

UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF URBAN GROWTH

Part II: POLICY OPTIONS

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Abstract:

The subject of the presentation, also based on the UNFPA publication on the State of the World Population 2007, is to identify the challenges and opportunities of urbanization, emphasizing in the great potential that urbanization offers to development.

Most of the policies in the past have been focusing on migration and most of them, were aiming to prevent people from coming to the cities. But people will continue to move in search of better opportunities. This makes sense in economic terms and it is a basic human right. So, instead of wasting time and resources to stop migration, we should concentrate on policies that make the environment more conducive to receive these migrants and incorporate the necessary measures to allow poor people to have the right to the city, which is one of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. We are convinced that the better we understand the nature of urban growth and of what would be the most realistic policy options, the better we will be able to deal with the inevitable massive urban increases.

Urbanization is not bad. Cities actually have a great potential: economic, social, demographic and environmental aspects have a much more favourable environment in terms of progress in cities than in the rural areas. The problems and difficulties of the slums of the mega-cities may not necessarily appear if pro-active, foresighted policies are implemented and are addressed in terms of what is going to happen in the next three decades of future urbanization. We will have much better possibilities to prevent negative aspects of urbanization and really benefit from its potential.

It is fundamental that future plans have an approach that integrates cities and rural areas. It is not a question of either rural development or urban development; both are part of the same equation and addressing both in an integral way will give us the best chances for success. Demographic tools and data are critical for analyzing the situation, raising future scenarios of growth and anticipating the magnitude of the challenges.

In conclusion, the main message of this presentation is that urban growth is inevitable and has a very high potential for sustainable development. Exploiting this potential requires a pro-active attitude. Urbanization should be integral part of national and global efforts to reduce poverty.