

Adapting to an urban future

Fact sheet: *The rise of the urban dweller. Who is he?*

For the first time in history more people live in urban rather than rural areas across the world. The 50/50 mark was passed in 2009 and today over 3.5 billion people live in cities across the world. And this number is rising...fast. By 2030 the United Nations estimate that over 60% of the global population will live in cities, around 4.9 billion people.

Rates of growth are fastest in the developing world. Currently 45% of people in developing countries live in urban areas and this number is set to rise to 66% by 2050. The majority of people in developed countries already live in urban areas having undergone the process of urbanisation in the past.

This rise in urban population will be mainly in Asia and Africa. Asia's urban population is expected to rise by 1.7 billion and Africa's by 0.8 billion. This means that the cities in less developed countries are growing fast and there is increasing concern about the future of these cities as more people arrive. It is not that urbanisation has not occurred in the past but it has never before been of such magnitude.

Rural to urban migration

Rates of growth

Close to 200,000 per day, 1.4 million per week, nearly 70 million a year.

These rates of rural to urban migration have resulted in the dramatic increase of squatter settlements, also known as slums, shanty towns, barrios, favelas, or zopadpattis. These settlements house the migrants and are considered to be transitional settlements.

Today 1 billion squatters: 1 in 6 of the world's population

2030 2 billion squatters: 1 in 4

2050 3 billion squatters: 1 in 3

A slum household is defined by the United Nations as a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking one or more of the following conditions:

- Access to improved water
- Access to improved sanitation
- Sufficient-living area
- Durability of housing
- Security of tenure

They exist outside the official city grid, built without architects or municipal maps, and are in a constant state of transition.

What are the characteristics of slums?

- Located on marginal lands, basically where no-one wants to live; Dharavi (the Mumbai slum made famous by *Slumdog Millionaire*) was originally a mangrove swamp and Estero de San Miguel is balanced on stilts above a polluted river.
- High population densities; in Manila the average family size is 6 and often the family live in one room. In Dharavi it is estimated that up to 1 million people could live in 2km squared.
- Lack of secure housing. Dwellings are haphazard in structure and layout, as they have developed as migrants move into the area. Squatters do not own the land and as a result they have no land security or rights and are therefore vulnerable. Their homes can literally be bulldozed overnight.

- Lack of amenities and infrastructure. Water is often provided by tankers and there are some communal taps, however water can be contaminated mainly because there is no sewage system and waste from communal toilets and the streets seeps into the water supply. Electricity supply is mainly tapped into cables illegally and is very dangerous.
- Poor health; given the conditions described it is hardly surprising that child mortality is high and life expectancy is low, in Dharavi it is 55 years. (This is an improvement on life in many rural areas).
- Low incomes; most work in the service industry in an informal local economy. Officially unemployment is high but realistically people have to earn money to live and do so in the informal sector.
- However economic activity and productivity is often high. Dharavi is known for its complex but efficient recycling industry. Entrepreneurial activity is clearly evident and IT and business graduates are not uncommon among the residents. Slums can be described by some as sustainable; no material is wasted and what cannot be reused is recycled. In many slums there is a sense of community.

Despite the common view that slums are unpleasant and living conditions are extremely poor, statistics suggest that for the poor rural migrants, life is actually better; education rates increase, access to services such as healthcare improves, life expectancy increases as do earnings. Increasingly slums are being viewed as places which are integral to a city functioning efficiently as the population provides vital services as a workforce, albeit in the informal sector. Urban planners and advisors are considering ways of upgrading slums rather than abolishing them as these populations will play a considerable part in the cities of the future.

Key terms

Rural-urban migration: Migrants move from rural areas to urban areas. Push factors from rural areas account for much of this move rather than pull factors from the city.

Informal sector: Economic activity which occurs 'off the books'. Workers do not pay taxes and are not officially employed. Businesses are unregistered and unlicensed although the product is legal. It is estimated that half the world's workers are part of the informal economy.

Urbanisation: An increase in the proportion of a country's population living in towns and cities. This is caused by migration of rural population to urban areas and by natural increase. A change of employment structure follows with the decline of agriculture and the rise of mass production and service industries.

Squatter settlements: transitional settlements that are self built by rural migrants. As they become established infrastructure and economic activity develops and housing becomes more permanent. See UN definition in text.