

state of world population 2007
Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth



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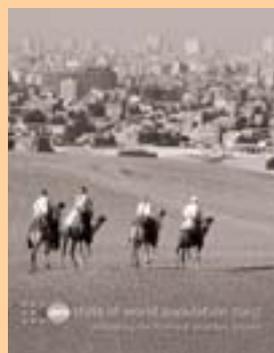
United Nations Population Fund
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On the cover
Camel riders approach Cairo, Egypt, from across the desert.

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Background image:
Employees of a huge industrial complex on their way to work in the town of Jamshedpur, India.

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Introduction

Peering into the Dawn of an Urban Millennium

In 2008, the world reaches an invisible but momentous milestone: For the first time in history, more than half its human population, 3.3 billion people, will be living in urban areas. By 2030, this is expected to swell to almost 5 billion. Many of the new urbanites will be poor. Their future, the future of cities in developing countries, the future of humanity itself, all depend very much on decisions made *now* in preparation for this growth.

While the world's urban population grew very rapidly (from 220 million to 2.8 billion) over the 20th century, the next few decades will see an unprecedented scale of urban growth in the developing world. This will be particularly notable in Africa and Asia where the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030: That is, the accumulated urban growth of these two regions during the whole span of history will be duplicated in a single generation. By 2030, the towns and cities of the developing world will make up 80 per cent of urban humanity.

Urbanization—the increase in the urban share of total population—is inevitable, but it can also be positive. The current concentration of poverty, slum growth and social disruption in cities does paint a threatening picture: Yet no country in the industrial age has ever achieved significant economic growth without urbanization. Cities concentrate poverty, but they also represent the best hope of escaping it.

Cities also embody the environmental damage done by modern civilization; yet experts and policymakers increasingly recognize the potential value of cities to long-term sustainability. If cities create environmental problems, they also contain the solutions. The potential benefits of urbanization far outweigh the disadvantages: The challenge is in learning how to exploit its possibilities.

In 1994, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development called on governments to “respond to the need of all citizens, including urban squatters, for personal safety, basic infrastructure and services, to eliminate health and social problems . . .” More recently, the

◀ *The intensity of urbanization can clash with age-old customs and traditions. The traffic dodges a cow, while street vendors vie with modern shops in this busy Mumbai, India, intersection.*

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▲ An elderly man outside his home: a traditional hutong in Beijing, China. The white character on the wall indicates that the building is scheduled for demolition to make way for “urban development”.

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United Nations Millennium Declaration drew attention to the growing significance of urban poverty, specifying, in Target 11, the modest ambition of achieving by 2020 “a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers”.²

UN-Habitat’s Third World Urban Forum, as well as its *State of the World’s Cities 2006/7*, successfully focused world interest on the deteriorating social and environmental conditions of urban localities.³ The process of

These are all obviously important questions, but they shrink in comparison with the problems raised by the impending future growth of the urban population. Up to now, policymakers and civil society organizations have reacted to challenges as they arise. This is no longer enough. A pre-emptive approach is needed if urbanization in developing countries is to help solve social and environmental problems, rather than make them catastrophically worse.

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