



Overcrowding in urban areas will increase in the next 20 years in all areas of the globe.
Photo: UN-Habitat.

HALF OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION LIVES IN URBAN AREAS

- International attention has been increasingly focussed on sustainable development but with half of the world's population now living in urban areas and the other half increasingly dependent upon cities for their economic, social and political progress, it is timely to look more closely at the challenges posed by sustainable urbanization.
- Though the number of people living in urban areas has reached about 3 billion people, there are major differences in the proportion living in urban areas on the different continents. In Latin America, Northern America, Europe and Oceania the proportion of urbanised people has stabilised at about 76%. In Africa and Asia the proportion is still low at 37.9% and 36.7% but they are projected to reach 54.5% and 53.4% respectively by 2030. In fact, between 2000 and 2015, 972 million people will be added to urban areas as compared to only 127 million in rural areas.

- There can be no doubt that people migrate to cities in search of opportunities. Cities are engines of economic and social development in virtually all countries of the world. As countries develop, urban settlements account for an ever-increasing share of national income: they generate 55% of GNP in low income countries, 73% in middle and 85% in high income economies. It is this economic growth, moreover, which provides the basis on which cities can build infrastructure, provide social, health and educational services, and generate income earning opportunities for the urban poor. Conversely, in the absence of a healthy urban economy, it will not be possible to provide these things, certainly not on a sustainable basis.
- There is evidence that the most immediate and fundamental bottlenecks to sustainable urbanisation are not necessarily lack of technology, funding, or international agreements (although these are important) but local planning, management and implementation capacity and sound governance.

- Cities need help in order to realise their crucial contributions to sustainable development and there is strong evidence that poverty, deprivation, and environmental degradation are not necessary consequences of rapid urban growth. Therefore to assist cities to achieve sustainable urbanization, UN-HABITAT offers operational support through specialised global programmes and global campaigns in a number of high priority areas.
- In the experience of UN-HABITAT, local actors, especially local authorities and their partners need help to improve their planning and management capacity. In particular, it is important to help local authorities implement strategies of sustainable urbanization that require new approaches to urban management including participatory land use planning processes, the strengthening of democratic decentralization of governance, and promoting equity within economic growth. These new approaches will have to be tailored carefully to local circumstances — no one model can fit all cities and countries.

For more information contact:

Press & Media Relations
Office of the Executive Director
UN-HABITAT
United Nations Human Settlements Programme
P.O. Box 30030
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: 254-2-623153; Mobile: 254 (0) 733 760332
Fax: 254-2-624060
Website: www.unhabitat.org