

Between 2000 and 2050, there is little population growth projected for the industrial countries or for the rural developing world. Thus nearly all of the projected world population growth of some 3 billion people by 2050 will be added to the cities of developing countries, much of it in squatter settlements.

Squatter settlements — whether they are *favelas* in Brazil, *barriadas* in Peru, or *gecekondus* in Turkey — typically consist of an urban residential area inhabited by very poor people who do not have any land. They simply “squat” on vacant land, either private or public.

Life in these settlements is characterized by grossly inadequate housing and a lack of access to urban services. As Hari Srinivas, coordinator of the Global Development Research Center, writes, these rural-urban migrants undertake the “drastic option of illegally occupying a vacant piece of land to build a rudimentary shelter” simply because it is their only option. They are often treated if not by apathy then by antipathy by government agencies, who view them as invaders and trouble. Some see squatter settlements as a social “evil,” something that needs to be eradicated.

Urban slums include not only squatter settlement but also severely rundown older parts of cities, which are also overcrowded and often lacking in rudimentary urban services, such as sewage disposal.

One of the best ways to make rural/urban migration manageable is to improve conditions in the countryside. This means not only providing basic social services, such as basic



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health care and education for children, but also encouraging industrial investment in small towns throughout the country rather than just in prime cities, such as Mexico City or Bangkok. Such policies will slow the flow into cities to a more orderly pace...

Some political elites simply want to bulldoze squatter settlements away, but this treats the symptoms of urban poverty, not the cause. People who lose what little they have been able to invest in housing are not richer as a result of the demolition, but poorer, as is the city itself. The preferred option by far is in situ upgrading of housing. The key to this is providing security of tenure to the squatters and small loans, enabling them to make incremental improvements over time.

Upgrading slums depends on local governments that respond to them rather than ignoring

DESIGNING SUSTAINABLE CITIES

By Lester R. Brown
Excerpted from *Plan B 2.0*

Aside from the growth of population itself, urbanization is the dominant demographic trend of our time. In 1900, 150 million people lived in cities. By 2000, it was 2.9 billion people, a 19-fold increase. By 2007, more than half of us will live in cities — making us, for the first time, an urban species.

them. Progress in eradicating poverty and creating stable, progressive communities depends on establishing constructive links with governments. In some cases, government-supported micro-credit lending facilities can help not only establish a link between the city government and the squatter communities but offer hope to the residents.

Although political leaders might hope that these settlements will be driven away or demolished, the reality is that they will likely expand over the next several decades. The challenge is to integrate them into urban life in a humane way that provides hope through the potential for upgrading. The inevitable alternative is mounting resentment, spreading social friction, and violence.

LESSONS FROM BOGOTÁ

One of the most remarkable modern urban transformations has occurred in Bogotá, Colombia, where Enrique Peñalosa served as Mayor for three years, beginning in 1998. When he took office he did not ask how life could be improved for the 30 percent who owned cars; he wanted to know what could be done for the 70 percent — the majority — who did not own cars.

Peñalosa realized that a city that is a pleasant environment for children and the elderly would work for everyone. In just a few years, he transformed the quality of urban life with his vision of a city designed for people. Under his leadership, the city banned the parking of cars on sidewalks, created or renovated 1,200 parks, introduced a highly successful bus-based rapid transit system, built hundreds of kilometers of bicycle paths and pedestrian streets, reduced rush hour traffic by 40 percent, planted 100,000 trees, and involved local citizens directly in the improvement of their neighborhoods. In doing this, he created a sense of civic pride among the city's eight million residents, making the streets of Bogotá in this strife-torn country safer than those in Washington, D.C.

Enrique Peñalosa observes that "high quality public pedestrian space in general and parks in particular are evidence of a true democracy at work." He further observes:

"Parks and public space are also important to a democratic society because they are the only places where people meet as equals...In a city, parks are as essential to the physical and emotional health of a city as the water supply." He notes this is not obvious from most city budgets, where parks are deemed a luxury. By contrast, "roads, the public spaces for cars, receive infinitely more resources and less budget cuts than parks, the public space for children. Why," he asks, "are the public spaces for cars deemed more important than the public spaces for children?"

In espousing this new urban philosophy, Peñalosa is not alone. The reform he initiated in Bogotá is being carried on by his successor, Antanas Mockus. Now government planners everywhere are experimenting, seeking ways to design cities for people not cars. Cars promise mobility, and they provide it in a largely rural setting. But in an urbanizing world there is an inherent conflict between the automobile and the city. After a point, as their numbers multiply, automobiles provide not mobility but immobility.

Lester R. Brown, founder and President of Earth Policy Institute, has been described by *The Washington Post* as "one of the world's most influential thinkers" and as "the guru of the global environmental movement" by *The Telegraph* of Calcutta. This article is excerpted from *Plan B 2.0*.

Plan B 2.0 is a don't-miss major expansion and update to Lester Brown's best-selling book *Plan B*. In this new book Brown outlines a plan, a budget, and a timetable for rescuing our twenty-first century civilization. The plan includes eradicating poverty and stabilizing population, protecting and restoring soils, forests, rangelands, and fisheries, and conserving the earth's biological diversity.

"Lester Brown tells us how to build a more just world and save the planet from climate change in a practical, straightforward way. We should all heed his advice," says former President Bill Clinton.

Plan B 2.0 can be purchased from the Earth Policy Institute online at www.earthpolicy.org or by calling 202-496-9290.

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