World Resources Report

Towards a More Equal City: Framing the Challenges and Opportunities

Victoria A. Beard, Anjali Mahendra, Michael I. Westphal

ABOUT THIS WORLD RESOURCES REPORT

This is the first working paper in a series of working papers that comprise the *World Resources Report: Towards a More Equal City*. It will be followed by other working papers on energy, housing, transportation, water and urban expansion. To obtain the full version of this paper, other working papers, and to view supporting materials please visit www.citiesforall.org.

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Working Papers contain preliminary research, analysis, findings, and recommendations. They are circulated to stimulate timely discussion and critical feedback and to influence ongoing debate on emerging issues. Most working papers are eventually published in another form and their content may be revised.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the world's urban population expected to increase by about 60 percent by 2050, we have an opportunity to build cities where everyone can live, move, and thrive.[1] There is an emerging global consensus that we must work towards cities that provide a high quality of life for all. Achieving this outcome is not guaranteed. It requires a new vision of how to build and manage cities. The decisions cities make today are crucial because they could lock us into a cycle of low productivity, poverty, and environmental degradation for the rest of the century and beyond.

The next generation of cities will be very different from those of the past. As Figure ES-1 shows, the patterns of urbanization we are seeing today create four significant challenges for cities. This demands a reexamination of our conventional responses to urbanization.

First, imagine the entire population of China and India moving into the world's cities by 2050. The urban population is rising at an unprecedented rate: about 2.5 billion more people are expected to be living in cities within just over three decades, and more than 90 percent of that increase will occur in Asia and Africa.[2] By mid-century, estimates show that 52 percent of the world's total urban population will be living in Asia and 21 percent in Africa.[3] About 40 percent of this urban growth will happen in cities that currently have populations between 1 and 5 million.

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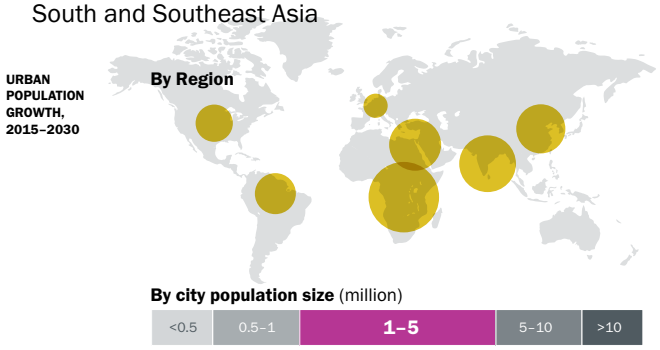
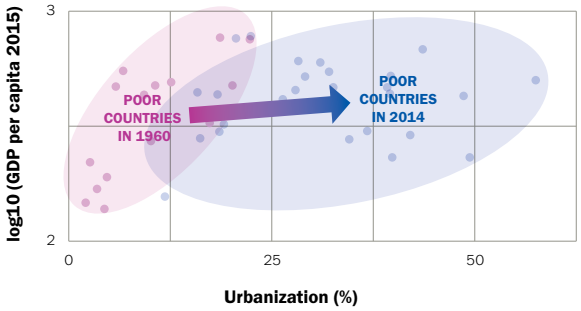
Figure ES-1 | **Four challenges for sustainable cities**

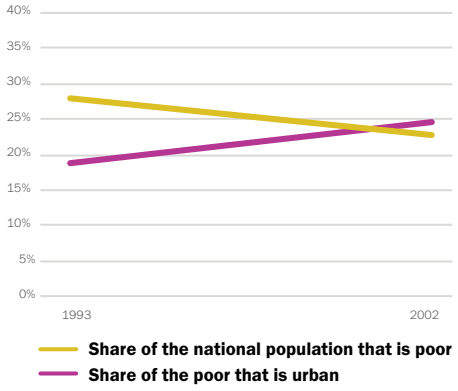
1. Highest rates of urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia



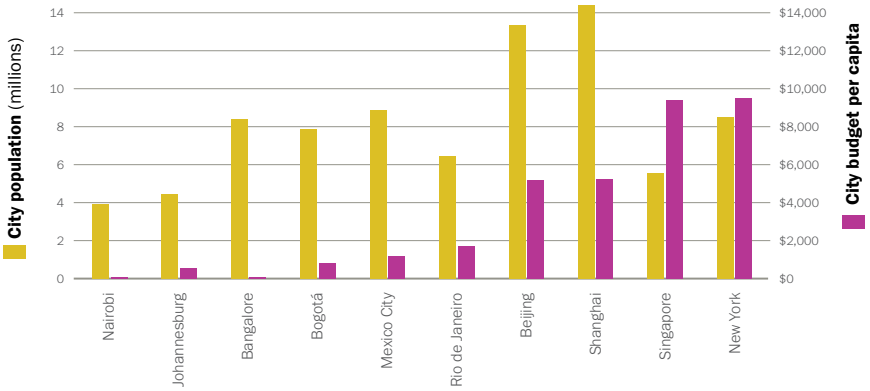
2. Urbanization is now happening in more low-income countries than in the past



3. The share of poor people living in urban areas is on the rise worldwide



4. Cities in the Global South have the fewest public resources per capita



Note: Example trend based on data from India.
Source: Ravallion et al., 2007c: 8.

Second, urbanization is increasingly occurring in lower-income countries. In 1960, very few low-income countries were highly urbanized, but by 2014 many more low-income countries were undergoing rapid urbanization. Many of the countries that have experienced urban growth and economic stagnation are located in sub-Saharan Africa.

Third, while the poverty rate is falling globally, a key challenge is that a higher proportion of the poor than ever before is now living in cities.[4] From the perspective of city governments, this represents a significant challenge because the absolute number of the urban poor is increasing. While the graphic above on the share of the poor living in urban areas is based on data from India, this pattern also is found in other countries of the Global South.

Finally, cities in the Global South that are expected to experience the greatest increases in population have the fewest financial resources per capita to address these challenges.[5] This makes it increasingly difficult for cities to provide access to core services for all urban residents. As many as 70 percent of city residents in the Global South are *under-served*, lacking access to one or more core services: housing, water and sanitation, energy, and transportation.[6] For example, in 2012, more than 482 million urban residents lacked access to modern fuels and 131 million lacked access to electricity; in 2015, 140 million did not have reliable, clean water.[7] City leaders face a tension between meeting the immediate and growing demand for services, and making longer-term decisions that shape the built environment.

When large segments of the urban population suffer from inadequate access to core services, there are economic and environmental consequences. Inadequate service provision undermines people's ability to be economically productive, and challenges them to fend for themselves in inefficient and costly ways that risk harming the environment. This issue is universal, affecting much of the population in cities in the Global South. It presents a challenge, but also offers the opportunity to develop new approaches to providing services that are more affordable, reach more people, and are less environmentally damaging than traditional solutions developed in the Global North.

Given this reality, and with appreciation for the diversity among cities, we have developed a new framework that divides cities into four categories based on their economic productivity and projected population growth between 2015 and 2030: *struggling, emerging, thriving*, and *stabilizing* cities. Both struggling and emerging cities have relatively lower GDP per capita today compared to thriving and stabilizing cities. Struggling cities are likely to experience more rapid population growth than economic growth. Emerging cities are projected to experience economic growth that is greater than population growth. The *World Resources Report: Towards a More Equal City* focuses on struggling and emerging cities because the expected scale of infrastructure and services needed in these cities creates an important opportunity to alter their development trajectory.

The report examines whether providing equitable access to core services leads to a more economically productive and environmentally sustainable city. The report explores actionable approaches to providing core services like housing, water and sanitation, energy, and transportation. Through a series of research papers, the World Resources Report examines sector-specific approaches that have worked in cities across the world, and explores how these practices can help other cities make better choices.

More specifically, the report includes research on how cities can provide growing numbers of residents with secure and affordable shelter located near economic opportunities and urban amenities. It explores the long-term effectiveness of policy approaches such as upgrading informal settlements, support for rental markets in central areas of the city, and more creative use of underutilized land. It examines how cities can meet growing energy needs through improved access to modern fuels, clean and efficient cook stoves, and distributed renewable energy. And in terms of transportation, the World Resources Report analyzes how cities can avoid car-centric decisions and support walking, biking, and public transportation for all. Our research examines whether approaches that prioritize the urban under-served will bring economic and environmental benefits to everyone in the city.

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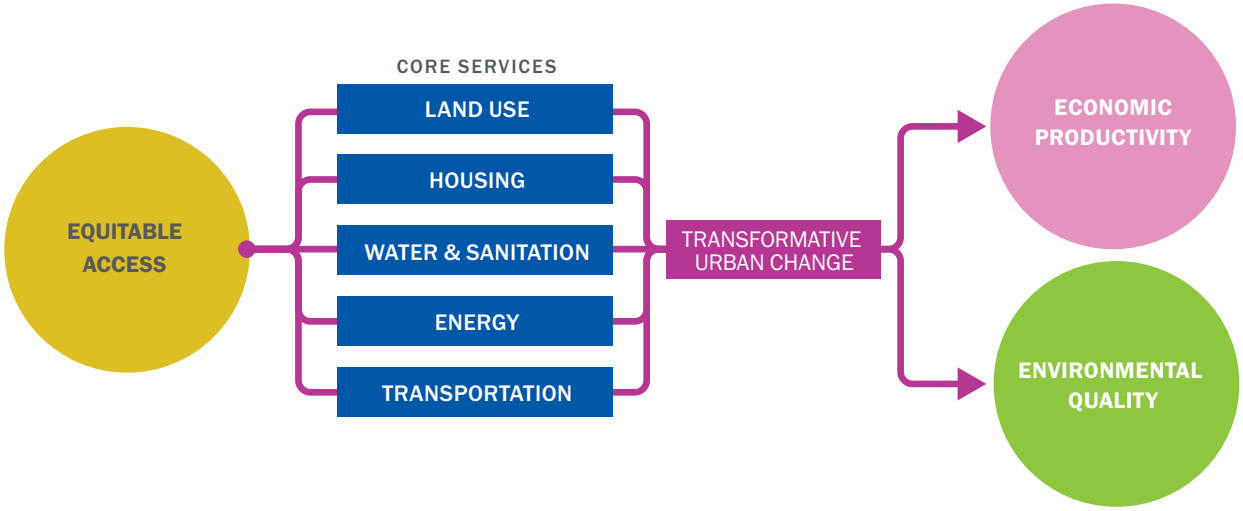
Sector-specific approaches are a start, but they are not enough. To build thriving cities, we need policies that transcend isolated sectoral thinking and piecemeal solutions. Through a preliminary analysis of two case studies, Medellín and Surat, we observed that urban transformation encompasses some common features—a strong coalition of urban change agents with a shared vision, who successfully address a seminal problem and unleash a cycle of positive change; the availability of financial resources to implement ambitious reforms; and a long-term political commitment. Despite these common features there is no single path for every city. Through a series of more in-depth, city-level case studies we will ask the question: Is it possible to learn from cases of successful transformation and use this knowledge to help other cities usher in their own transformation?

Medellín, Colombia transformed itself from the murder capital of the world into a thriving city. It first improved services to under-served communities through imaginative projects that included the construction of a cable car system to connect isolated hillside communities to the city center. The success of this and other urban development projects helped the city government build a coalition with political leaders and the private sector. That, in turn, built momentum for more changes citywide, such as new schools, new parks, and a museum, as well as changes to housing policy that legalized informal homes. No single factor explains the transformation in Medellín; rather, it was a mutually reinforcing set of factors.

Figure ES-2 | **Equitable access as an entry point to sustainable cities**



In Surat, India, an outbreak of plague prompted a change in the health care system and provided the trigger for urban transformation. The city government initiated vigorous cleanup efforts, changes to the waste management and water systems, and new public health monitoring. These reforms were accompanied by changes to the governance and budget processes, and further buoyed by strong municipal leadership and coalition-building with the private sector and civil society groups. The result was transformation in still other areas, such as flood risk management and building climate resilience.

We envision that the outcome of transformative change will be a more equal city. As work on the World Resources Report unfolds over the next year, we aspire to create a social and political movement of urban change agents working towards this outcome. We invite thought leaders, government actors, the private sector, and civil society to imagine cities that can be better for everyone. Our research papers will highlight actionable approaches to providing equitable access to core services as a means to transform cities, as illustrated in Figure ES-2. The city-level case studies will provide a better understanding of how to enable broader and more ambitious citywide transformation. Without equal access to core services, cities may not be able to achieve the higher quality of life, economic productivity, and environmental sustainability that we all desire.

ENDNOTES

1. United Nations, 2014: 1.
2. United Nations, 2014: 1.
3. United Nations, 2014: 12.
4. Ravallion et al., 2007a.
5. United Nations, 2014.
6. Authors' calculations based on analysis of PovcalNet last updated October, 2015.
7. World Bank, 2016b; WHO and UNICEF, 2015.

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