive approaches to inevitable urban growth are likely to be effective. Minimizing the negative and enhancing the positive in urbanization requires both vision and a permanent concern for poverty reduction, gender equality and equity and environmental sustainability. It also requires good information and analysis, as the last section of this chapter shows.

A Win/Win Approach: Social Development and Urban Growth

This Report has repeatedly described massive urban growth in developing regions as "inevitable". The confluence and inertia of at least two dominant processes—globalization with its many economic and social ramifications, and population growth in rural and urban areas—make urban growth ineluctable during coming decades. This is particularly the case in Africa and Asia.

However, the speed and size of this inevitable urban growth is not fixed. If policymakers could reduce the intensity of population growth, they would have more time to address existing needs while preparing to deal with future increases in urban population.

Until now, attempts to slow urban growth have focused almost exclusively on reducing rural-urban migration, but they have rarely succeeded. Migrants keep on coming to the cities because they perceive, correctly, that, despite all the drawbacks, urban habitats offer more choices.

Attempts to slow migration fail to address the principal demographic component of urban growth, which is natural increase in urban areas (and, indirectly, in rural areas). As urbanization levels rise, natural increase accounts for a growing proportion of all urban growth. This pattern presents policymakers with an untapped win-win opportunity: reducing the rate of natural increase by improving the social conditions of the poor and advancing women's rights.

Reducing natural increase means improving the social and economic status of the poor, ensuring that quality reproductive health services are affordable and available, and empowering women. Together, these interventions influence individuals' fertility preferences and ability to meet them. Development empowers the exercise of human rights and gives people greater control over their lives.

There is also a clear positive linkage between development, women's empowerment and the ability to plan one's family effectively. Women who can decide for themselves the number and spacing of their children have more freedom to pursue work, education and community activities and to earn an income outside the home.[6]

Reducing the gender gap in education and health, and widening women's opportunities for more varied and

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, UNMET NEEDS AND NATURAL INCREASE

Almost one fifth of married women in developing countries have an unmet need for family planning services. This need is more than twice as high among adolescents as it is in the general population. It remains very high in most low-prevalence regions. High levels of unmet need for effective contraception have led to 70 to 80 million unintended pregnancies each year in developing countries. Addressing these preferences could reduce exposure to reproductive health risks and open possibilities for young women in education, employment and social participation.[1]

Such findings are of considerable relevance for urban growth. What would happen, for instance, if the urban poor were able to achieve their desired fertility levels? An illustrative exercise suggests that it would make a significant difference in the rate of growth of urban populations in developing countries.[2] Demographic and Health Survey data from two countries (Bangladesh, 2004, and Colombia, 2005) were used to estimate what it would mean for fertility if women had perfect access to reproductive health services and achieved their desired fertility size.

Under these conditions, Colombia's projected urban population growth during the 2005-2025 period would be reduced from an average of 1.66 per cent per year to 1.21 per cent per year and its rural population growth would be reduced from -0.20 per cent to -0.83 per cent.

In Bangladesh, the projected urban growth rate would be reduced from 3.38 per cent to 3.05 per cent and its rural growth rate would be lowered even more, from 0.80 per cent to 0.39 per cent, during that period. A lower rate of rural natural increase would evidently contribute to reducing rural-urban migration. This simulation is by no means a perfect representation of reality, but it is nevertheless suggestive.

A rise in age at marriage would also have an impact on natural increase. In most developing countries, childbearing takes place within marriage, making age at marriage a primary indicator of exposure to risk of pregnancy. Overall, among 20-24 year olds, 90 per cent of young women have their first births after marriage. In developing countries, between half and three quarters of all first births to married women are within the first two years of marriage.[3] An increase in the average age at marriage could be expected to have an important effect on fertility decline.

---

better-paid work, would encourage economic growth. Rising incomes, in turn, reduce gender inequality, but they do not break down all barriers to women's participation and development.

Advances in this domain have often been disappointing. Women continue to be disproportionately represented among the poor. Overall, economic liberalization may have had a negative effect on poverty reduction in general and on women in particular.[7] The evolution of the health sector is particularly disappointing.[8] Moreover, a World Bank study found that *services related to reproductive health are more inequitable than any other cluster of services.*[9] The public health sectors designed to protect poor women are failing them in many parts of the developing world.[10] Not surprisingly then, poor urban women's fertility is significantly higher than among non-poor urban women. Moreover, in the household, poverty inhibits the bargaining power of women who may not have the ability to implement their preferences as opposed to their spouses'. This also plays into access to reproductive health information and services.[11]

Policymakers have recognized the advantages of slowing down urban growth, but have not understood the costs and the limitations of efforts to prevent rural-urban migration. Successful urban growth reduction depends not on restricting people's right to migrate, but on empowering people and facilitating the exercise of their basic human rights, including the right to reproductive health.

A Better Information Base for Decision-making[12]

Effective governance and management in the changing social and environmental context of expanding urban areas call for reliable and updated information and analysis. Inputs from the population field can play a key role here.

Sociodemographic information can be used to address two complementary agendas: a) improvement of social policy aimed at poverty reduction; and b) generating a broader vision for the sustainable use of space and the

COMMUNITY SURVEYS AND MAPPING FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Communities of the urban poor and supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are documenting their own living conditions, assets and needs. In the process, they are building knowledge among and about the community and strengthening community groups. They are also building relationships amongst community residents and establishing the community as a formal stakeholder in the city's political and planning processes.[1]

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Starting out as a savings group in 1994, the Solidarity and Urban Poor Federation in Phnom Penh has carried out a number of surveys to gather and analyse community data, including population size and density; occupations and incomes; shelter location and risk; tenancy; availability and method of securing water and power and sanitation.[2]

Nairobi, Kenya

A federation of the urban poor in Kenya, Muungano wa Wanvijiji, works closely with a supporting NGO, Pamoja Trust, to develop their own plans to obtain basic services and security of tenure. In the settlement of Huruma, Pamoja and federation members from the Huruma villages of Kambi Moto, Mahiira, Redeemed, Ghetto, and Gitathuru carried out a community survey and mapping exercise with the Nairobi City Council. Residents of Huruma themselves collected all the data, which included information on population figures and household size; tenancy; income strategies and household expenditures, as well as water and sanitation access and use. The survey and mapping were the first step in the process of regularizing of these settlements.[3]

Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania

The Manzese Ward and UN-Habitat's Safer Cities Programme worked with women to identify what elements of the city rendered it hostile to their safety and free movement. Following a two-day consultation and exploratory walk, a violence map was drawn up, specific recommendations were made to upgrade the entire settlement, from better lighting and pathway access, to monitoring local bars, guest-houses and other small businesses. They also identified the need for local-level recourse for domestic violence and petty crimes.[4]

---

provision of land for the shelter needs of the poor. In the hands of the right people—which in many cases will be groups of the urban poor themselves—good information can help drive both of these agendas.

INFORMATION FOR THE EXERCISE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Poor people lack power to make their voices heard by policymakers. Many are effectively invisible to urban policymakers: Official information systems do not accurately register their existence or where they live, and many municipal governments lack information on irregular areas of settlement. Invisibility means less investment, inaccessible schools and health posts, high absentee rates for doctors and teachers assigned to poor districts and a significant social distance between service providers and their clients.[13]

Sociodemographic data must be spatially disaggregated (organized by district) in order to have any real impact. Sex-disaggregated data, gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting are also critical to meet women's needs and enable all members of society to realize their potential. Gender-based constraints, as well as opportunities, influence access to income and assets, housing, transport and basic services; yet urban planning often ignores this differentiation, reducing the social and economic benefits cities could offer to both men and women.

Public officials need good, clearly presented and disaggregated information to fill gaps in services, especially in fast-growing neighbourhoods. Civil society, the media and the general public need the same information to understand their rights, formulate their demands, keep pressure on planners and politicians and monitor their response.

Participatory approaches are designed to generate community involvement in development and give people some control over different types of development projects. Fortunately, recognition is rising, especially in poor urban areas, that the participation of poor men and women in the decisions that affect them is critical.[14] Women among the urban poor have often been the pioneers of grassroots organizations to address community needs and push for change; these have developed into effective social movements.[15]

Knowledge empowers people and has long-term implications for planning. "Participatory mapping" and budgeting can improve awareness, show communities what public services are available and who uses them, and improve local control.[16] Community surveying and mapping is most important for organizations of the urban poor (see Box 25).

Policymakers also need disaggregated intra-urban information to address the needs of the poor more efficiently. This can help to ensure a balanced and equitable distribution of resources; build indicators for quality control; select whom to include or exclude from a programme; and allow adjustments in the location of agencies, distribution of employees and communication strategies.

Demographic dynamics, such as patterns of growth and age structure, vary widely within cities and may challenge social policy management. Correctly identified, these variations can improve decisions on the allocation of health and education policies, as well as help to develop more general urban intervention initiatives. However, there are several obstacles that require new approaches.

High levels of irregular land occupation limit local governments' ability to obtain sound data. Shantytowns and informal settlements frequently change shape as the result of invasions and evictions. Records are incomplete precisely because of inadequate public services.

Most developing-country planners and managers do not yet have access to fine resolution intra-urban data and indicators, though there has been some progress using geographic information system (GIS) techniques for the mapping of census enumeration areas.

Spatially-disaggregated information allows policymakers to deal with one of the most complex issues of urban administration—choosing where to act: areas with the greatest distortions between supply and demand and those which present cumulative negative social indicators. This kind of analysis is even more necessary as decentralization proceeds.

Urban administrations frequently make decisions on very short notice, without time to develop sophisticated analyses. Institutional instability often undermines informational or research projects.

Every stakeholder recognizes the importance of information for decision-making. Donor countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), however, have not yet given priority to the practical aspects of understanding the actual and potential demand for information, organizing information systems that can respond to these demands and forming groups to manage these information systems.[17]

Social policymakers in countries constrained by lack of resources sometimes perceive rational decision-making based on good information as a luxury. International institutions can help convince them that this is not the case; they can also support the generation of data, tools and analyses to clarify needs and suggest choices. Box 26 provides a good example of this kind of contribution.

The argument that information is essential for improving social services supports a worldwide trend to evidence-based policymaking. However, much effort is still needed to understand the growing complexity of the urban arena in developing countries and the information systems required to support decentralized social policies.

The challenges are considerable. Urban administrations in developing countries frequently make decisions on very short notice, without time to develop sophisticated analyses. Institutional instability often undermines informational or research projects.[18] There are technical problems, such as inconsistencies between the units of analysis used in demographic censuses or surveys and those required by potential users. Technical teams tend to be small, ill-trained and ill-equipped. Better-equipped teams often create information systems for which there is no demand.

Information systems vary a great deal from project to project. There are no common standards, and national and international agencies sometimes fail to exchange resources and information with one another. Donor packages sometimes do not respond to local needs or to specific management problems, which leads to duplication and misuse of information. As a result, long-term impact and project sustainability can be a major problem.

FACING THE CHALLENGES OF DECENTRALIZATION IN HONDURAS

In 1990, facing decentralization, the municipal Government of San Pedro Sula in Honduras requested UNFPA's help in setting up a research and statistics unit. At the time, authorities knew very little about the city's population dynamics except that it was growing quickly.

UNFPA supported training of local staff and helped officials to understand the role of population dynamics in local and regional development. A base map showing land use down to the individual housing unit was prepared and used as basis for a low-cost household census, as well as a detailed survey of population and social indicators. A system for monitoring fertility, infant mortality and reproductive health risks was established. A multi-disciplinary database

was created and shared with a variety of municipal, national and international groups, including the Inter-American Development Bank.

The telecommunications giant AT&T cooperated with the project to expand telephone service to 32 towns and cities. As a *quid pro quo* for using project data, AT&T financed two international HIV/AIDS and reproductive health workers and agreed that all information generated with their support would remain in the public domain.

This type of collaboration enabled the project to improve the quality of its base maps, digitizing "island" maps and eventually creating a single geo-referenced base map for the whole city. The city's own bureaux of land manage-

ment, water management and sanitation used these base maps for their own operations.

The success of the project drew other municipalities facing decentralization to emulate it. The project successfully cooperated with a range of central and local government bodies, the private sector, NGOs, academia, bilateral donors and international agencies. Activities were extended at the local level into HIV/AIDS prevention, as well as other aspects of reproductive health, gender and environment. Most important, information was shared with the local communities, allowing them to participate more actively and with better information in political processes.

In order to perform effectively, social policy managers need access to demographic information systems that not only include data on supply distribution—such as equipment, allocated professionals and existing services—but also enable the comparison of such distribution structures with the needs of local men and women.

Meeting needs stemming from decentralization will also require capacity-building at the local level. Professionals who work on decentralized planning now have to be prepared to analyse demographic phenomena (fertility, mortality, migration, age and sex composition) in spatial terms, using such tools as GIS and satellite imagery. Moreover, they need to be prepared to engage with civil society and to help local groups gain access to information and information systems.

Over the years, UNFPA has consistently supported data gathering. The Fund could further strengthen decentralized planning by reinforcing local capacity to generate, analyse and use population data for local development. This training should go beyond the mere manipulation of data and involve a technical understanding and capacity

to develop policy proposals regarding major local planning issues, such as land use and territorial planning, housing, transportation and basic social service provision.

PLANNING FOR THE SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF SPACE
The population field can play a key role in drawing attention to the bigger picture of demographic changes over the longer term and in preparing for considerable urban growth in developing countries. Policy steps to help reduce the social and environmental costs of urban expansion include:

• **Orienting future urban expansion.** Using demographic data together with satellite images and other spatial data in a GIS can help orient urban expansion of a given locality or group of localities in more favourable directions. Projections of demographic growth trends, used in conjunction with other data—for example, on elevation, slope, soils, land cover, critical ecosystems and hazard risks—can help policy-makers identify areas in which future settlement

should be promoted or avoided. To be useful in a GIS, census data need to be available at the scale of the smallest spatial unit possible (in many cases, the census tract).

- **Generating early-warning indicators.** Early-warning indicators can be used to alert planners to unexpected urban expansions. Updated information on the broader dynamics of urban expansion and environmental protection needs is critical for responsible urban governance. Precarious and informal settlements need to be identified as they spring up. Aerial photos and satellite images are increasingly used to complement intercensus population estimates.

- **Planning infrastructure and housing policies.** The presence of roads, public transport, power and water supplies helps determine the direction in which cities grow. Their development should be oriented in accordance with environmental and demographic criteria. Information on demographic trends and commuting patterns can help predict increased pressure on housing, as well as on the road and street system.

- **Identifying populations at risk.** Information on the location, gravity and frequency of environmental risks is a basic planning tool for any city. Informal urban settlements face heightened risks from events such as floods, earthquakes and landslides. Health hazards also abound, because of overcrowding and poor infrastructure, but also because settlements grow up in unhealthy places near polluted bodies of water, solid waste landfills or polluting industries. Specific risks depend not only on location, but also on residents' level of information and on the building materials and overall quality of their housing.

- **Planning for parks and walkways.** Urban public parks and walkways are sometimes considered a luxury that cities in poor countries can ill afford, but open spaces contribute to individual well-being and physical fitness. They can help promote equity in important domains of city life (see Box 27). Urban trees have important environmental benefits such as filtering air pollutants, attenuating the

urban heat-island effect and improving water quality. The same GIS tools mentioned above can identify areas for green space preservation, either before they are developed or as part of comprehensive urban renewal.

27 **PUBLIC SPACE: THE GREAT EQUALIZER**[1]

Doubling the urban population of developing countries in a few decades can be an opportunity to imagine new designs and organizational schemes to make cities more humane and more equitable. When elected Mayor of Bogotá in 1998, Enrique Peñalosa acknowledged that income inequality is endemic to market economies. However, he believed that "quality of life equality" could be enhanced by making public interests prevail over private interests in urban areas.

Peñalosa held that a city's transport system is critical to equality. Public transport must take priority over private cars for democracy and the public good to prevail. He considered highways to be monuments to inequality, built with funds diverted from the more important needs of the poor, only to cater to a small minority of the affluent. The city thus rejected a plan for a system of expressways in favour of mass transit, pedestrian access and bicycle paths. A chaotic system of private buses was replaced by a spider-web system in which local buses feed dedicated express lines and move passengers at a rapid pace. Barriers along the streets restored sidewalks to pedestrians, and restrictions removed 40 per cent of cars from the streets during peak hours. Several hundred kilometres of dedicated bicycle paths were also built.

The Mayor observed that income differences are most acutely felt during leisure time: While upper income citizens have access to large homes, gardens and country clubs, lower-income people and their children live in cramped homes and have public spaces as their only leisure option. Believing that quality public pedestrian space at least begins to redress inequality, Peñalosa improved access to green spaces, waterfronts and public walking spaces.

Predictably, these and other equity-generating initiatives spawned powerful opposition. But in the end, Bogotá has shown that much can be done for the promotion of equity through the strategic use of public space. As their urban population doubles, policymakers in developing countries also have a window of opportunity to use public space as the great equalizer. It is the only place where all citizens meet as equals in cities.

Preparing the Urban Transition: A Last Word

The anti-urban policies common in the developing world during the last quarter-century misapprehend both the challenges and the opportunities of urban growth. Urban poverty is unquestionably an important and growing problem in many developing countries. Environmental problems are increasingly clustered in urban sites. Yet to blame cities for poverty and environmental problems is to miss the point. Dispersing or deconcentrating population and economic activities would not bring relief—even if it were possible.

For humankind to benefit from the urban transition, its leaders must first accept it as both inevitable and important for development. They must recognize the right of the poor to what the city has to offer and the city's potential to benefit from what the poor have to bring.

Rather than attempting in vain to prevent urban expansion, planners must objectively examine the available policy options for addressing it and building on its possibilities. Urban improvement and slum upgrading draws a lot of attention from city governments and urban planners. Such action is necessary, but it is not enough: Cities must look urgently to the future.

The projected expansion of the urban population in Asia and Africa, from 1.7 to 3.4 billion over a period of only 30 years, and the reduced level of available resources, stress the need for a more imaginative but pragmatic response. In turn, this will demand a realistic vision for the future, better information at the local and regional level, as well as participatory approaches and negotiated agreements that build on the knowledge and experience of the poor.

Decisions taken today in cities across the developing world will shape not only their own destinies but the social and environmental future of humankind. The approaching urban millennium could make poverty, inequality and environmental degradation more manageable, or it could make them exponentially worse. In this light, a sense of urgency has to permeate efforts to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the urban transition.