

## Development of Megacities in Emerging Economies: Challenges and Prospects

**Olubodun, M. E. & Adebayo, F. T.**

Department of Architectural Technology, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State  
Department of Architectural technology, Ogun State Institute of Tech., Igbesa, Ogun State

**Corresponding Author:** Adebayo, F. T.

### ABSTRACT

Megacities have particular significance in the world-wide process of urbanisation. By the year 2015, more than 600 million people will be living in over 60 megacities worldwide. According to the United Nations, the term megacity refers to a continuous urbanised area with population of at least 10 million people. In the emerging economies of the world, specifically Africa, emergence of megacities can be adjudged to be a plus from the economic point of view but it carries along with it, some problems that need to be addressed vis a vis their solutions. At the same time, there are enormous prospects for megacities in this category which need to be fished out and discussed. More often than not, megacities are perceived to be burdened by disadvantages, origins and engines of multiple problems as well as agents and victims of risks. Such a view however neglects the potentials; benefits, chances and various advantages of mega-urban developments. The fact remains that rich megacities profit as production centres' in the global market from the earnings of the international division of labour and involvement in global socio-economic and political networks. However, poor megacities are the absorbing pools for the rural migration with large percentages of the population living below the poverty line. Here, the production and service levels of a wide range of informal activities persist at regional and national scales. This paper therefore aims to look at the challenges and prospects of megacities in emerging economies.

**Keywords:** megacities, environment, urbanisation, challenges, opportunities

### INTRODUCTION

We have observed over the years, and noted that the environment is governed by three basic theories; the theory of environmental determinism, the theory of environmental probabilism and the theory of environmental possibilism. The former gives credence to the fact that the environment

determines whatever obtains in it. The second theory is based on probability, which means that the influence of determining variable could either be man or the environment, depending on that which can hold sway. The latter on the other hand, is as regards the environmental possibilism theory, which states that the environment can be made to conform to man's dictates or wants.

The pursuit of man's satisfaction has led to a dynamics of events. Man had to move out of the cave to put up a tent structure for him to get some kind of satisfaction. This had continued until different sections and regions began to carve out building techniques and technologies for themselves, in manners that best suit them socially, environmentally, physiologically and psychologically (Olubodun, 2008).

Urbanisation is unequivocally a global phenomenon, but it is not following the same pattern. The development of industrial nations is further advanced. City dwellers in Europe represent 75% of inhabitants while the figure is more than 80% in North America. In Africa and Asia on the other hand, most people, about 60% live in the rural areas (Just, 2008). However, the trend is changing ways as the Africa and Asia are now slightly picking up, a major reason why we have more megacities emerging today. Megacities have particular significance in the process of urbanisation world-wide. The emergence of megacities is just a facet in the much more extensive process of urbanisation, which has been under way for centuries.

The distribution of the megacities is certainly striking! If we narrow down our focus to the last 30 years, the nature of Asia becomes particularly significant. All 20 cities with the fastest population growth in the last 30 years are either in Asia or Africa. Ten of these are Chinese cities alone! There is a clear dichotomy between urban growth in developing economies on the one hand and industrial nations on the other. In the industrial nations, metropolitan cities have for decades attracted new migrants at the rate of 1% per year at most. It is entirely a different story in the emerging economies, as the growth rate in many places is as high as 4% with the lowest being 2% per year (Just, 2008).

There is dichotomy between society and nature, and megacities do not only appear as the ultimate opposite of rural space, they are also the most visible counterpart to nature – a space so definitely transformed by human agency such that anything natural is considered difficult to be found. With the rapid urban growth and emergence of megacities, new challenges emerge, including provision of essential social services and security. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, heat waves etc put large

scale stress on the human security and resilience of urban populations. Also, there is constant change in adaptive capacity with the slow and largely silent process of urban transformations, including resettlement policies, food system changes, commoditisation of urban services and privatisation. Migrations, for instance caused by environmental impacts or social transformations, have considerable impacts on human security in urban spaces as they put high pressure on the adaptability and resilience of urban systems.

Unchecked urban growth in critical regions of the developing world has created problems the world cannot afford to ignore. Serious security problems are emerging in newly formed and under-governed megacities. By 2015, there will be about 60 megacities globally, with most of these massive urban centers in Africa and Asia. Cities like Lagos, Cairo, Dhaka, Karachi, Mumbai and Jakarta for example are defined as megacities and are already bursting at their figurative seams. These and many other cities are projected to grow dramatically in the coming decades (Loita, 2009). While cities in the industrialised countries face stabilizing or even declining populations, urban population growth in developing countries is dramatic. Estimates predict that from 1950 to 2050, the urban population in developing countries will have increased almost 16 times, from under 200 million to a total of 3150 million people. Given that urban population growth in developing countries is three times that of industrial countries. The urban population of developing countries will be almost four times larger than the developed by the year 2025 (Perlman, 1990). This growth is not evenly distributed throughout the urban landscape, about half is due to migration from small towns and villages, and since the vast majority of these migrants do not have the resources to purchase or rent houses in the formal housing market, they resort to living in squatter settlements, shanty towns and illegal subdivisions, thus creating slums. Thus, while the formal city grows at an average rate of 3 – 4% per year, the informal city might be growing at twice that rate.

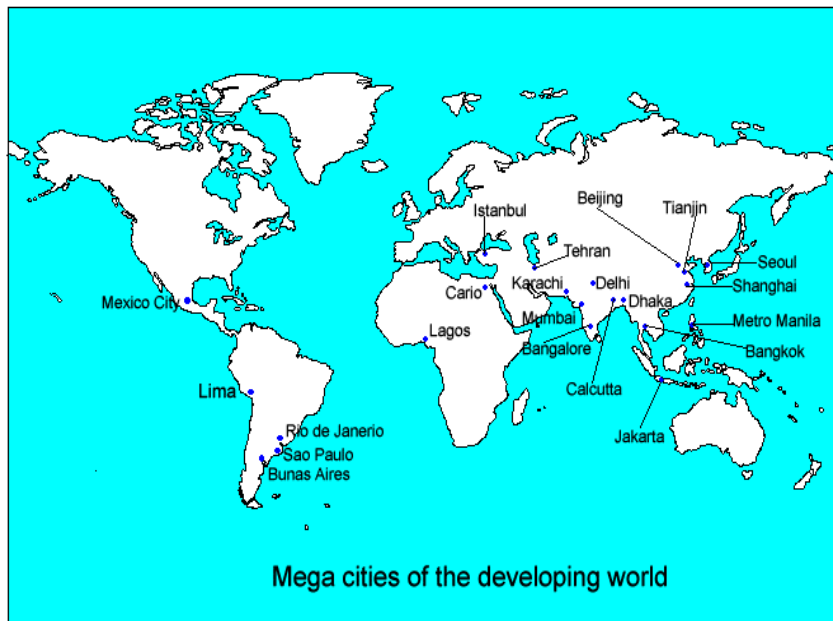


Figure 1: megacities of the developing world

Source: [www.megacities.uni-koeln.de](http://www.megacities.uni-koeln.de)

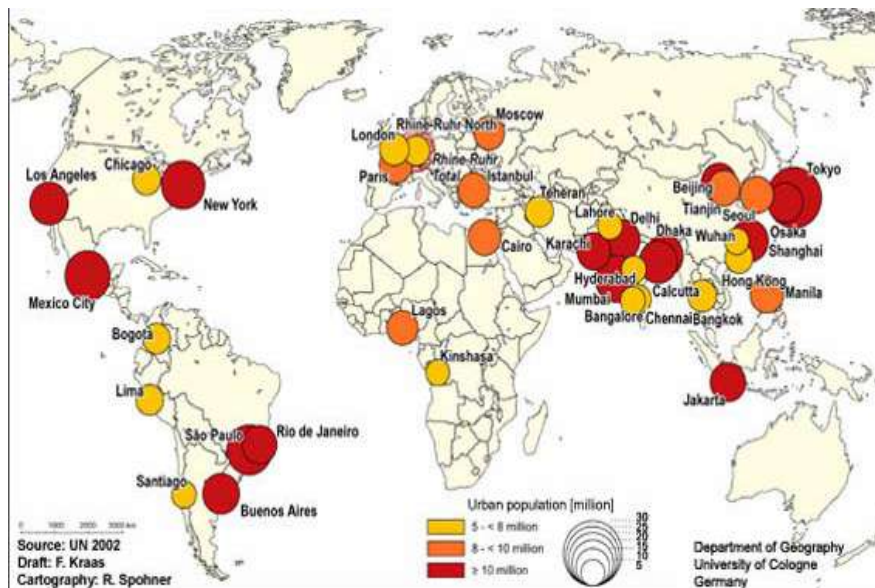


Figure 2: megacities in 2015

Source: [www.megacities.uni-koeln.de](http://www.megacities.uni-koeln.de)

## REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF MEGACITIES

The questions that easily come to mind are many. What are the driving forces behind the emergence of these megacities? Why do cities offer more benefits compared with rural areas?

### **Productivity gains enhance Growth**

It is a strong fact that that trading enables city dwellers to specialise. This ultimately results in qualitative and quantitative productivity gains. In the beginning, these increases in output were only sufficient to enable regional trading between the city and the surrounding area. Another major urban driver of urban development is population growth above all population growth in rural areas. Growth in cities is an expression of relative attractiveness. Those in rural areas judge their prospects to be less bleak in the city than the alternative of remaining in the rural settlements. It is true for all cities in the world that population growth is less of an internal organic phenomenon, but rather is largely the result of migration. In most nations, the majority of migrants are people moving from rural areas within their country. The growth of megacities in those countries ought to be fastest in those countries where the gap between urban and rural incomes is very wide. This correlation is found in megacities; the larger the difference between urban incomes and rural incomes, the faster cities expand and the faster the growth forecast by the United Nations also going forward. Only for a few global cities with strong demand for highly specialised professionals is international migration the primary source of population growth (Just, 2008).

### **Climate Change**

The growing rate of industrialisation, unsustainable farming methods in the rural areas and climate change trigger huge losses of farmland. In China, about 3000 to 6000 square km of farmland are lost every year (Just, 2008). The story is not any different in Africa. This factor again compels people living in rural areas to opt for urban settlements. Indeed, we are on the cusp of a period of deep-seated climate change, the growing scarcity of agricultural land is likely to ensure that people continue to move to the cities, especially in developing nations and emerging markets.

### **Technological Revolution**

It is no longer news that the world has become a global village, where all information can be got at the touch of a button or a set of buttons. Modern Information and Communication Technologies have helped to dismantle the old hierarchies between the first, second and third world. The megacities and global cities have now fixed into the picture of a flat world as illustrated by Thomas Friedman in his best seller "The world is flat". Thus globalisation and digitalisation have helped to drive the development of

megacities, for they have helped to amplify the advantages of the division of labour and the formation of clusters. In so far as there are no indications that this integration of the goods, labour and capital markets will abate positive growth, it is certain that megacities will continue to profit from economic opening. For this again, more people in rural areas are likely to join forces with those in the urban areas.

### **Investment Opportunities**

Considerable investment opportunities abound in cities, as compared with rural settlements. All facets of human endeavour do enjoy various forms of investment opportunities, from real estate to financiers of users of real estate. The chronicle is an endless one. It will be out of place then, for some to enjoy all these while others watch in awe.

### **MEGACITIES, MEGA CHALLENGES**

All megacities, regardless of demographic factors, level of economic development, political structure or social background, share certain fundamental problems. These include increasing demand on limited budgets, extreme polarisation between the rich and the poor, severe environmental strain, fragmented programme initiatives, isolation among sectors and disciplines, and powerful resistance to change in the status quo. These problems are reinforced by incentive systems which discourage public policy risk taking while encouraging them in the private sector.

On a closer look at the emerging economies, which are expected to be infested with several teething problems, the major urban challenges are:

- A           How to address the urbanisation of poverty and increasing inequality;
- B           How to deliver urban land at scale in order to meet increasing demand for housing, linked to networks of public infrastructure and recognising the need to mitigate the impacts of and adapt to climate change;
- C           how to address rapid and chaotic peri-urbanisation and the emerging phenomenon of extended urban corridors;
- D           how to meet the needs of the youth, who constitute the majority of the urban population; and
- E           how to address the shortage of skills in the human settlements or built environment (Attahi, 2008), among several others.

## URBAN CHALLENGES IN TRANSITION ECONOMIES

In contrast to developing economies, transition economies face different challenges in urban development. Previous public patterns of housing provision have been disrupted by the political and economic changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These systems had provided a minimum quality of housing and infrastructure in most countries. Whether or not the cities in these countries will become productive motors for their new reformed economies remain to be seen. The major challenges for the coming years in transition economies will be:

- A            how to address the problems resulting from slow (or even negative) population growth and ageing, including shrinking cities and deteriorating buildings and infrastructure;
- B            how to address problems of urban sprawl and preservation of inner city heritage buildings arising from the growing demand for housing and facilities by an emerging wealthy class and from international investors;
- C            how to address severe environmental pollution from the socialist era industries and more recently, from rapid growth of vehicle ownership; and
- D            how to strengthen local authorities to whom many responsibilities have been transferred but without the necessary financial resources (Hirt and Stanilov, 2008).

## URBAN CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPED ECONOMIES

Cities in developed countries have occupied an increasingly important place in their respective national economies. In recent times, their economies have become knowledge-based and shifted towards financial services, which have tended to be located in large cities. But how well these cities do, or will continue to do, with these functions depend on the reliability of their infrastructure and the quality of urban life as factors in attracting new investment. More recently, the sub-prime mortgage lending crisis and collapse of a number of major investment banks in the USA and the UK has not only affected large numbers of home owners, shareholders and savings, but has also introduced a new acute level of uncertainty that is bound to affect urban employment and economic prosperity in general. In the foreseeable future therefore, the major urban challenges in developed economies will include among others:

- A            how to resolve the very recent mortgage and housing markets crisis;

- B how to address increasing socio-spatial inequalities and urban fragmentation resulting from globalisation and competitive city investment policies, as well as from the changing structure of labour markets that has left many urban residents unemployed and impoverished;
- C how to reduce the large ecological footprints of cities caused by car dependence, huge waste production and urban sprawl;
- D how to mitigate the effects of and adapt to climate change; and
- E how to resolve the problems associated with slow population growth, ageing and shrinking of cities (Garau, 2008).

### CONCEPTUALISING THE CHALLENGES

As time would not permit, I will like to discuss one or two of these challenges in a broad manner but the summary of it all is as explained in table 1 of this paper.

For the purpose of clarity, these numerous challenges can be classified into four major conceptual frameworks thus:

**Table 1: Broad Classes of Megacities' Challenges**

S/N	Dimension	Problems, Risks and disadvantages
1	Ecological dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Urban expansion, urban sprawl and fragmented land use mosaic.</li> <li>- Air, water, soil pollution, sewage water problems.</li> <li>- Waste disposal; uncollected, illegal and toxic waste.</li> <li>- Inundation and land subsidence.</li> <li>- Expansion in ecologically fragile areas like slopes.</li> <li>- Environmental health problems.</li> <li>- Sealing and degradation of fertile soils.</li> </ul>
2	Economic dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rudimentary or non-existing infrastructure (Transportation, water, energy, communication).</li> <li>- Mass unemployment and under employment.</li> <li>- Low labour wages and exploitation of labour force.</li> <li>- Wide spectrum of informal (unregistered,</li> </ul>



		<p>uncontrolled, partly illegal) activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dilapidating urban fabric.</li> <li>- Unaccounted for water and energy flows.</li> <li>- Migration and commuters flows.</li> </ul>
3	Social dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of social coherence.</li> <li>- Widening of socio- economic disparities and social fragmentation.</li> <li>- Decline of access to health system, education and security infrastructure.</li> <li>- Informal and partly illegal settlements, urban decay.</li> <li>- Social disorganisation; conflicts, war, riots.</li> <li>- Displacement processes</li> <li>- Growing vulnerability in marginalised population groups and communities</li> <li>- Social injustice, misuse of social power</li> <li>- Corruption, bribery, cronyism and nepotism</li> </ul>
4	Political dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of governability and steering capabilities</li> <li>- Growing informality in decision making processes, politico-economical networks, self organisation of public functions ( e.g. private security, mafia structures)</li> <li>- Loss of just presentation of general public (e.g. migrants, minorities, under – privileged)</li> <li>- Incoherent government laws, regulations, rules</li> <li>- Unbalanced internal external influences.</li> </ul>

**Source:** Kraas, 2007

### SECURITY MATTERS

Ensuring the security of lives and property of over 10 million residents in a city, together with visitors within and outside the city is a very critical issue to the development of such a city. A megacity with high incidence of armed banditry, violent crimes, assassination attempts, religious, political and ethnic unrest, excessive circulation of dangerous arms and ammunition, electronic crimes and all sorts of various other menace

supported by lack of enforcement of proper sanitation, waste collection and environmental law cannot be welcoming to either domestic or international investors. If we take the Lagos megacity as an example, all the crime listed above and more abound therein. More importantly, if the international borders are porous enough to give room for other international security problems, developmental growth will ultimately be marred.

Effective maintenance of security can be assured only when the law enforcement agencies of a megacity are supported by the citizens themselves in their local communities. In most megacities of the developing economies, maintenance of security is further compounded by the fact that law enforcement agents are far from adequate for the populace. In Lagos for example, with a population of about 15 million, a personnel figure of 25,000 policemen was given (FRN 2006), giving a ratio of 1:600. This is a far cry from the United Nation's recommendation of police/people ratio of 1:400! The law enforcement agents need to mitigate the lukewarm attitude of the public on matters of security by holding workshops and enlightenment campaigns on their attitudes when relating with the public, to reduce to the barest minimum, the uncooperative and hostile attitudes of the public towards them. If the security agencies are adequately funded and equipped, matters of security lapses in developing megacities will become an anomaly.

## **HOUSING AND URBAN RENEWAL**

In most developing megacities like Lagos, Mumbai etc, quite a sizeable proportion of the population are classified as slum dwellers living under unimaginable, almost sub-human conditions. The fact remains that many of these slum residents do not possess the resources to acquire housing units in the formal housing markets, and equally do not have the necessary wherewithal to work in the formal sector, yet they still find their ways to survive in the megacity owing to the rural deficiencies mentioned earlier. In most cases, they are found to be squatting illegally on government land, a situation where there is little or no incentive for them to invest time and other resources in improving their environment. More often than not, by the time government is prepared to make use of such land; they face the hard task of emergency eviction, taking them back to the first square. Examples are slums of old Maroko in Lagos, Mabushi, Karimo and Area 1 in Abuja.

Sometime in 1997, the World Bank expressed interest in promoting slum upgrade in Lagos, choosing the Olajowon area of Badia for a pilot scheme. The primary objective was to provide basic infrastructure in the

neighbourhood without relocating the residents while improving their living standards. The project was commissioned in 1999 (FRN 2006). In the examples of figures 3 and 4, it is evident that slum dwellers are in a tough battle with nature and their living standards are far below the poverty line. This is the more reason why slum upgrade must be prioritised in the quest to have a befitting megacity.

**Figure 3: Mumbai (India) Housing**



**Source:** HSC online

**Figure 4: Delhi market**



**Source:** HSC online

The best form of slum upgrading is that which involves the residents themselves staying insitu! It entails a participatory planning strategy which involves the residents themselves but the major challenge might be proper

identification and delimitation of the areas so designated. For this, the importance of satellite imageries for planning is very vital.

Urban renewal, as different from slum upgrade, should be a part of efforts towards achieving good prospects for megacities. Areas with sub standard houses should be upgraded as a continuous exercise in phases, to make room for a general or recurrent feature in megacity re-development. All said and done, with the formal housing sector in place and slums upgraded now and then, and urban renewals in taking place intermittently, developing megacities will wear new looks and investment opportunities will increase. Then, standards of living will move up the ladder.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Facilitation of mobility and circulation of people and goods is one of the major functions of the spatial structure of any megacity or settlement. For an emerging megacity, such mobility ranges from the movement of an individual on foot to the daily hordes of commuters moving in and out of the megacity from distant points. It comprises bicycles, motorcycles, cars, buses, Lorries, trucks etc on roads, air planes as well as ships on water. It covers all facets of human endeavour, work, education, business, relaxation, tourism, law enforcement, government activities and the likes. The mixture of the demand for mobility for these various activities compounds the equation for the transport system in any city (Mabogunje, 2008). According to him, the system embraces walkways, bicycle paths, service lanes, water ways and airway routes. Others include service lanes, estate streets, major roads, highways, freeways, rights of way for rail lines.

One of the major transportation challenges in emerging megacities is inadequate public transport system. Probably owing to poor management or otherwise, most emerging megacities find it difficult to maintain public transport system.

Another major challenge is the perennial problem of traffic congestion. This is caused by many factors. On the one hand, there is physical structure of many parts in the megacity. Many parts of the megacity are not well articulated and some of the arteries are too narrow for the volume of traffic being experienced. Poor coordination between governments at different levels also contributes to this. All these put together cause vehicles to pile up and cause high traffic congestion. Safety on roads within megacities is another challenge. Traffic flow is often disrupted by road accidents, especially where the design of road is of grid-

iron pattern. If road intersections are reduced, safety on roads will improve considerably.

Another environmental challenge is increase in air and noise pollution coming from vehicles. The most ambient air pollution in megacities comes from combustion of fossil fuels in all motorised vehicles. The use of fossil fuels tends to increase with the growth of the urban economy unless measures are taken to promote efficient fuel use and the use of the least polluting fuels such as unleaded fuel for motor vehicles (Mabogunje, 2008).

On the other hand, safety and proper flow of traffic can be enhanced by improvements in lighting and directional signs which are poorly deployed in emerging megacities. Thus, lighting has made great progress such that highways in megacities of the developed economies have become ribbons of lighted pavement requiring no headlights on vehicles for adequate vision and safety.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

Economic and social problems in Africa's megacities also result in serious environmental damage and degradation. According to Ayeni (1981), this is one of the most alarming and uncomfortable problems of metropolitan Lagos, because it can be seen everywhere. The waste disposal board was created in Lagos in 1978 but it quickly went back to sleep as there were inadequate equipment, costly maintenance and relative inaccessibility of the majority of the inhabitants of the city. Another example is in Cairo where toxic fumes make it difficult to breathe in certain sections of the Autostrada because of rubbish burning (El-Shakhs, 1992). Most of the emerging megacities also have adverse impacts on their rivers, threatening water supply activities. The story is not any different in other megacities of emerging economies. See figures 5 and 6.

**Figure 5: Tehran garbage collection**



**Source:** HSC online

**Figure 6: Tehran Drainage**



**Source:** HSC online

## **INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION**

As many of these megacities grow and consolidate their power and functional unity, administrative weaknesses and fragmentation within their government systems and among their subdivisions begin to intensify. The traditional political and administrative arrangements, which might have been appropriate for the smaller colonial cities they once were, clearly do not fit the more complex new phenomena of rapid expansion and post-colonial political adjustments.

African cities especially did not only develop major diseconomies of urbanisation but also became the loci for intensifying social and political problems within their societies. Not the least of these are deterioration in order and control, unemployment, urban poverty, squatters and homelessness. It is estimated that 21 per cent of Cairo's population falls within the two lowest income categories of the poor and the destitute, both of which are below acceptable poverty levels (Ibrahim, 1982). In South Africa again, apartheid historically split functionally homogenous urban areas into separate administrative jurisdictions on the basis of race. The resulting extreme disparities in income and expenditure, and in the level and quality of services, are likely to persist for some time to come. In most African cities, class has replaced race as the mechanism for segregation and maintenance of inequality (Gilbert and Gugler, 1994), and this is likely to continue if not checked on time.

## **RISING TO THE CHALLENGES**

Appropriate and responsive planning for the future development of megacities in Africa is hampered by tremendous uncertainties, an extremely rapid pace of change, and seeming inability of governments and the formal sector to cope with such change. Adequate responses would therefore have to be based on promoting the following:

- Flexibility, adaptability and speed of response.
- Democratisation, participation, and the harnessing of local community initiatives.
- System-wide coordination and cooperation.
- Privatisation and greater reliance on the informal sector.

Training more architects and planners may be essential but they are only a small part of an effective approach to urban planning in Africa's megacities. If planning is to be made more relevant to the lives of the urban population, new responsive and consultative processes that do not promise more than can be delivered will have to be developed and adhered to.

At the levels of national urban systems, development strategies should aim to promote nascent democracy movements and strengthen local and municipal governments, to target certain strategically located intermediate urban centers for development and to guide the inevitable spontaneous development of urban regions along corridors of potentially intense urban interaction between major cities.

At megacity levels, planning effort should aim at containing the uncontrolled horizontal spatial expansion of central cities, articulating their internal structure into identifiable local communities with viable business sub centers, empowering peripheral communities to restructure themselves into viable, spatially identifiable settlements, and promoting area-wide differentiation of functions and specialisation of settlements.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While present day megacities are both the cause and results of many socio-economic and environmental problems, the major ones of which have been highlighted above, it is also clear that they are, and have always been the repository of knowledge and innovation. Throughout history, cities have been closely linked to the advancement of civilisation in all world regions. It can be said without exaggeration therefore, that the history of civilisation has been the history of cities. If properly planned and managed, megacities of emerging economies of the world are capable of providing solutions to the key urban challenges discussed above.

The need for global awareness of urbanisation is very paramount. More importantly, it is clear that urbanisation issues need to be integrated into national development policies and strategies. There is also the need to focus on effective advocacy, monitoring and partnerships, which can promote sustainable urbanisation through evidence based global monitoring and research, policy dialogue, strategic partnerships, global campaigns, education, communication and exchange of best practices.

Addressing all the urban challenges discussed above will require pro poor and inclusive urban planning, management and governance policies as well as effective institutions. These are still weak in many developing economies, which make their megacities suffer. Promotion of participatory urban planning, management and governance should be addressed vigorously by strengthening the capacity of national governments, state governments, local and municipal authorities and other stakeholders to develop more liveable, productive and inclusive cities.

In megacities of developing economies, slums are the most visible manifestation of urban poverty and of the failure of urban development and housing policies. Addressing the slum challenge will partly entail in-situ upgrading, focussing on improving water and sanitation, as well as improving the supply of adequate but affordable housing for low income households. To achieve this, serious attention has to be paid to increasing the supply of affordable land, especially for the poor. Environmentalists



should assist in the promotion of pro-poor land and housing schemes, aimed at assisting national governments and progressive partners to adopt pro-poor, gender and age-sensitive housing, land management and property administration through enabling policies and improved legal and regulatory frameworks.

While addressing the challenges of poor water and sanitation in slums and basic urban infrastructure in general, governments in these megacities will also need to deal with the longer term risks arising from climate change. Security of lives and property should equally not be left at the back seat. Environmentalists should also be involved in the design and provision of sound basic urban infrastructure and services to assist their governments in dealing with all these environmental challenges.

Finally, addressing all the current and future urban challenges identified above require appropriate and robust financing mechanisms. If they are to succeed, such mechanisms must not only be at a much larger scale than before, but must also recognise the progressive or incremental nature of house construction among the poor in megacities of developing economies.

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