



# Population Reports

## Meeting the Urban Challenge

### AN URBAN FUTURE

#### Where will virtually all population growth take place over the next 30 years?

Over the next 30 years virtually all population growth will take place in urban areas of developing countries. The urban population of developing countries is projected to double, from just under 2 billion in 2000 to nearly 4 billion by 2030. In contrast, the urban population of developed countries is projected to increase hardly at all—from 900 million in 2000 to 1 billion in 2030.

#### What is the difference between the terms “urban” and “city”?

The terms “urban” and “city” are often used interchangeably, and there is no international agreement on their definition. Almost all national governments agree that settlements of 20,000 or more people are urban, but some consider smaller settlements to be urban as well, with various cut-off points. Few, however, would consider a small urban center of 1,000 to 2,000 inhabitants to be a city (44). Thus, while the term “urban” can refer to settlements of all population sizes, most people reserve the term “city” for urban centers with large populations.

#### What are the criteria that most governments use to define urban settlements?

Most governments define urban settlements based on one or a combination of criteria, including:

- Population size,
- Population density, and
- Social and economic factors, such as the proportion of the labor force engaged in nonagricultural activities; the administrative or political status of a locality, such as national, provincial, or district capitals; or census designations (44).



E. Gilbert, Courtesy of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation

## Questions & Answers

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Research an article?

Browse the questions and select information with a particular audience in mind—policy makers, journalists, researchers, health providers, project managers, women, men, adolescents, and others.

Find the short answer and then choose to read about more indepth information.

Use the questions for testing, exams, training, classroom preparation, newsletters, and more.



### **Does most of the world's urban population live in big cities or in smaller urban settlements?**

Most of the world's urban population lives in smaller urban settlements, not the largest urban agglomerations. In 2000 about 37% of the world's urban population lived in cities of 1 million or more; 53% lived in urban centers with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants. The UN projects that the largest share of the increase in the urban population through 2015 will be in such smaller urban areas, reflecting both population growth and reclassification of rural areas to urban (131).

### **Which region of the developing world is currently as urbanized as the developed world?**

Latin America is as urbanized as the developed world, with about 75% of the population currently living in urban areas. In developing countries as a whole, 40% of the population now lives in urban areas.

### **Rapid urban population growth reflects which three basic factors? Which of these factors plays a greater role in urban growth?**

Rapid urban population growth reflects these three basic factors:

- 1) Migration from rural areas;
- 2) Natural population increase (births minus deaths) among urban residents; and
- 3) Reclassification of previously rural areas as urban as they become built up and change character.

During the initial phases of urbanization in a country, migration from rural to urban areas tends to play a greater role than natural population increase in urban areas. As a greater share of the total population lives in cities, however, natural population increase within them surpasses migration in importance (63, 158). As natural population increase slows, migration can once again play a dominant role in urban population growth—for example, if economic opportunities in urban areas expand rapidly while those in rural areas do not (15).

### **In general, why do people move from rural to urban areas?**

People leave rural areas and move to urban centers to escape adverse rural conditions (push factors). At the same time, many urban areas attract people from the countryside because they generally offer more opportunity (pull factors).

### **What are some examples of push factors? Of pull factors?**

Factors that push people out of the countryside include the deteriorating quantity and quality of agricultural lands, poor market infrastructures, and lack of supporting institutions, such as sources of credit for small-scale farmers. Factors that pull residents to some urban areas include access to better jobs, education, health care, and higher living standards.

## **THE URBAN POOR**

### **Do most poor people in developing countries live in rural or urban areas?**

Most poor people in developing countries live in rural areas (140). But urban poverty is widespread, too, and it is growing. The World Bank estimates that, worldwide, 30% of poor people live in urban areas. By 2020 the proportion is projected to reach 40%, and by 2035 half of the world's poor people are projected to live in urban areas (96). In 1988 the World Bank estimated conservatively that some 330 million urban poor in the developing world were living on less than US\$1 a day (151). In 2000 the estimate had increased to 495 million (153). In over half of developing countries with data on poverty, as defined by the countries themselves, at least one urban resident in every five lives below the national poverty line (157).

### **Why should income-based poverty statistics, especially urban poverty statistics, be interpreted cautiously?**

The true extent of urban poverty is greater than income-based poverty statistics suggest. Poverty levels estimated on the basis of income alone do not account adequately for the larger numbers of people with such impoverishment as inadequate housing and lack of clean water and sanitation (74, 89, 132). Moreover, urban poverty may be even more debilitating than rural poverty because in urban areas, unlike rural areas, access to virtually all goods and services depends on having a cash income. Furthermore, services that governments usually pro-

vide free in rural areas, such as schooling, usually carry costs for households in urban areas—for example, school fees and expenditures for school uniforms, books, and transportation (3, 104). Urban residents have to buy most of their food, while rural residents grow a substantial portion of their own food, and food prices often are higher in urban areas than in the countryside. Urban households spend 60% to 80% of their income on food (101) and pay up to 30% more for it than rural households (1).

### **What contributes more to urban poverty, unemployment or employment in the informal labor market? Why?**

Most urban poverty results not from unemployment but instead from the lack of well-paying, steady jobs. The unemployment rate itself is relatively low in urban areas of most developing countries (41, 100). For example, in 155 surveyed cities in developing countries, three-quarters had unemployment rates at or below 15% (157). Nevertheless, poverty has risen as fewer people can find steady jobs with adequate wages. As economic conditions worsen, a growing percentage of people shift from employment in the formal economy to work in the informal labor market. In 30 of 40 developing countries surveyed by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1999, employment in the urban informal sector constituted over one-third of total urban employment. Employment in the informal sector is less secure, and incomes are lower than in manufacturing and other formal-sector jobs (2, 28, 56).

### **What types of jobs are in the informal sector?**

Within the informal sector the urban poor work in a variety of jobs—for example, as street vendors and petty traders; as taxi drivers and in other small transport; in personal services such as shoe shining; in security services such as night watchmen or car parking attendants; in janitorial services; and also begging and commercial sex (14, 28, 37, 101).

### **What is security of tenure?**

Security of tenure is the right of legal access to and use of the land and buildings that residents occupy. In developing countries, slum residents usually lack security of tenure. Each year several million urban dwellers are forcibly evicted from their homes (132).

### **Why is it misleading to state that urban residents in developing countries generally enjoy better health than rural dwellers?**

While the health of urban residents in developing countries is generally better than that of rural dwellers, within urban areas, however, the urban poor face many more health risks than the average urban resident. In 17 of 18 countries studied with DHS data, for example, infant mortality was higher in the less developed urban areas than in the more developed urban areas (with level of development indicated by access to piped water) (7). Health conditions for the urban poor are sometimes even worse than they are for the rural poor (7, 161, 163).

### **Why are the urban poor more vulnerable than other urban residents to poor health and environmental hazards?**

The urban poor are more vulnerable to poor health and environmental hazards because they are more likely than others to lack adequate housing, sanitation, and other basic services (107, 132). In each of 32 developing countries with DHS data, poor urban households were less likely than other urban households to have access to basic services, including piped water, a flush toilet, and electricity. Poverty status was defined by household ownership of certain consumer items, such as a refrigerator and television, as well as housing quality, including the number of sleeping rooms (48).

### **Why don't basic services needed for good health reach the urban poor?**

Basic services needed for good health often do not reach the urban poor for several reasons:

- Municipal authorities do not recognize many informal settlements for political and administrative reasons, and thus these areas are not eligible for services. In some cases, slum areas are not classified as urban precisely because they lack services (120).
- The urban poor often settle on land not suitable for housing. Extending infrastructure such as roads, water mains, and sewer lines can be difficult because of rough terrain. Moreover, such neighborhoods often are developed haphazardly, without planning to allow space for infrastructure. In order to lay water or sewer pipes, the

utility authorities often must remove or relocate many houses (120).

- Governments and donor agencies give low priority to providing such services as primary health care, basic education, family planning, water and sanitation, and nutrition, according to an analysis of 17 developing countries around the world (45). The UN and the World Bank agree that, on average, 20% of national budgets in developing countries and 20% of international aid should be allocated to extending these basic services to all people—both urban and rural. In the 17 countries studied, however, the average expenditure on these services was only 12% of total government spending—from 8% in Lebanon to 17% in Nepal. Similarly, in few instances did spending on basic services account for 20% or more of donor assistance (45).

## POLLUTION AND HEALTH

### From what sources are urban water supplies contaminated?

Urban water supplies often are contaminated from a variety of sources, including discharge of untreated industrial wastes, leaching from waste dumps into surface and ground water, inadequate treatment of sewage, and poor solid waste management (9).

### What is the major waterborne malady?

Diarrheal diseases are the major waterborne malady, responsible for 90% of the health problems related to water supply and sanitation (53). An estimated 4 billion cases of diarrheal disease occur every year, causing 3 million to 4 million deaths, mostly among children (82, 144, 148, 152).

### What are some of the major urban air pollutants?

- Suspended particulate matter and ozone are some of the major urban air pollutants. Suspended particulate matter—small particles floating in the air—is generated from natural sources, such as volcanoes and dust storms, as well as from human activities such as vehicle, incinerator, and industrial emissions. Due to their small size, suspended particulate matter tends to float longer in the air than larger particles, which usually settle quickly. Suspended particulate mat-

ter is small enough to be inhaled (57).

- Ozone is a secondary pollutant formed when oxides of nitrogen and unburned volatile organic hydrocarbons, mostly from vehicle exhausts, combine in the atmosphere with oxygen in the presence of sunlight. Ozone is a main component of atmospheric smog (not to be confused with the stratospheric ozone layer, which protects the earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation from the sun) (34, 47).

### Is outdoor air pollution more of a problem in developed or in developing countries?

Outdoor air pollution is usually considered a problem of developed countries, as a result of their high level of industrial activity and vehicle use. More than 70% of deaths from outdoor air pollution occur in the developing world, however, because populations are larger and pollution standards often are less strict than in the more developed world (139).

## IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

### What factors contribute to the environmental impact of urban settlements?

The extent of urban environmental impact increases as population grows as well as per capita demand for resources rises, both from industries and consumers (44, 132). As the populations of cities in developing countries have increased dramatically, so have levels of per capita resource consumption, water and air pollution, and soil degradation and contamination (132). In addition, the number of households has grown even faster than the population itself, reflecting a trend to smaller families and thus a decline in the average number of people per household. Analyzing data from 141 countries, a recent study calculated that the annual growth in the number of households (at 3.1%) was much more rapid than population growth itself (at 1.8%) between 1985 and 2000. More households naturally require more housing units, which increases the amount of land and materials needed for housing construction (70).

### What is an “ecological footprint”?

The ecological footprint represents the land area necessary to sustain consumption and waste disposal of a specific population (22, 99). The concept provides a measure of the impact that a population has on nature. In order to sustain the earth's ecosys-

tem indefinitely, the ecological footprint of humankind should be only about 1.7 hectares of land per capita. At current levels of consumption, however, our ecological footprint averages about 2.3 hectares of land per capita. This level clearly cannot be sustained over the long term because it is about one-third larger than earth's natural capacity (147).

### **Do developing or developed countries have heavier ecological footprints?**

Urban residents in the industrialized world consume much more per capita than urban residents in developing countries consume. Thus most developed-country cities have much heavier ecological footprints. At current consumption levels a typical North American city with a population of 650,000 requires about 30,000 square kilometers of land. In comparison, a similar sized city in India requires about 2,800 square kilometers (137). On average, slum dwellers in New Delhi, India, require only 0.8 hectares (2 acres) of land per capita to maintain their minimal life styles, while Americans in Boston or New York need 8.4 hectares (21 acres) of land per capita to support their consumption levels (147). Just as per capita consumption levels are much greater, the average urban resident in an industrialized country generates four to six times more waste than does the average urban resident in a developing country (132).

## **MAKING URBAN AREAS WORK**

### **What are some of the steps that governments can take to address urban problems better?**

Among other measures, governments can improve urban governance, upgrade slums and provide alternatives to the creation of new slums, curb pollution, and manage waste-disposal better.

### **What is governance?**

Governance is more than government. It includes not only the organization of and relationships between political and administrative institutions but also the relationships among government, private institutions, and civil society (105, 142). The UN defines governance as "the sum of ways through which individuals and institutions, both public and private, plan and manage their common affairs" (137).

### **Who should have direct control over the planning and management of urban areas, national or municipal governments?**

Around the world, a new consensus is emerging that national governments should not retain direct control over the planning and management of urban areas. Instead, national governments should act as enablers, creating legislative and administrative environments in which a wide range of local governments, private-sector firms, and community organizations can deliver infrastructure and services to urban areas (137). For example, national governments can focus on attracting favorable foreign investments, encouraging appropriate technology transfers, undertaking joint public-private initiatives to provide housing and basic services, and setting environmental standards (25).

### **What are the three conditions that must be met for decentralization of power, authority, and responsibility from national to local governments to be effective?**

- First, national and state authorities need to devolve budget authority to the municipal level (51, 110, 136, 156). In most countries the main sources of municipal revenues are local taxes and transfers from central to local governments (137). Officials at higher levels of government often are reluctant to relinquish financial resources to lower levels, however (85). Without this crucial revenue, municipal governments have little ability to operate.
- Second, the administrative capacity of local governments must grow. Local governments often lack the experience of central governments. Local government officials and employees may need training in such areas as accounting, public administration, financial management, public communication, and community relations (140, 156).
- Third, decentralization works best when it is inclusive—that is, when authorities ask about and respond to community needs and interests and when community members participate in decision-making. Community participation helps ensure responsiveness and accountability in public decision-making (137, 140, 141). Community leaders and residents know the problems they face and often can suggest effective solutions.

Governments can help to ensure people's participation through elections and referenda, opinion surveys, and open meetings, and by setting up advisory groups or community oversight committees (85).

### **How can slower population growth encourage economic growth?**

Slower population growth encourages economic growth, provided that governments institute sound social and economic policies (8, 73). Lower fertility in a country opens a "demographic window" of opportunity—a temporary period when a large group of working-age people supports relatively fewer older and younger dependents. This situation frees families and nations to save more and to make the longer-term investments that help lift people out of poverty. In order to reduce poverty, however, development efforts must be directed to helping the poor themselves, not only to stimulating aggregate economic growth (73, 143).

### **What are among the most important ways to improve urban living conditions for the poor?**

Improving housing conditions and providing affordable and adequate basic services, such as water and sanitation, are among the most important ways to improve living conditions. Also, when housing and services are provided efficiently, people can spend less of their incomes on these necessities and thus have more for other essentials (45, 104, 132).

### **What are two of the most important components of policies to avoid slums?**

Two of the most important components of policies to avoid slums are providing both access to land and financing for the poor (137). Governments often need to reform laws and regulations concerning markets for housing, land, and infrastructure. Also, reforming housing finance systems can give the poor more access to credit (154, 155).

### **What is fundamental to the success of a slum upgrading program?**

Fundamental to the success of a slum upgrading program is extending security of land and housing tenure to those who lack it (137, 154). Once people feel secure in their neighborhood, they are more likely to invest in their communities (32, 137).

### **How can donors support better urban governance?**

Addressing urban population growth and problems of urban poverty requires donors to institute a long-term approach that emphasizes institution-building to increase the capacity of urban areas to respond (52). Donor agencies can support better governance and, where government institutions are weak, increase funding to nongovernmental institutions to ensure that low income groups benefit as intended (52, 106). Whenever possible, international donors should work through local partners, both to increase their credibility with the urban poor and because local partners know most about local problems and their potential solutions (52, 103).

### **What are the two steps most needed to prevent the majority of water-related diseases and deaths in urban areas?**

Providing an adequate water supply and improving public sanitation are the two steps most needed to prevent the majority of water-related diseases and deaths in urban areas. For better sanitation, constructing sanitary latrines, building sewers, and treating waste water to biodegrade human wastes will help curb diseases (145). Such simple technologies as hand-pumps and improved latrines have benefited millions of people across the world (150).

### **Which two types of sanitation technologies can help improve sanitation?**

More widespread use of two types of sanitation technologies—on-site and off-site—can help improve sanitation. On-site technologies dispose of wastes where they are created, as with latrines. Off-site technologies dispose of waste centrally, as in conventional sewerage treatment systems (50). Better on-site sanitation can be achieved through greater use of dry nonflush latrines, which can be built cheaply, are easy to operate, and are inexpensive to maintain. In particular, they are suited to areas where water supply is limited and there is enough land to dig new latrines and fill up old ones (50). Off-site technologies tend to have a much higher cost, require skilled labor for construction, and they need constant maintenance.

### **What steps can be implemented to help curb outdoor urban air pollution?**

Reducing the dependence on private vehicles is a

fundamental step that all urban areas can take to help curb outdoor air pollution. Transport systems need to be designed to move people, not vehicles. In response to mounting health and environmental problems, a number of cities have taken steps to reduce air pollution, principally by providing better public transportation systems and reducing traffic (158). Since 1998 Bogota, Colombia, has reduced motor vehicle use by building bicycle paths, restricting automobile use to certain hours in the day, and creating an effective bus system. Such actions have reduced air pollutants by 40% (158). Setting aside more land for parks and green areas also helps curb air pollution and reduce urban temperatures. The “urban heat island” effect occurs when city temperatures run higher than those in suburban and rural areas as a result of the number of buildings and loss of vegetation (49). Urban heat islands accelerate the formation of smog, which damages the natural environment and endangers health. They also increase demand for cooling energy such as fans and air con-

ditioners. Trees and other vegetation act as natural air conditioners, cooling the air while absorbing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen (71). For example, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority in India developed and maintains a nature park to help clean up Mumbai and decrease pollution levels.

### **What is an example of a “low-tech” solution to recycling urban waste that poorer countries can afford?**

In many poor countries unable to afford high-tech solutions, armies of “rag pickers” sort through garbage for items they can resell or recycle. Such an informal system not only provides a public service—one that many municipalities cannot afford—but it also provides employment and income (44). In Mumbai, for instance, an association of 2,000 women collects and recycles wastes from households and municipal dumps around the city.

