

UN-HABITAT

STATE OF THE WORLD'S CITIES 2006/7



Urbanization: Mega & Meta Cities, New City States?

The urban phenomenon of this century will be megacities, high-density metropolises of more than 10 million inhabitants. As hubs of trade, culture, information and industry, they will be vested with such power that at many levels they will act as city states that are independent of national and regional mediation.

Today megacities are home to less than 10% of the global urban population. And their pace of growth has in the past been slower than that of smaller cities of 5-10 million people. However, the developing world, where megacities will be the hallmark of future urbanisation, is experiencing extraordinary spurts of growth in its largest cities.

- The number of people living in **Nigeria's Lagos**, the fastest growing megacity in the world, is expanding at more than 5% a year. By 2020, there will be 12 megacities in **Asia**, and all but 4 of the world's megacities will be in the developing world.

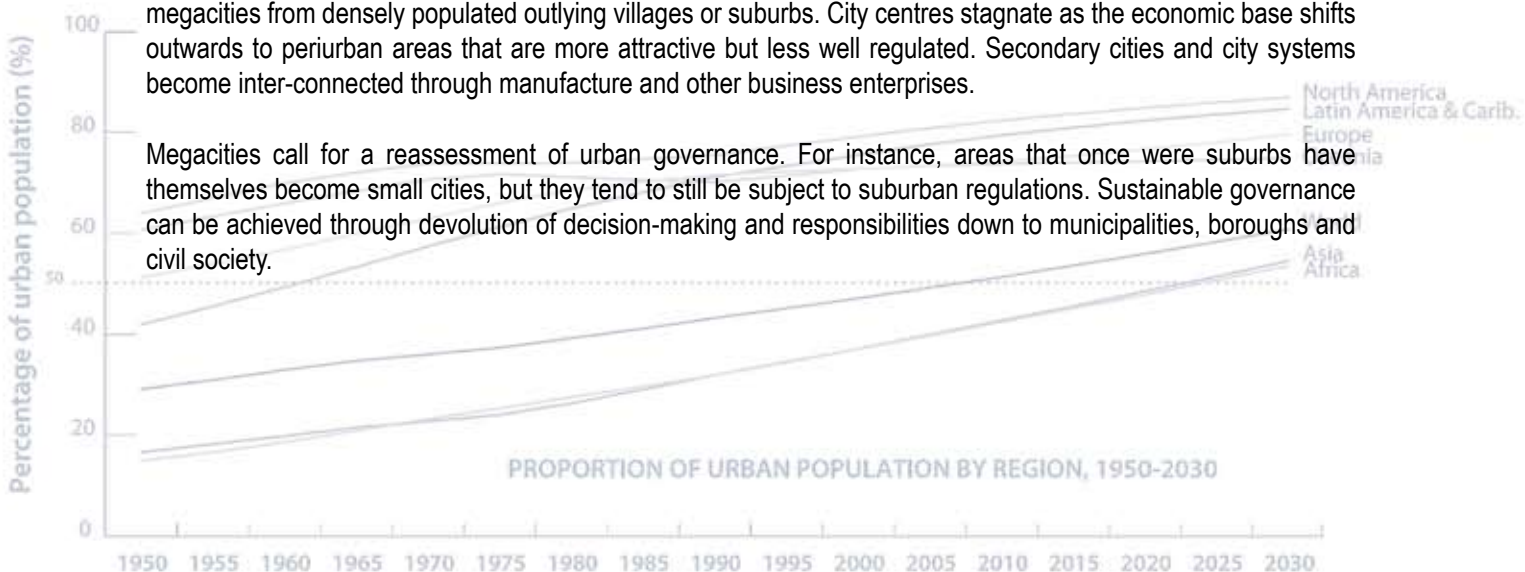
In many of these regions, particularly countries in **Asia** and **Africa**, there has been little planning or development of infrastructure to keep pace of this trend. In this report, UN-HABITAT demonstrates that unless there is considered investment for the poor as well as the rich in the new megacities, they will be overwhelmed by burgeoning slums and the Millenium Development Goals will not be met.

The Meta-City

There is also the metacity, or hypercity, an epithet that refers to massive sprawling conurbations of more than 20 million people. **Tokyo** became the first hypercity in the mid-1960s when it crossed the 20 million threshold. Today it is the largest urban conglomeration in the world. Tokyoites – more than 35 million - outnumber Canadians. By 2020, **Mumbai, Delhi, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, New York, Dhaka, Jakarta** and **Lagos** all will have achieved metacity status.

These metropolises are so huge that they have changed the dynamics of urbanisation. People commute to work in megacities from densely populated outlying villages or suburbs. City centres stagnate as the economic base shifts outwards to periurban areas that are more attractive but less well regulated. Secondary cities and city systems become inter-connected through manufacture and other business enterprises.

Megacities call for a reassessment of urban governance. For instance, areas that once were suburbs have themselves become small cities, but they tend to still be subject to suburban regulations. Sustainable governance can be achieved through devolution of decision-making and responsibilities down to municipalities, boroughs and civil society.



The City State and Globalisation

Megacities are a key to globalisation, a state of interconnectedness around the globe that transcends and largely ignores national boundaries. Global urban economies rely on advanced producer services such as finance, banking, insurance, law, management consultancy, advertising and other services. The technology revolution has made it possible for business enterprises to hire these services anywhere in the world.

Cities in the developing world have taken advantage of this to provide customer services at very competitive rates by drawing on a large labour force at low rates of pay. This trend unfortunately contributes to the creation of divided cities and the perpetuation of slums.

Cities that have become hubs of global economic activity

* Finance – **Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Amsterdam, Singapore, Sao Paulo, Shanghai**

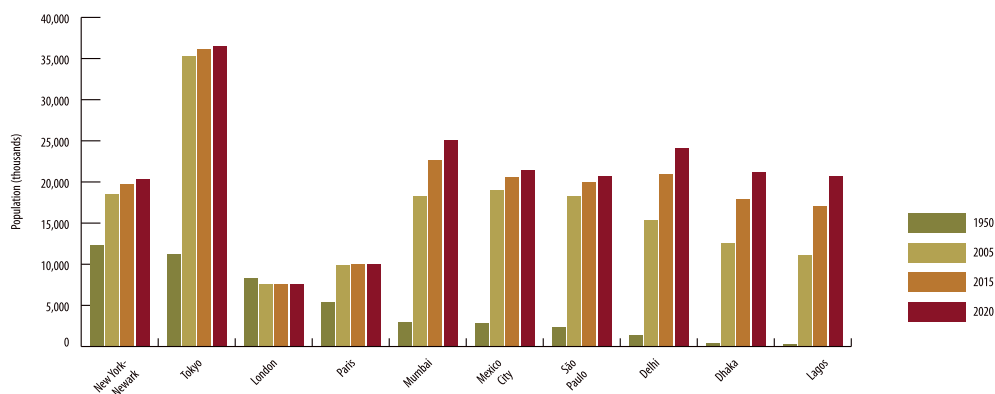
* Transport – **Dubai, Rotterdam**

* Information technology – **Bangalore, Seattle, Silicon Valley**

Once the sole domain of **Europe** and **North America**, world cities are emerging in the developing world to compete with long-established capitals of commerce. **Istanbul** and **Mumbai** are culturally influential within their regions through film, literature, satellite TV networks and other forms of entertainment. **Nairobi, Addis Ababa** and **Bangkok**, amongst others, host regional headquarters for international agencies and development partners.

Sir Peter Hall, Professor of Planning at the University College of London and a renowned expert on urban trends, predicts this century will see a resurgence of economically powerful global cities in **Asia**, specifically **Beijing, Shanghai** and **Mumbai**. Rivalry already exists between **India's Mumbai** and **China's Shanghai** as global financial centres.

FIGURE 1.1.4 URBAN GROWTH IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST CITIES, 1950-2020



Source: United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2003 Revision*.

Note: Population in 2020 was estimated from population in 2010 and 2015 assuming that trends for these years remain the same.

This is a UN-HABITAT Feature/Backgrounder, please feel free to publish or quote from this article provided UN-HABITAT is given credit. Suitable photographs are available on our website. For further information, please contact: Mr. Sharad Shankardass, Spokesperson, or Ms. Zahra Hassan, Press & Media Liaison, Press & Media Relations Unit, Tel: (254 2) 7623153/7623151, Fax: (254 2) 7624060, E-mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org, Website: www.unhabitat.org. SOWC/06/07/B/Urb2