

Forum: General Assembly 2 (Economic and Financial)

Issue: Ensuring simultaneous urban growth and sustainable development in LEDCs

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Introduction

According to the United Nations, the population of the world grew from 2.5 billion to 6 billion between the years 1950 and 2000 (Stockton). It is estimated that by 2050, the population of people on the Earth will increase to be between 8 and 13 billion according to the UN population division. It is also estimated that by 2030, the percentage of people living in urban areas will increase from over 50% to over 60%. However, in developing countries, only less than 40% of the people currently live in urban areas. It is also projected that the population growth rate will increase to 2.3% in developing countries by 2030, leading to an increase in the urbanization level. As compared to 1990, where there were 1.4 billion people from developing countries living in urban areas, it is expected that this number will increase to 3.8 billion people by 2030. Therefore, according to the UN, developing countries will make 80% of the expected urban growth globally, with the urban population in developing countries increasing by 60 million people between 2000 and 2030. It is also expected that most of the population of developing countries will live in large, metropolitan areas from 2020.

Sustainability issues come hand in hand with urban growth. While the continent of Africa is said to have the lowest urban population level of 37%, the HIV/AIDS pandemic threat continues to escalate. Using the same example, by 2020, it is expected that the sub-Saharan African population will increase to 440 million and by 2025. About 70% of the African population is projected to be living in large, urban cities. Taking another example of Latin America, as compared to African countries, growth in Latin America started occurring much sooner. According to the UN, half of the population in Latin America was living in urban areas by 1960 and this number increased to 72% by 2000. It further forecasts that by 2030, this percentage should increase to 84% by 2030.

Leaders at the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals in September 2000, which set sustainability goals worldwide to be achieved by 2015. Now that it is 2016 and the Millennium Development Goals are no longer in play, leaders have turned towards the Sustainability Development Goals, which is a post 2015 Development Agenda to be achieved by 2030. This issue focuses on

ensuring that developing countries are able to grow economically and urbanize while achieving the Sustainability Development Goals set out by the UN.

Definition of Key Terms

LEDC

An LEDC or a less economically developed country is a country that has a low level of development and therefore urbanization. Most of the population of the country lives in rural areas. The level of economic development of a country is dependent on the development indicators that include health, industry and education.

Urban growth

Urban growth can be defined as a metropolitan or suburban area expanding into its surrounding environment. It is also known as urban sprawl, which is another word for urbanization.

Urban growth boundary

An urban growth boundary is a boundary within a region, which is used by governments to control urban sprawl. It does this by ensuring that the area within the boundary is used for higher density urban development, while the area outside the boundary is used for lower density urban development.

Urbanization

Urbanization can be defined as a rise in the number of people living in urban, metropolitan cities. It mainly occurs when people move from rural areas in a country to urban areas when the country is developing.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development can be defined as the development needed by the current generation without reducing the ability of future generations developing to meet their own needs.

Background Information

Goals set by the United Nations

The United Nations has agreed on a set of goals in the past to be achieved in 15 years that world leaders agree on. Depending on how countries have progressed with these goals, a further set of goals was agreed on 15 years later.

Millennium Development Goals

The UN adopted the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 to address the issues of extreme poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, gender inequality, education and environmental sustainability. The success of the MDGs was based on each member nation working towards achieving the goals within the country as well as funding from originally the G8 (now the G7) that included Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, United States and the European Union. The G8 agreed to fund the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank in June 2005 to cancel the \$55 billion debt that heavily indebted poor countries owed in order to let them concentrate on reducing poverty and improving health and education in their countries. However, due to most of the aid globally going towards debt relief and natural disasters rather than directly working on achieving the MDGs, by 2013, it was seen that progress on the MDGs was uneven. Some countries had successfully achieved multiple goals, while some struggled to work towards one of the eight. Therefore, the UN proposed the post-2015 agenda in 2013, which is now known as the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals followed on from the Millennium Development Goals. These goals are set in the 54th paragraph of United Nations Resolution A/RES/70/1. This resolution was reached following an agreement on “The Future We Want” at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. These 17 goals address sustainability issues including working on ending poverty and hunger, finding ways to improve health and education, trying to make cities more sustainable or making them sustainable cities, combating climate change and working on the protection of oceans and forests.



Caption #1: The Sustainable Development Goals

Key Issues

Sustainability problems as a result of rapid urbanization

Rapid urbanization in developing countries can cause many developmental and sustainability problems that must be addressed. This is caused mainly because the primary way of urban development is when populations migrate from rural parts of the country to urban parts in search of a better quality of life and better paying job. However, this could lead to many social, economic and political issues in the region they leave and the one migrate to.

Brief description of the problems faced

Migration of people from rural to urban areas could lead to poor standards of living in metropolitan areas. These poor standards could be as a result of lack of energy supply, lack of access to safe and clean water, poor sewage systems and poor education and health systems. Poor access to food and clean water could lead to malnutrition, food scarcity and diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. Fewer people in rural areas could lead to a loss in fertile agricultural land as large corporations seek to urbanize more land. Poor sanitation could lead to pollution of ground water due to the existence of nitrates and bacteria, leading to infections like cholera and tuberculosis. Lack of preparation for mass migration could lead to poor drainage systems and waste management systems in urban areas. Due to low-income families needing more fuel in urban areas, it could lead to an increase in deforestation and complete depletion of large vegetation areas. This could lead to soil erosion causing many more vegetation problems. Migration to metropolitan cities could increase carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas emissions as it could cause an increase in traffic, activities in industries and burning of firewood and other woods. Since housing is more expensive in urban areas, it could lead to poor land tenure security and pressure on the usage of land. This could also lead to unplanned settlements towards the outskirts of urban areas in order to make housing more affordable. Lack of pre-planning in urban areas could lead to public parks and greenways being completely neglected while not being used. This migration could also lead to inequalities in the work place as well as an increase in poverty in urban areas. This poverty could exist along with a population with low education levels and an increase in the unemployment rate as the total labor force of the country expands. Due to these problems, other issues such as crime, drug use and sexual abuse become more prevalent as those on a lower income try to survive in expensive urban areas. It is estimated by Cairncross et al that 42% of the total urban population lives in poverty and life or health threatening homes (Keiner). This is due to the lack of access to public healthcare and basic public infrastructure in some countries.

Local Agenda 21

During the 1992 World Summit in Rio, Agenda 21 on global sustainability was passed. Although this is a non-binding and voluntary action implemented by the United Nations, it led to an increase in global initiatives for sustainability alongside urban growth. It is a 350-page document that is divided into 40 chapters under four main sections. As stated in Agenda 21 - The first section, Social and Economic Dimensions, focuses on measures to combat poverty in developing countries, ways to change consumption patterns, promote better healthcare options and to create a more sustainable population with sustainable development in mind with the decisions made. The second section, the Conservation and Management of Resources for Development, focuses on measures to protect the atmosphere, combat deforestation, protect environments that are fragile, conserve biodiversity, manage biotechnology, control pollution and control radioactive waste products. The third section, Strengthening the Role of Major Groups, focuses on the role of children, youth, women, NGOs, local authorities, business, industry, workers, indigenous people, their communities and farmers in urban growth. The fourth section, Means of Implementation, focuses on science, transfer of technology, education, international institutions and mechanisms for finance.

Main issues in developing countries

Most of the rural population is concentrated in Asia and Africa

The largest population of people still living in rural areas is in countries in Asia and Africa. Three countries – India, China and Nigeria are said to have more than a third of the total number of people living in rural areas. Therefore, there must be policies directed towards these three countries.

Different definitions for sustainable developments

Not all countries agree on one definition for sustainable development and so the measures taken by each country to ensure sustainable development differ. This could be an issue as countries might quote data showing an improvement in the literacy rate and therefore may declare that they have met that goal. However depending on the way the government perceives the goals set by the SDGs, and the definition of sustainable development, the external costs of this development may be greater or may not meet the standards set by other countries. There must be a universal understanding of sustainable development and its consequences.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

UN Bodies

Many bodies have been created over the years by the United Nations on the topic of sustainable development in developing countries.

DESA

DESA or the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs support the Economic and Social Council on sustainable development and population growth. It was created to help countries make decisions to meet their economic, social and environmental goals. It aims to promote cooperation amongst countries in order to promote development across all countries.

ECOSOC

The ECOSOC or the Economic and Social Council works on addressing issues related to energy, food security and nutrition, managing natural resources, reducing poverty, sustainable urbanization and clean water. It aims to create programs and regional and national strategies in order to address any issues.

UN HABITAT

UN HABITAT or the United Nations Human Settlements Programme aims to promote socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns with the main goal to provide adequate shelter for everyone. It is a UN agency specifically for human settlements and sustainable urban development.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
June 3 to 14, 1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development A United Nations conference held in Rio in which 172 states were represented. The issues that were addressed included scrutiny of the patterns of production, renewable alternate sources of energy to fossil fuels, public transport systems and supply of clean water. Resulted in Agenda 21.
2000-2015	Millennium Development Goals Eight Development Goals that all UN member nations agreed to set measures to seek during those 15 years.
March 22, 2002	Monterrey Consensus

During the United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, more than fifty states were represented. It aimed to find ways to finance development including mobilizing domestic financial resources for development, mobilizing international resources for foreign direct investment for development, creating international trade agreements, increasing international financial and technical cooperation for development, reducing external debt and addressing systematic issues (United Nations conference on sustainable development).

Follow up conference in Doha

November 28 to
December 2, 2008

This conference was attended by 40 heads of states and government officials and officials from 172 states. It focused on reviewing the terms created during the 2002 Monterrey Conference. It concluded with the adoption of the Doha declaration on financing development.

Sustainable Development Goals

2015-2030

169 targets that all UN member nations agreed to seek to achieve during the next 15 years.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Agenda 21 during following the 1992 Rio UNCED conference
- 2000 Millennium Declaration (**A/RES/55/2**)
- 2008 Doha Declaration on Financing for Development
- 2013 declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals (**A/RES/70/1**)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

From 2000 to 2015, the United Nations signed the Millennium Development Goals in order to increase sustainable development; however the lack of regulation and targeted funding for developing countries led to only a few countries achieving the set goals while other states struggled to achieve any.

From 2015 to 2030, the United Nations signed the Sustainable Development Goals, which carried on from the Millennium Development Goals. While more and more people are leaving rural areas for urban cities, these goals aim to increase development nationally.

Possible Solutions

Since a the implementation of the goals set by the United Nations in the Sustainable Development Goals is up to the implementation by the local government, it is important that **governments allocate spending to reach the suggested goals**. This **spending should be targeted** in order to ensure that each or some of the goals are met.

Since governments in developing nations may have large debts need to be paid, it is essential that the **private sector invest** in these countries to assist with achieving the sustainable development goals. However, like with public sector investment, this money should also be targeted.

Additionally, there could also be a program through which more developed countries provide **targeted aid to less developed countries** in order to help them achieve the sustainable development goals.

Local governments, with the help of UN bodies, should also set targets to ensure that urban planning is not neglected in the process as an increase in migration from rural areas could cause sustainability issues in metropolitan areas.

As the number of people in urban areas increase, measures to ensure food and nutrition security as well as affordable housing for those moving from rural areas should be considered. This could be done through **altering taxes or subsidies at a national level**.

Another solution could be to make sure governments **publish values for their “green GDP”** that takes into account any environmental consequences of production. This could help reduce environmental consequences as governments compete to maximize their green GDP.

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