

Links between the changing environment, livelihood and the world of work

Urbanisation

The succeeding pages present for your examination and discussion an actual, on-going initiative on green jobs. A facilitator will be provided to your group to direct the discussions and assist you in completing the assigned tasks within the time provided.

Instructions:

1. Read the case study provided your group. (15 min)
2. Discuss among yourselves, using as guide the questions indicated below. The facilitator may also pose some questions to probe further or elaborate certain points. (30 min)
3. Write your responses to these questions on the flip charts provided. (5 min)
4. Choose a member of your group to present your outputs in plenary. Each group is given a maximum of 10 minutes to give a brief description of their case, then present their discussion results.

Total time: 1 hour 45 min

Guide Questions:

1. What is the social/economic (labour) challenge or issue in the case?
2. What environmental factors greatly affect/are affected by this challenge/issue?
3. What are the probable impacts of this challenge/issue on specific stakeholders?
4. How are these impacts responded to?
5. How could these responses be enhanced or strengthened to ultimately lead towards green jobs?

Introduction

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed unprecedented rates of urbanization. Between 1985 and 2000, the world's urban population increased from 1,994 million to 2,926 million. In 2000, 47 per cent of the world's population was urban¹. Today, half of humanity now lives in cities and by 2030, nearly 60 per cent of the world's people will be urban dwellers². These trends are the direct outcome of the natural expansion of the population already living in cities, combined with continued rural-to-urban migration.

Urban growth is most rapid in the developing world, where cities gain an average of 5 million residents every month. In Africa and Asia, the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030³. The proportion of poor people in Asia has fallen in recent decades but the region still accounts for two-thirds of the world's poor, of whom 250 million are in urban areas⁴. Recent economic growth has largely bypassed the urban poor as the benefits of growth do not always trickle down very fast.

Unprecedented urbanization rates are changing the face of poverty: increasingly, poverty is manifesting itself in cities. Millions of jobseekers, men and women, are resorting to the urban informal economy, where they earn just enough to survive, without any form of social security for neither themselves nor their families. Most cities cannot cope with this rising poverty.

Challenges

The exploding urban population growth creates unprecedented challenges. In many developing countries, urban expansion has often been characterized by informality, illegality and unplanned settlements. Above all, urban growth has been strongly associated with poverty and slum growth. The basic infrastructure of cities is often underdeveloped and in a bad state of maintenance. Basic services are not functioning or do not reach the poorest neighbourhoods. In addition to suffering low incomes, the urban poor are thus exposed to health hazards due to bad drainage, waste accumulation, a lack of sanitary facilities and so on.

The informal sector in cities is sizable, as the formal sector has struggled to generate enough job opportunities to meet the growth in urban jobseekers. Both the qualified unemployed and people with low employability have had to turn to informal self- or wage employment, where they earn just enough to survive, without any form of social security for neither themselves nor their families.

¹ ILO 2004, Cities at Work: Employment promotion to fight urban poverty, http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/recon/eiip/download/cities_at_work.pdf.

² UN Water 2010, Water and Cities, http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/water_cities.html

³ UN Water 2010, Water and Cities, http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/water_cities.html

⁴ ILO 2004, Cities at Work: Employment promotion to fight urban poverty, http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/recon/eiip/download/cities_at_work.pdf.

Poverty forces poor households and enterprises to exploit their immediate living and working environment often beyond its capacity to restore itself, and so destroys the basis for any future improvement in their own lives and those of their children. Large swathes of deforestation are found around cities, uncontrolled disposal of household and enterprise waste is rampant, and the poor exacerbate pollution and fall prey to illness because they have to resort to obsolete technology, non-renewable, inefficient energies and toxic substances. In addition, difficult conditions in unplanned settlements are often compounded by seasonal flooding. The poor infrastructure of unplanned settlements (e.g drainage and roads) and the quality of housing typically worsen significantly the impact of flooding for slum dwellers and limits their ability to confront such weather and environment related challenges.

Opportunities and responses

Despite these challenges, cities are also places of opportunity. Improvements in infrastructure and services can directly and indirectly improve the lives of large numbers of people.

Urbanization brings together a number of fundamental changes that can be positive, namely: (a) in the employment sector, from agriculture-based activities to mass production and service industries; (b) in societal values and modes of governance; (c) in the configuration and functionality of human settlements; (d) in the spatial scale, density and activities of cities; (e) in the composition of social, cultural and ethnic groups; and (f) in the extension of democratic rights, particularly women's empowerment.⁵

Cities are a source of wealth: no country has ever achieved sustained economic growth or rapid social development without urbanizing (countries with the highest per capita income tend to be more urbanized, while low-income countries are the least urbanized). Thanks to superior productivity, urban-based enterprises contribute large shares of gross domestic product (GDP).

High urban densities reduce transaction costs, make public spending on infrastructure and services more economically viable, and facilitate generation and diffusion of knowledge, all of which are important for growth. Hand in hand with economic growth, urbanization has helped reduce overall poverty by providing new opportunities, raising incomes and increasing the numbers of livelihood options for both rural and urban populations.

A number of countries have, to some extent, managed to curb the further expansion of slums and to improve the living conditions prevailing there. Uneven as they may have

⁵ UN Habitat 2010, State of the World's Cities 2010/2011, <http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/listItemDetails.aspx?publicationID=2917>.

been around the world, efforts to narrow the most unacceptable form of urban divide as represented by slums have yielded some positive results. According to UN-HABITAT estimates, between the year 2000 and 2010, a total 227 million people in the developing world will have moved out of slum conditions. In other words, governments have collectively exceeded the slum target of Millennium Development Goal 7 by at least 2.2 times, and 10 years ahead of the agreed 2020 deadline. Asia stood at the forefront of successful efforts to reach the slum target, with governments in the region together improving the lives of an estimated 172 million slum dwellers between the year 2000 and 2010; this represents 74 per cent of the total number of urban residents in the world who no longer suffer from inadequate housing.⁶

Investments in infrastructure delivery can have important implications for employment creation. The direct results of investments include the generation of jobs, incomes and business opportunities, particularly if local resource-based methods are applied for the development, maintenance and operations of infrastructure of public and community interest. Longer lasting impacts such as improved access to goods and services, and larger production and productivity gains can contribute to sustainable poverty reduction and local development.

Rural and urban development strategies can be explicitly made more pro-poor by optimizing the employment impact of physical upgrading strategies in infrastructure and service delivery, providing social-safety nets, and other alternatives in the form of unemployment insurance, micro financing or job training.

Urbanization can indeed play a positive role in overall poverty reduction, particularly where supported by well-adapted policies. However, when accompanied by weak economic growth, or when infrastructure or distributive policies are nonexistent or ineffective, urbanization results in local concentration of poor people rather than significant poverty reduction.

Clearly, if the urban economy is to be instrumental in eradicating poverty through expanding output, generating more decent jobs and complying with (more realistic and affordable) regulations, its production patterns and environmental management will have to become more sustainable. Enormous changes to production and consumption patterns are due to occur within the next few decades, particularly in the key areas identified by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002: water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity. These changes will be a source of challenges, but also of opportunities, particularly for cities and their hard-working, innovative and resilient dwellers.

⁶ UN Habitat 2010, State of the World's Cities 2010/2011, <http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/listItemDetails.aspx?publicationID=2917>.

The thrust for strengthening the environment-employment relationship has to come from policies backed by civil society participation and private sector initiatives. Positive changes cannot be achieved by any one individual or by government efforts alone. It is vital that these opportunities should be created through growth that is not only pro-poor, but also respectful of the environment which supports them. Workers and entrepreneurs need to be well trained and to have good working conditions in order to appropriately support the green urban economy. If all these issues are taken into account, there is a potential win-win situation regarding the urban environment and decent work.

Urban development policies that integrate environmental concerns with broader economic and social planning can present interesting responses to the challenges and opportunities posed by the rapid urbanization that characterizes many Asian countries.

In China, the National Development and Reform Commission initiated the National Low Carbon Province and Low Carbon City Experimental Project. The project provides the target provinces and cities with an impetus to act on energy intensity reduction targets and achieve greater environmental sustainability.

Environmental considerations are being integrated into development planning, and industrial and economic policies. Measures being implemented include incentive policies such as soft loans, land grants to encourage the development and/or absorption of clean technologies, targeted public investments, and the development of research and educational programs.

Cities are well placed to deliver low carbon programs at scale such as recycling schemes, generation of energy from waste, integrated public transport systems, infrastructure for cleaner vehicles (e.g. plug-in car points), green buildings.

In terms of economic development and employment, the pilot municipalities and provinces are in a good position to become centres for the production of clean energy technologies and green products in general thanks to the impetus coming from environmentally friendly development planning, as well as specific skill development programs aimed at supporting emerging green sectors. Vocational training programs are being developed by the government in tandem with local industries as part of an effort to proactively address changing requirements.

Additional information

Unemployment and Pollution: Major concern for future among city residents

A recent survey (September, 2009) by UN-HABITAT showed that among the current economic problems that most bothered citizens within cities, most were related to employment issues (Figure 1a). Among environmental problems pollution took the lead (Figure 1b).

Figure 1: Problems in cities: respondents' views to a survey by UN-HABITAT (2009)

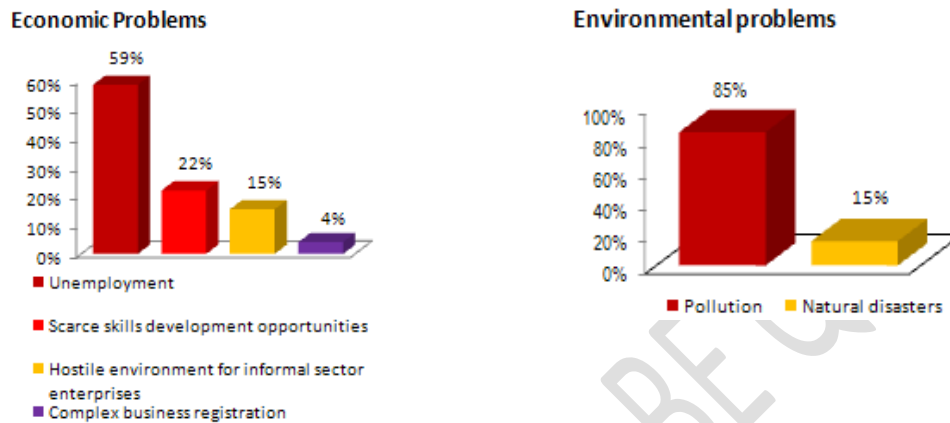
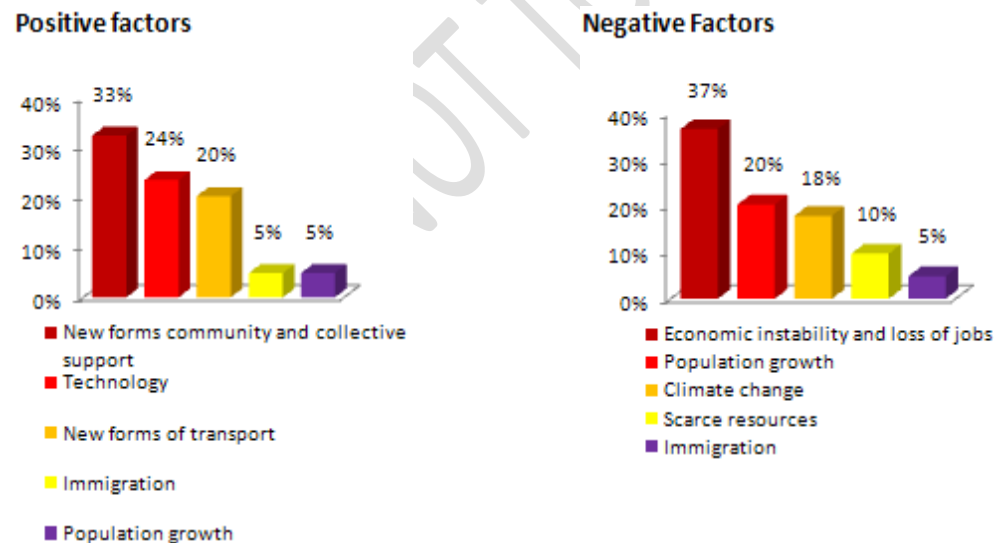


Figure 2: Factors affecting future of cities: respondents' views survey by UN-HABITAT (2009)



Source: <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=595&cid=7284>

A question about the future of cities indicated that 'economic instability and loss of jobs' and climate change were cited as having significant adverse impacts (Figure 2). Interestingly population growth featured in both positive and negative factors albeit with the ranking reversed.