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SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION



UNCTAD CURRENT STUDIES ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION. Nº10



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I. Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed the emergence of the new developmental phenomenon of urbanization. Cities are not only the engines of economic growth but also increasingly spaces of shared social, cultural and economic experiences (United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), 2005). Urbanization is synonymous to most people in the developing world with job creation and poverty reduction. Yet while some cities across the world have managed to benefit from urbanization as a developmental tool by applying the right policies, others have merely moved poverty to urban areas. In addition, various examples from around the world demonstrate that being a developed country is not a prerequisite for sound urbanization that contributes to economic development.

Urbanization has accompanied large-scale improvements in some developing countries towards the Millennium Development Goals. The most important change has been the eradication of extreme poverty in rural areas, for instance in China. Such progress has depended primarily on the role of cities in employment generation and their ability to provide basic services such as water, health and sanitation for the masses at a lower cost than in rural areas.

The next wave of urbanization represents an opportunity to meet the Millennium Development Goals and raise people out services. Cities should aim to become shared spheres of prosperity.

Urbanization is a key environmental issue as well. The rapid pace at which urbanization is taking place in the developing world has an impact on climate change and other global environmental issues. Cities account for more than two-thirds of the global energy demand and result in up to 80 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The urban planning and investment choices that a few large developing countries will make therefore represent one of the most important environmental issues of the twenty-first century. Entire new industries are forming with the aim of switching to clean and renewable energies and managing the world's resources in a more efficient manner, primarily in developed countries but also in the developing world.

In recent years, sustainable urbanization has become a very popular topic. Several conferences at international, regional and local levels have periodically discussed urbanization issues in detail. Debate on the topic has already reached a level of maturity whereby tools, resources and applications are abundant worldwide. Innovation on sustainable urbanization is happening everywhere, in both developed and developing countries.

This report aims to contribute to the sus-

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