

SUSTAINABLE CITIES¹

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The challenges faced by the cities today particularly in the developing world are manifold. These are rising population, growing urbanization, widening inequalities, adapting and mitigating climate risks and realizing the full economic potential of agglomeration of economies . How to make cities sustainable in the wake of these onerous challenges is therefore not an easy task ?

What is **Sustainability** ? There are many different interpretations but what is most accepted definition is “ meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs” . It has **three** main pillars: economic, environmental, and social. These **three** pillars are informally referred to as people, planet and profits.

Developing world population mainly in South Asia and Africa would keep on moving on an upward rising slope for the next few decades. By 2050 their share in the world population is projected at 80 percent of the world population. Today, over 4 billion people around the world – more than half the global population – live in cities. This trend is expected to continue. By 2050, with the urban population more than doubling its current size, nearly 7 of 10 people in the world will live in cities. The majority of the additional 3 billion urbanites would be concentrated in Asia and Latin America. Similarly, the number of urban agglomerations (750,000 inhabitants or more) and the number of inhabitants per agglomeration are expected to grow significantly in Asia and Africa by 2025 . It is expected that over 80 per cent of the urban population added in the next 15 years will be found in middle-income countries such as China, India, South Africa, Nigeria, Indonesia and Pakistan.

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Cities and metropolitan areas are powerhouses of economic growth—contributing about 60 per cent of global GDP. However, they also account for about 70 per cent of global carbon emissions and over 60 per cent of resource use.. The levels of urban energy consumption and pollution are quite high. Cities occupy just 3 per cent of the Earth’s land, but account for 60-80 per cent of energy consumption . Many cities are also more vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters due to their high concentration of people and location so building urban resilience is crucial to avoid human, social and economic losses..pollution deteriorates everyone’s health and affects workers’ productivity and therefore the economy, and natural disasters have the potential to disrupt everyone’s lifestyles.

Over 1 billion people live in slums and this number keep rising. Widening income Inequality can lead to unrest and insecurity. Informalisation and control on the livelihoods of the slum dwellers by the slum lords working in connivance with the Police and other government functionaries have dampened the urban growth impulses. Consequently, urban population growth has outpaced economic growth as well as the needed improvement of competence and institutional capacity of city governments in many developing countries. In contrast there is a close correlation found in developed countries and for good reasons. The reallocation of factors of production from low productivity (agriculture) to high productivity sectors (manufacturing and services) forms the basis of sustained economic growth. By concentrating people, investment and resources (a process known as agglomeration), cities heighten the possibilities for economic development, innovation and social interaction. High density of populations reduces the unit cost of provision of infrastructure and services.

Agglomeration economies allow scaling up of production, spill over of skills , and transfer of know how , availability of intermediate inputs and reduced length of supply chain , In developing countries, on the other hand, diseconomies set in due to informalization of the economy particularly in the production and distribution of goods and services , unplanned and poorly resourced squatters and urban slums, congestion scarcity premium that are paid by the slum dwellers for land, housing, water, transport (due to dysfunctional institutions of governance) , air pollution, decrepit infrastructure , unequal access to, and inefficient use of public services such as water , energy ,sewerage, education and health care ,financial fragility arising from persistent gap between revenues accruing to the city government and the expenditures it is obligated to incur. In Pakistan, for example, there are multiple jurisdictions within the metropolitan areas with their own independent governance and provision system but fragmented responsibilities without any coordination . The end result is that the correlation between high growth and urbanization breaks down.

The above outcome of haphazard urbanization in developing countries is a result of the policies that left cities to grow organically. The cost of poorly

planned urbanization would rise in future in form of the huge slums, tangled traffic, greenhouse gas emissions and sprawling suburbs. Slums are a drag on GDP, and lower life expectancy. By choosing to act sustainably we choose to build cities where all citizens live a decent quality of life, and form a part of the city's productive dynamic, creating shared prosperity and social stability without harming the environment.

To get **urban development** right, the **cities** have to create productive jobs and offer better livelihoods and thus increase economic growth; improve social inclusion; promote the decoupling of living standards and economic growth from environmental resource use; protect local and regional ecosystems; and reduce both urban and rural poverty.

This requires a functioning city based on an integrated and coordinated response at the local, national levels. Besides retrofitting the old cities the predominance of small- and medium-sized cities provides an opportunity to invest in green infrastructures, bypassing old energy technologies, and in social development to minimize social inequities. Rural development has to form part of an integrated approach to sustainability and for reducing poverty. Ensuring wider and inclusive access to public services can reduce rural/urban inequalities, disaster risk and food insecurity, as well as strengthen networks between cities and villages.

The agenda for building sustainable cities is by no means easy to achieve as it involves multiple goals, many stakeholders, huge investment and strong institutions. To get this configuration in place in countries whose past record is not that impressive may sound unrealistic but there is hardly any alternative.

.Building sustainable cities would require investment in (a) renewable energy sources, (b) efficiency in the use of water and electricity, (c) design and implementation of compact cities, (d) retrofitting of buildings and increase of green areas, (e) fast, reliable and affordable public

transportation and (f) improved waste and recycling systems. They would need resources to support green technology transfer, and capacity development, and to improve access to soundly constructed housing, water and sanitation, electricity, health and education, and to adopt a sustainable framework that encourages the city's growth within ecological limits, and the building of resilience against the adverse impact of natural hazards.

Today, 90% of urban expansion in developing countries, occurs most of the time near natural hazards, rivers, and coastlines, and through informal and unplanned settlements. Lack of adequate infrastructure, land use planning, and building codes exacerbates the risks to which urban dwellers are exposed.

Poorer segments of the population are particularly vulnerable, since they tend to live in more hazardous settlements and lack the necessary safety nets to recover from economic or environmental shocks. Preparing cities for disaster and climate risks and strengthening urban resilience are thus critical to all development and poverty reduction efforts.

Building sustainable cities would require partnerships among governments, private sector and other civil society groups to achieve resource efficient and environmentally sound production patterns, sustainable lifestyles, circular economy and spur new businesses with additional jobs focusing on green technologies and environmental services. Private sector participation through various mechanisms such as public-private-partnerships will help to improve the level of investments and efficiency of urban environmental management.

What is the way forward?

South Asia's policymakers, the World Bank report says, face a choice: Continue on the same path or undertake difficult and appropriate reforms to improve the region's trajectory of development. It won't be easy but such actions are essential in making the region's cities prosperous and livable

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Once the required investments and partnerships are in place, Sustainable cities have to be equipped to perform the following five major functions to meet the challenges of the future,

Economic development ω Green productive growth ω Creation of decent employment ω Production and distribution of renewable energy ω Technology and innovation (R&D)

Social development ω Education and health ω Food and nutrition ω Green housing and buildings ω Water and sanitation ω Green public transportation ω Green energy access ω Recreation areas and community support

Urban governance ω Planning and decentralization ω Reduction of inequities ω Strengthening of civil and community organizations ω Autonomy and devolution

Environmental management ω Waste and recycling management ω Energy efficiency ω Water management (including freshwater) ω Air quality conservation ω Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change

To make our cities livable, productive the provincial-local government relationships have to be revisited. Devolution of administrative powers and financial authority should be clearly defined and driven by rules rather than discretion. Local governments in form of autonomous directly elected Metropolitan corporations, Municipal Corporations, Municipal Committees and Town committees should have full responsibilities for devolved functions such as Education, Health, Water and Sanitation, Solid and liquid waste disposal, Public Transport etc. The capacity of these bodies has to be upgraded and strengthened by inducting highly qualified and experienced experts and specialists in urban planning, water and sewerage delivery, solid waste disposal, resource mobilization, traffic engineering, energy efficient building design. The Chief Executives of these bodies should be senior officers from Civil services or the private sector. It is

gratifying to note that the new laws of Local government approved by the Punjab and KP assemblies contain most of these elements and their performance and operations should be watched with great interest. The innovative feature of these laws is separation of urban governance structures from those of the rural as the problems faced by the two are quite distinct. In the past, the District Governments dominated by the rural representatives did not pay as much attention to the urban areas. The multiplicity of jurisdictions charging local taxes, fees, user charges, cesses, fines and penalties etc would have to be unified under one Metropolitan or Municipal Corporation..

It is a pity that in Pakistan the four provinces are able to raise only Rs 7 billion as property taxes on a stock of immovable property worth trillions of rupees . Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta, Faisalabad should be able to generate sufficient resources to take care of the provisioning of public goods and services in their areas without claiming any significant shares upon the Divisible tax pool. The population of these cities would be forthcoming as their taxes and fees would be spent on the facilities, amenities and services provided exclusively to them and their cities. The propensity to pay taxes increases if the benefits of their use are perceived to be appropriated locally . This would free up a lot of resources from the Divisible Tax pool to be disproportionately allocated to the backward districts in each province improving their infrastructure and investing in human resources. This strategy would not only uplift millions out of poverty but also reduce regional disparities in the country.

To conclude, each country has to formulate and execute the agenda for Sustainable cities in the light of their own peculiar conditions but one common lesson that emerges from successful stories is that administrative, legal and financial devolution to the local governments, and empowerment in decision making to the communities at grass root levels is a *sine qua non*. In addition, strong collaborative partnerships and close coordination between the Government, private sector and civil society has higher probability of success in meeting the difficult challenges of urbanization in contrast to the cases where an adversarial and confrontational relationship exists between these actors.

