

Urbanisation should feature in post-2015 development agenda

By Dr R Seetharaman

One of the key challenges faced by the world is rapid urbanisation and UN-Habitat works on this segment with focus on areas such as urban legislation, urban planning and design and urban economy. UN-Habitat (The UN Human Settlements Programme) is a UN agency for human settlements and sustainable urban development.

UN-Habitat notes that cities face unprecedented demographic, environmental, economic, social and spatial challenges, with six out of every ten people in the world expected to reside in urban areas by 2030. More than 90% of this growth will take place in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Considering this growth, urban areas are central to sustainable development efforts. Rapid urban growth is mainly occurring in countries least able to cope with the demand for decent jobs, adequate housing and urban basic services. Close to 1bn people, or 33% of the urban population in developing countries, live in slums in inequitable and often life-threatening conditions. If left unaddressed, these trends may become sources of social and political instability. Some 60% of the surroundings required to accommodate the earth's urban population by 2050 remains to be built. Higher fuel prices, climate change and limits to fresh water will present a major challenge to urban growth. These challenges provide an opportunity to demonstrate that growth can occur at lower rates of environmental degradation. The innovations required to deliver sustainable urban development will almost certainly arise from the concentration of institutions, people and infrastructure that cities naturally provide.

City of short distances known as compact cities constitute the world's most efficient settlement pattern. Compact cities are based on efficient public transport systems and encourage walking and cycling, low energy consumption and reduced pollution.

The World Urban Forum (WUF) is organised by UN-Habitat, every 2 years and examines rapid urbanisation and its impact on communities, cities, economies and policies. The seventh session of the WUF was held in Medellín, Colombia in April 2014 with the theme "Urban Equity in Development-Cities for Life." According to the concept paper "Urban Equity in Development-Cities for Life" presented in WUF



7, "Equity relates to fairness and in order to be achieved, it requires levelling the playing field politically, socially and economically in the local and global arenas.

Bringing urban equity into the centre of development means that no one should be penalised for where they live, the way they think or believe, or the way they look. It also means that public goods and basic services should be available to everyone, creating conditions to be distributed according to needs. Urban equity in development implies that the urban space should not contribute to reproduce unequal relations or reinforce existing ones.

In this relation, it should ensure that redistributive mechanisms are put in place for a fair, more efficient use of resources, skills and opportunities. Urban equity is a useful tool needed to redefine the urban policy agenda at local, national and regional levels to ensure shared prosperity; and a factor to enhance the city's transformative capacity to bring about collective well-being and fulfilment of all." WUF7 recognised the need for: an urbanisation model that puts people first and fosters social cohesion, especially among socially marginalised groups such as women, youth and indigenous peoples; comprehensive and participatory planning; national urban policies; gender equality and balanced land development; better urban resilience to climate change and other disasters; and safe and affordable transportation.

WUF7 has aimed to further advance the outcomes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) as well as set the stage for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda to affirm the importance of well-planned cities and the potential for urbanisation to be a positive force for present and future generations.

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