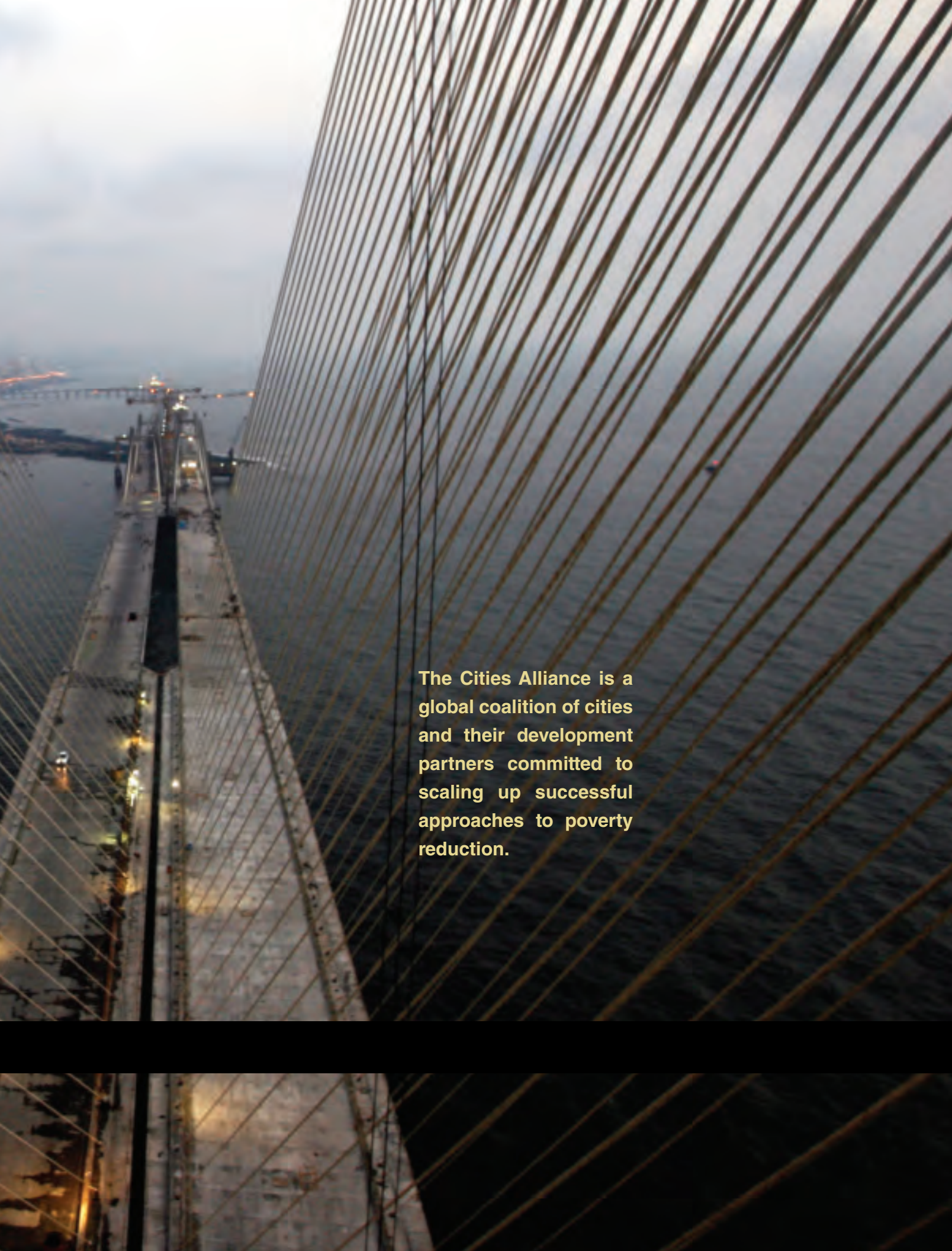




Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

2009 Annual Report: Building Cities and Citizenship



The Cities Alliance is a global coalition of cities and their development partners committed to scaling up successful approaches to poverty reduction.

OUR MEMBERS

Slum Dwellers:

Slum Dwellers International (SDI)

Local Authorities:

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) \ Metropolis

Governments:

**Australia \ Brazil \ Canada \ Chile \ Ethiopia \ France \ Germany \ Italy \ Japan \ The Netherlands \ Nigeria \ Norway \ Philippines \ South Africa \ Spain \ Sweden \ United Kingdom \ United States of America **

Multilateral Development Organisations:

**Asian Development Bank \ European Union \ UNEP \ UN-HABITAT
The World Bank **

Associate Members:


International Labour Organization (ILO) \ UNDP

Cover Photo: The skyline of Mumbai as seen from atop a tower of Bandra-Worli Sea Link.

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The 10th Anniversary of the Cities Alliance provides a timely opportunity for the organisation and its members to learn from past failures and successes and to re-emphasise those principles, policies, and practices that are essential for developmental progress. It has become increasingly clear that national policy frameworks that accept the inevitability and even the desirability of urbanisation are more likely to create the conditions for economic growth on a national scale, and ultimately reduce both urban and rural poverty.

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

2009 ANNUAL REPORT



UCLG PRESIDENT BERTRAND DELANOË

Foreword

Since its launch in Paris in May 2004, United Cities and Local Governments has constituted the global platform for the promotion of the projects of local and regional authorities. Its members, cities, regions, and local government associations from 136 countries, today constitute more than half the world's population.

In our increasingly urban world, the efficiency of cities, the quality of their management, and the vision and dynamism of their leaders are essential. Cities not only have the capacity to drive national economies: they can also be pioneers in social and political innovation, promoting the role and the position of women, fighting for the inclusion of minorities, strengthening democracy, encouraging arts and culture, and—most importantly—supporting truly sustainable development.

It is therefore more frequently at the local level that the world's most significant challenges will be identified. As the World Bank noted in its 2009 *World Development Report*, no country has achieved a level of advanced development without competitive cities.

Today, the challenge of climate change will require unprecedented cooperation between national and local governments. Local authorities can be effective partners, capable of envisaging and creating original and sustainable solutions. This is why global cities should be able to sit at the international negotiating table.

UCLG values highly its partnership with Cities Alliance and its members. Ten years after the founding of the Alliance in Berlin, our partnership has become a true reference on urban issues and particularly when it comes to finding solutions for our most vulnerable citizens. Together, we have fought to see the issue of slums included in the Millennium Development Goals. On the eve of the review of the Millennium Development Goals by the United Nations General Assembly, the cities, local and regional authorities of the world want to see local governance at the heart of the new goals.





INTRODUCTION: OF CITIES AND CITIZENSHIP





Heidemarie Weiczorek-Zeul, the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, President Nelson Mandela, Patron of the Cities Without Slums action plan and World Bank President, Jim Wolfensohn at the launch of the action plan, Berlin, December 1999.

Of Cities and Citizenship

The Cities Alliance was launched in Berlin in December 1999. Two concerns were uppermost in the minds of those who saw the need for the new organisation: (i) the failure of national governments to respond adequately to the challenges of urbanisation at an appropriate scale, and (ii) the related failure of the international development community to provide consistent and coordinated support to developing cities and countries. By early 2009, membership in the Cities Alliance had risen to 26.

This short essay does not attempt to quantify or analyse the impacts of the Cities Alliance and its members. Rather, this essay—a joint effort of the Cities Alliance Secretariat and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED),¹ assisted by a meeting of international experts held in Berlin in June 2009²—re-examines the key policy challenges facing developing cities and countries over the next 10 years and considers how international developmental assistance can respond to this changing agenda.

Getting Urbanisation Right: A Central Challenge for the 21st Century

The world has reached a turning point in its history: it is more urban than rural. This fact has been regularly announced every year since 1999, when Nelson Mandela analysed the urban challenge in his address to the founding meeting of the Cities Alliance. Nonetheless, there remains empirical and anecdotal evidence that the significance of urbanisation has been inadequately grasped by many developing countries and development agencies alike.

¹ This section was written by Gordon McGranahan of IIED and William Cobbett of the Cities Alliance

² Much inspiration came from the meeting convened by the Cities Alliance in Berlin in June 2009. In addition to the two authors, participants included Annette Baehring (GTZ), Somsook Boonyabantha (ACHR), Elisabeth Gateau (UCLG), Indermit Gill (World Bank), Mark Hildebrand (ex-Cities Alliance Manager), Stephen Karam (World Bank), Manfred Konukievitz (BMZ), Prof Akin Mabogunje (Nigeria), Franz Marre (BMZ), Eduardo Moreno (UN-HABITAT), Sheela Patel (SPARC), Clare Short (Member of Parliament, UK) and Keshav Varma (World Bank).

Bangladesh; crowded street with several rickshaws.
© Ron Giling / Still Pictures

Cities in developing countries certainly face daunting demographic, managerial, and resource challenges. Between now and the middle of the 21st century, the world's total population is projected to grow by about 2.4 billion, while the urban population is expected to grow by 3.0 billion—meaning that rural populations will actually fall by 0.6 billion. Asia's urban population alone is projected to grow by 1.8 billion, and Africa's by 0.8 billion. This implies that by 2050, Asia's cities (and urban towns) are expected to accommodate twice as many people as they do now, and Africa's cities and towns three times as many.

Many of these cities are already unable to provide sufficient infrastructure and essential services for their existing populations. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that a common response to such projections has not been to plan for this growth but rather to try to slow it down. Survey results indicate that anti-urban perceptions and policies to curb urbanisation are on the increase. In 1996, 42 percent of all governments responding to a United Nations questionnaire indicated a concern that their countries were becoming too urban too quickly. This figure rose to 51 percent in 2007. African governments displayed the most disquiet: 63 percent were concerned in 1996 and 74 percent in 2007. Over this same period, there has been an even sharper increase in the share of governments claiming to have introduced policies to reduce migration to urban agglomerations—from 45 percent to 65 percent for the world generally, and from 54 percent to 78 percent for Africa.

The rhetoric and policies of the international development community have often reinforced this tendency to plan against urbanisation. Fears of excessive rural-urban migration are evoked in descriptions of *mushrooming* and *exploding* cities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These cities are often presented as overcrowded sites of environmental distress, surrounded by expanding slums. In terms of aid policies, many development agencies have long been concerned that urban areas already get a disproportionate share of investments.

Particularly when it comes to environmental and poverty issues, development agencies are inclined to focus on rural areas, where most low-income people and sensitive natural environments are located.

The debate over the relative importance, depth, or size of either rural or urban poverty has become as stale as it has counterproductive. The key message is that urban growth is essential for rural poverty reduction—indeed, only sustained urban growth has the capacity to lift both rural and urban populations out of poverty.

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Of course, continued investment in rural areas, and in agriculture, is an essential component of any national economic strategy and poverty alleviation. Such investments need to focus on increasing agricultural productivity, ensuring food security, boosting agricultural exports, preventing desertification, and preserving vital environmental assets, among other things. At the same time, it needs to be understood that boosting agricultural productivity typically results in rural labour migrating into towns and cities, further increasing urban demand for rural production as well as swelling the ranks of urban slum dwellers.

By and large, it is small and secondary cities that are being forced to manage this rapid increase of urbanising poor. Small towns, which are normally not prominent in national development frameworks, are often sorely underresourced in personnel, skills, and budget. The importance of secondary cities has also been consistently neglected in development assistance; capitals and mega-cities have captured what little attention there has been on urban and local government issues.

While navigating these urban transitions can be difficult, urbanisation nonetheless can present enormous opportunities in a responsive policy environment. For example, notwithstanding a somewhat ambiguous policy approach, until very recently, to the growth of China's cities, the urbanisation of some 150 million Chinese³ has played a very significant role in that country's remarkable economic transformation and the extraordinary growth of its exporting eastern cities, leading to unprecedented reductions in the number of people living in poverty. In the past few years, the government of India has been showing an increasingly vibrant response to an urbanisation process of immense scale, focusing on the need to encourage the reform of Indian cities and their management. At the same time, Indian officials have demonstrated a keen willingness to better understand some of the lessons from Latin America and, particularly, from Brazil. The response in Sub-Saharan Africa has been mixed, with many countries continuing to exhibit a slow and negative response to urbanisation, but with some important national and city exceptions emerging in the past few years.



Nanjing, the central shopping mile at the old Central District at night.
© sinopictures/Brigitte Hiss/Still Pictures

³ *World Development Report 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography*, World Bank Group, Washington D.C., 2009; Overview Edition, p17.

As illustrated in figure 1, the urban growth trajectories of Africa, and Asia are similar. Contrary to the crisis rhetoric, urban growth rates are now falling in every region and are projected to continue to do so – though these rates will also continue to exceed rural rates for the foreseeable future. Moreover, Africa’s urban growth is not being driven primarily by migration or the transformation of rural areas into urban settlements: most of it is the result of high overall population growth rates in the region. Asia is urbanising faster, and it is the only region where about half of urban growth could be the result of migration.

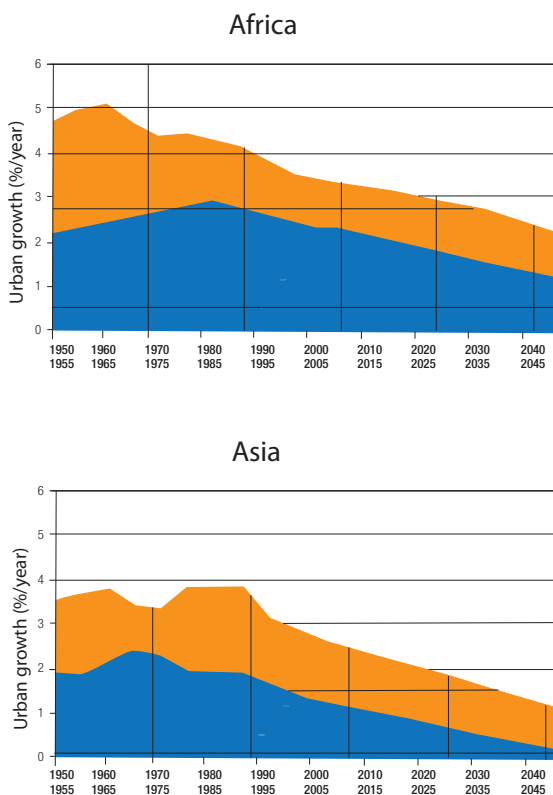
Contrary to many assertions, the current pace of urbanisation in African and Asian countries is not historically unprecedented. However, it would be unprecedented for them to achieve economic success without urbanisation.

The World Development Report (2009) makes a compelling economic case for cities, arguing that three spatial transformations are necessary for economic growth: higher densities, shorter (economic) distances, and fewer divisions. The move to cities embodies the first of these transformations and enables the other two.

By concentrating people and economic activities, cities provide a range of economic advantages, not only to their residents, but to those who trade with them. The enterprises and facilities in cities achieve a scale unimaginable in rural areas, allowing benefits to spread rapidly and costs to be greatly reduced. Both buyers and sellers access larger and more diverse markets in cities. Both people and enterprises in cities learn from each other and combine their ideas, creating innovations and increasing productivity. In short, the shift to cities, successfully handled, doesn’t just result in a step shift in productivity; successful cities provide the crucibles for long-term social and technological progress.

For cities to play this role in economic growth, they need appropriate infrastructure and spatially blind institutions and policies, extending basic services to everyone. Spatially focused policies are needed to provide the connective infrastructure, such as roads and telecom-

Figure 1:
Past and projected urban growth rates in Africa and Asia and the contribution of population growth and urbanisation, 1950–2050



Source: UN Population Division, 2007 revision.
Note: The rate of urbanisation is the annual increase in the percentage of the region’s population that is urban. A country or region’s urban population growth rate is approximately equal to the sum of its population growth rate and its urbanisation rate.

munications, which plays a critical role linking cities and their markets to rural production, to their hinterlands, and out towards the global economy—thereby reducing (economic) distances and strengthening those cities' ability to take advantage of the resulting market opportunities.

As markets exploit the economic potential of cities, the resulting economic growth is inevitably uneven: it occurs first in the cities, creating disparities between urban and rural areas. While this can bring social problems, favouring rural investment simply to support lagging regions is economically wasteful and historically unsuccessful. From an economic perspective, rural investments should be justified in terms of their productive benefits, and not as a means of reducing rural-urban imbalances.

People migrate to cities not to live in or create slums, but because they believe the move will improve their social and economic opportunities in the medium term, if not immediately. As a general rule, they are right.

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The Consequences of Informality, Illegality, and Invisibility

The future of world poverty and inequality is being influenced to a significant degree by what is now happening in cities. Yet, even with the clear evidence that well-run cities hold the potential to vastly reduce poverty, the economic benefits that urbanisation can provide are only rarely seized, particularly in low-income countries. Resisting urbanisation, rather than helping deprived rural dwellers, more often amplifies rural-urban disparities and reinforces a broader hostility of social elites to the urban poor. It is this whole self-reinforcing process of decline that needs to be turned around.

This resistance to urbanisation most commonly takes the form of official apathy, and even hostility, to the plight and the needs of the urban and urbanising poor. This is most obviously manifested in the lack of essential services, leaving the city's poorest residents to procure land, shelter, water, sanitation, and energy on informal and parallel markets, generally at a price premium.

Over time, the consequences of this official neglect may promote parallel systems of governance and the emergence of gangsters and slumlords, often protected by useful political connections. In short, ignoring the needs of the poor gives rise to the very conditions that cause

Yemen, Sana'a. Market in the old city. © Glen Christian/Still Pictures



slums to emerge and grow and to often become difficult and dangerous places, particularly for the residents of the slums themselves. Presented in such stark terms, this is a cold indictment of what passes for urban policy in too many cities and countries.

The central message for those governments that believe they have the ability to inhibit urbanisation: such policies tend to have pernicious side effects and rarely reduce the growth of urban populations—and they do real and costly damage to the economy and to social relations. Conversely, national policy frameworks that accept the inevitability, and even the *desirability*, of urbanisation are more likely to create the conditions for economic growth on a national scale and, ultimately, reduce both urban and rural poverty.

In Latin America, which has largely completed its urban transition, new democratic regimes are belatedly trying to incorporate their *favelas* into the social fabric of the cities. The unprecedented public investments of the current Brazilian administration, the innovation being shown in Colombian cities like Bogota and Medellin,

and the programme to recover previously excluded neighbourhoods in Chilean cities are attempts to overcome decades of social exclusion. The economic investment and administrative tasks involved in formalising these settlements are immense. This is only a small part of the challenge, however.

Past failures have contributed to high levels of crime and violence, which have not been contained in the *favelas* but have extended across entire cities and countries. The power politics of informal settlements also extend well beyond the settlements themselves and cannot be administered away by changing the formal land registration systems and regulations or giving out land titles. Existing inequalities in Latin America today reflect the past failure to get urbanisation right, and the problems will continue well into the future.

The same urban transition is now occurring in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as South and Southeast Asia, but, with few exceptions, there is little evidence that the right lessons are being drawn from the mistakes made elsewhere.

Upgrading in the Santo Domingo neighbourhood of Medellin, Colombia provides space for children to learn about the environment. © Andrea Merrick/Cities Alliance





Box 1: Slum Dwellers as Developers

In the face of consistent inaction by city and national governments, the residents themselves are driving efforts to improve conditions, and a close look at most informal settlements or other deprived neighbourhoods reveals an immense variety of innovative practices. Yet, in too many cases, progress is made in the face of local government apathy or outright opposition.

Possibly the most glaring example of this paradox is in the constant production of basic shelter. Although accurate figures are very difficult to obtain, all the evidence suggests that overwhelmingly, new shelter for slum dwellers is built by the urban poor themselves. And this production is undertaken despite concerted attempts by public authorities to hamper or actively prevent it. A sensible and pragmatic approach would not only recognise this important contribution of the urban poor, but actually encourage and support the process. Indeed, government and private sector support for incremental housing processes should ideally be incorporated as a mainstream of any national housing policy, so that a shack eventually becomes a house, and a slum gradually transforms into a city's suburb.

In short, completely different outcomes and progress would be possible if local governments started viewing the urban poor as citizens—with rights, responsibilities, and resources. Local governments have the capacity to create the political, institutional, and legal basis for nurturing local successes and tapping the opportunities that urban density and the energy of the urban poor can and should provide. What is needed is leadership bold enough to introduce a wholly new mind-set, supporting and encouraging entrepreneurial behaviour by all citizens, rather than defending the interests of part of the city or of the elites.

Housing construction for the poor in Lima, Peru.
Courtesy, World Bank Photo Library.

Rather than actively planning for rapid growth, governments tend still to plan against it, often in the misguided belief that forward planning will encourage new growth. Such absence of planning merely leads to unplanned and inefficient growth, with the poorest residents being left to fend for themselves and the city itself beginning a cycle of decline.

A New Challenge: Climate Change

Most of the challenges described above have a long history. More recently, the challenge of climate change has come to the top of the international agenda, with urbanisation often being blamed for increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, uncontrolled urban development created climate change in somewhat the same way that uncontrolled urban development created the sanitary crisis in the 19th century. In both cases, the perceived exigencies of markets were allowed to override environmental concerns, and the environmental opportunities that cities provide were largely ignored—that is, the reduced transport distances, the scope for shifting to public transport, and the potential to reduce built-over land area per capita.

It is now widely recognised that adequate water and sanitation services and energy are far easier and less costly to provide in cities than in the countryside. Eventually, it may well be recognised that climate change mitigation, too, is less costly when people live in cities.

A prejudice against cities is evident in the common claim that urban areas emit 75 percent or more of greenhouse gases. Recent studies have shown this to exaggerate the urban contribution by at least 10 to 20 percent. Moreover, in the wealthy countries where most of the gases are emitted, urban living is already less burdensome than more dispersed suburban and rural living. New York City, for example, is considerably less greenhouse gas-intensive than the United States average. Indeed, from a climate perspective, the worrying settlement transition is not the movement to cities in the low- and middle-income countries, but the movement out of cities in the high-income countries.



A slum in Cebu City, Philippines. © Mark Edwards / Still Pictures

Anti-urban prejudice can actually prevent national and international pressures on cities to take action to mitigate climate change, as well as make it less likely that city-based pressures will emerge. This is an especially important deficiency in high-income countries, where current emissions per capita are extremely high, and the momentum towards more transport and land-intensive settlement forms needs to be reversed. In economically growing middle-income settlements, it is yet another compelling and urgent reason to get urbanisation right to avoid increasing emissions.

Once again, forward planning is an essential component of a sustainable approach to urbanisation, particularly in rapidly urbanising low-income countries. While their urban settlements currently make negligible contributions to climate change, it is important not to lock into place climate-unfriendly settlement patterns. This applies to both mitigation, where efficient compact settlement patterns need to be encouraged, and adaptation, where protective measures and settlement away from the more vulnerable locations need encouragement.

Again, the message should be clear: it is important to plan where future urban growth should be located, not to ignore urban growth and hope it won't happen.

New Models of Learning

If urbanisation and cities are at the centre of the development challenges of the 21st century, it should be self-evident that they should also be at the centre of development assistance. Unfortunately, conventional development assistance is ill-suited to supporting urban innovation, and the principal alternatives being touted are not much better. To get urbanisation right in the 21st century, both national governments and international agencies will need to find better ways of recognising and nurturing urban opportunities and engaging with local governments.

Conventional development assistance is built on agreements between national governments or between national governments and international agencies. Most development assistance has been devoted to large projects or programmes with long delivery chains, a heavy reliance on expensive foreign expertise, and strong government involvement. Although civil organisations have also received development assistance in recent decades, the principal interaction has been between markets and governments, as in the world at large. For cities, this narrow focus on governments and planning on the one hand and private enterprises and markets on the other has been problematic, since one of the key roles of cities is as the places where civil society, and ordinary people, can play a leading role.

To get urbanisation right in the 21st century, both national governments and international agencies will need to find better ways of recognising and nurturing urban opportunities and engaging with local governments.

Conventional development projects tailored to specific cities are difficult to support. Local governments rarely have much influence over the allocation of development assistance. A large share of the funds tends to be expended high up on the delivery chain, often on foreign assistance or by central ministries. This form of assistance is particularly ill-suited to supporting large

numbers of small, affordable projects—the sort particularly relevant to low-income urban dwellers. Overhead tends to be excessive, official standards too exacting, selected technologies too expensive, local participation largely cosmetic, and actual outcomes disappointing.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) advocated a shift from fragmented project-based support towards a greater reliance on national financial management through, for example, direct budget support. This shift was meant to focus attention on improving the national budgetary process and national governance, rather than on parallel structures of development assistance.

An obvious question to pose of any new model of urban development assistance is whether it strengthens downward accountability and genuine local leadership. While the principles of direct budgetary support are still widely favoured among donors, there is concern that the incentive and capacity of many national governments to be accountable to their citizens is lacking and unlikely to be strengthened by having an appreciable part of their budget funded externally.

Urban development assistance has the potential to build accountability and improve relations between local governments and their citizens. This will require a change of strategy, however. Rather than simply allowing cities to become the site of new development projects, urban development assistance will need to work explicitly to create more successful cities, not just economically, but socially and environmentally as well. Such assistance will also be more effective if it recognises the importance of simultaneously engaging both national and local governments.

The past few years have witnessed the emergence of new forms of development assistance, less reliant on the traditional, vertical modes of engagement. Emerging countries such as China, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, India, and South Africa have demonstrated an eagerness to forge new methods of technical assistance, based on common experiences with donor agencies as well as common development challenges. There is little doubt that a significant realignment and adjustment in inter-

national development assistance is commencing, with greater emphasis on sharing appropriate knowledge and experience, and less on grants and implementing projects.

Within this framework, new questions will certainly need to be asked of universities, research entities, and policy units in developed and developing countries alike. Many of the students attending developing-country institutions are leaving ill-prepared to assist and lead responses to the development challenges that their countries will face in the next decades, particularly in such critical fields as urban planning. The major benefit of a more active relationship between institutions of higher learning and local and national governments would be the building of long-term capacity so essential to the future of any country.

Looking Ahead

The 10th anniversary of the Cities Alliance provides a timely opportunity for the organisation and its members to learn from past failures and successes and to re-emphasise those principles, policies, and practices that are essential for developmental progress. While none of these should cause any real surprise, what is too often missing is their consistent application over time, beyond the next election or budget cycle in the city, government, or donor country.

Yet the most important policy decisions for successful and sustainable development can only be taken by the national governments of developing countries themselves, which is where the primary responsibility belongs. These policies can certainly be reinforced by organisations such as the Cities Alliance. Following are some of the most important policies:

- **Strengthen local governments and local accountability.**

The success of national social and economic programmes and policies is greatly enhanced through the active involvement of, and partnership with, local government. However, in too many countries, the local is viewed as an inferior level of government rather than as an essential component of a system of governance and accountability.

Over the past two decades, a process of decentralisation has taken root in most parts of the world, leading to a gradual—but asymmetrical—recognition of the role of local governments. In the best cases, this process has been augmented by an increase in local government powers—the ability to benefit from stable financial transfers from the central government and also to raise their own sources of revenue. However, in too many cases, local government is treated merely as an administrative arm of higher tiers of government, required to implement policies and decisions made at some distant capital city or administrative centre.

Bringing local government more fully onto the international development agenda is a vital step to improve local accountability and build the skills and human capital necessary to respond to urgent developmental issues, such as urbanisation, the impacts of climate change, and the policies needed to support local economic growth. Parallel policy and developmental support should also be provided to national associations of local governments, improving their capacity to facilitate learning between cities, as well as representing the interests of local government on a national stage. Vibrant, well-run cities of all sizes are an essential ingredient for national development, and the key to well-run cities is local accountability.

- **Actively promote the role of women.**

As a key vector for successful development, support for the role of women needs to move well beyond political correctness; it needs to be consistently promoted as essential to good social and development policy.

Although women constitute half the world's population, and their indispensable contribution to social, economic, and political development has long been understood and recognised, their role continues to be systematically marginalised. In urban development, women invariably provide leadership in the management of savings-driven delivery mechanisms, for example, but they are routinely excluded from the management of economic assets and from local and national political leadership positions. Yet simple procedures—such as recording property rights equally between men and women or allocating them to women alone—have repeatedly demonstrated significant, long-term benefits. As a key vector for successful development, support for the role of women needs to move well beyond political correctness; it needs to be consistently promoted as essential to good social and development policy.

Women at an adult literacy class funded by Paraspara Trust. © John Isaac/ World Bank



- **Promote learning between cities and countries, and between communities.**

The Cities Alliance has identified a growing demand from developing countries for access to the lessons from cities and countries that have already had to tackle similar problems, such as dealing with slum backlogs or rethinking models of city governance. Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Chile, and Colombia, or Asian countries, such as the Republic of Korea, Indonesia, China, and the Philippines, have been identified as having a range of positive and negative experience on issues of urbanisation, slum upgrading, city governance, social exclusion, and social inclusion. The relevance and applicability of these experiences are being recognised in India, Egypt, Uganda, Syria, Ghana, and other countries, and by reforming cities such as Lagos and Lilongwe. The Cities Alliance can expand its role in supporting its members by capturing, analysing, and disseminating these experiences, as well as in facilitating direct horizontal exchanges.

For communities, recent initiatives have provided support directly to networks of organisations working close to the ground, circumventing the delivery chain and giv-

ing the intended beneficiaries more control over the process. The networks can be local, national, or even international. Ideally, the networks should be dominated by organisations that can legitimately claim to represent the intended beneficiaries, and they should be capable of handling finance and reporting on its use. Such criteria are ambitious, if somewhat ambiguous, and may seem unrealistic when applied to large, variegated groups of intended beneficiaries such as the urban poor.

However, some of the most successful of such networks have linked up organisations of the urban poor. In Thailand, the government's Community Organization Development Institute (CODI) has based its acclaimed urban upgrading programme on this sort of networked approach. Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), a network of organisations of the urban poor and a recent member of the Cities Alliance, is now active in more than 20 countries. It has not only been very successful in achieving improvements on the ground, it has changed the ways many local governments engage with their more deprived citizens. It recently set up a fund that channels international financial support directly to organisations of the urban poor.

An upgrading project underway in Bangkok, Thailand.
© William Cobbett/Cities Alliance



- **Provide multiyear, programmatic support.**

While the limitations of supply-driven, sectoral projects have long been recognised, they still occupy a significant place on the international development agenda. Through its members, the Cities Alliance is well positioned to provide multiyear programmatic support to a limited number of countries, which should be largely selected on the basis of their own imperatives of reform. Such programmes should be driven by local partners and provide both the opportunity and the framework for co-ordinated national and international assistance.

- **Build on what already works.**

In conventional development assistance, there are powerful pressures that claim to have found solutions to development problems and then promote them everywhere (claiming, of course, to adapt them to local circumstances). This applies not only to technologies, but also to policies and practices. Local specificities and complexities do not get the attention they deserve. Decisions that should be made locally, within the cut and thrust of local politics, end up being discussed and often made hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away. This tends to drive realistic solutions into the informal sector, where they are difficult to support through conventional assistance.

An alternative approach is to build on what is working locally. From this perspective, the challenge is not to design and scale up best practices, but to identify good practices and help people to improve upon them. This cannot be done by experts and government officials alone. It is local residents and entrepreneurs who know best what is working and what is not, and signals of success are more likely to be more reliable if they come from markets and the actions and opinions of the beneficiaries and their organisations than from project evaluations

This also suggests that the time is right to move beyond the concept of community consultation, which is often reduced to a formalistic process disconnected from real decision making, and insist on local governments recognising the urban citizenship of all residents.

For its part, the Cities Alliance needs to keep constantly reviewing its policies and practices to ensure that it maximises its impact. As a small organisation with a modest budget, the organisation realises that it needs to become even more selective and strategic in its work. However, the fact that its members maintain an ongoing and extremely vibrant debate about the direction of the organisation is a sign of good health after the first 10 years.

Bangkok: canal upgrading as part of Baan Mangkong Programme.
© William Cobbett/Cities Alliance

