



General Assembly Second Committee

Topic 1: Human Settlements¹

26 September 2017

Human settlements are the places people live. They may be urban or rural. Until 2007, most people lived in rural areas. In 2007, the balance tipped. Since then, more than 50 percent of the world's inhabitants have lived in cities. By 2029, the percentage of urban residents will reach 60 percent.² By 2050, the figure will be 66 percent.³

Human settlements have physical, environmental, political, social, and cultural elements. According to the UN, these can be divided into “(a) physical components of shelter and infrastructure; and (b) services to which the physical elements provide support, that is to say, community services such as education, health, culture, welfare, recreation and nutrition.”⁴ In addition, each human settlement exists in a unique environment that affects life in the community and is affected by that community.⁵

The fundamental goal of sustainable development is to improve conditions in human settlements while preserving or improving the environment. Achieving improvements in human settlements would enable individuals to more fully enjoy the political, civil, economic, cultural, and social rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁶ In addition, it would create more national, regional, and international stability and security.

Increasing urbanization poses both opportunities and challenges. In terms of opportunities, cities are sites of concentrated economic activity, which is necessary for economic development.⁷ They are also places where services such as education and health care can be delivered efficiently, when funds and personnel are available.

When urban populations grow faster than economic opportunities and services, increasing urbanism can complicate development and compromise human rights. Today, this is the situation in many countries. Less-developed countries (LDCs) have been particularly affected, for two reasons. First, people in LDCs are moving from rural areas to cities in large numbers. The highest rates of growth are anticipated in Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia, Nepal, Niger, Eritrea, Rwanda, Malawi, South Sudan, and Burkina Faso. Cities in these countries are growing at rates around 2% per year,⁸ which means they will double in size in less than 35 years. Second, cities in less developed countries have fewer organizations and resources to address the needs of urban residents.

¹ This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams, Nicholas Potratz, Ashley Zuelke, and Jessica McCutcheon. Copyright 2017 by Karen Ruth Adams.

² UN News Centre, “Top UN official highlights impact of financial crisis on world’s urban poor,” 23 October 2008, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=28683&Cr=housing&Cr1>.

³ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision,” <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2014-Report.pdf>, p. 1.

⁴ UN Statistics Division, *Glossary of Environment Statistics*, Series F, No. 67 (1997), quoted in OECD, “Glossary of Statistical Terms: Human Settlements,” <http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1266>

⁵ UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “What is Human Settlements,” <http://www.unescap.org/huset/whatis.htm>; accessed 15 February 2009.

⁶ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1948, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

⁷ David E. Bloom, et al, “Urbanization and the Wealth of Nations,” *Science* 319: 5864 (8 February 2008), 772-775.

⁸ United Nations, “World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision,” p. 68.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

As a result of the gap between urban immigration and economic opportunities, urban slums are found throughout the world and are growing quickly. According to UN-Habitat (the UN organization charged with improving conditions in human settlements), a slum household lacks any one of the following:

1. Access to improved water (access to sufficient amount of water for family use, at an affordable price, available to household members without being subject to extreme effort);
2. Access to improved sanitation (access to an excreta disposal system, either in the form of a private toilet or a public toilet shared with a reasonable number of people);
3. Security of tenure (evidence of documentation to prove secure tenure status or *de facto* or perceived protection from evictions)
4. Durability of housing (permanent and adequate structure in non-hazardous location)
5. Sufficient living area (not more than three people sharing the same room).⁹

The number of people living in slums has increased from 689 million in 1990 to 881 million in 2014. This is approximately one-third of urban residents and nearly one-seventh of the world's population.¹⁰ Without drastic action, UN-Habitat predicts that the world slum population will continue to grow by six million per year.¹¹

Slums not only pose challenges to their inhabitants. They also impose environmental, social, and political costs on other people, as well as on the states and regions in which they are found. Many slum dwellers reside on steep slopes and in flood plains, which contributes to environmental degradation and vulnerability to environmental disaster.¹² In addition, slum residents live in close proximity to one another and have access to few services, such as trash collection, clean water, sanitation, and health care. This increases pollution and facilitates the spread of disease. Finally, slums offer few employment and educational opportunities. Thus they are often marked by crime and political unrest.¹³

UN Member States must find ways to improve life in human settlements. As they do so, they must cope with increasing urbanization, economic crisis, and climate change. Today, most of the world's cities are in coastal areas. According to scientists, climate change makes it more likely that coastal cities will experience natural disasters, such as hurricanes and tsunamis, which may force their populations to move. For other cities, the two main effects of climate change will be increased migration from coastal cities and rural areas, and increased demand for energy to keep homes, office buildings, industrial plants, and transportation networks cool as temperatures rise.¹⁴ This means that major electrical black-outs like those experienced in India in 2012 are likely to become more frequent.¹⁵

⁹ UN-Habitat, "Slums: Some Definitions," 2007, http://mirror.unhabitat.org/documents/media_centre/sowcr2006/SOWCR%205.pdf.

¹⁰ UNCTAD, "Development and Globalization: Facts and Figures 2017," <http://stats.unctad.org/Dgff2016/DGFF2016.pdf>.

¹¹ United Nations, "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision," p. 2.

¹² UN Commission on Sustainable Development, "Sustainable Human Settlements Development: Implementing Agenda 21," March 1994, available at <https://www.ircwash.org/resources/sustainable-human-settlements-development-implementing-agenda-21>.

¹³ UN News Centre, "Top UN official highlights impact of financial crisis on world's urban poor."

¹⁴ UN-Habitat, "Cities and Climate Change: Global Report on Human Settlements 2011," 2011, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/cities-and-climate-change-global-report-human-settlements-2011-abridged-report>.

¹⁵ Andrew C. Revkin "The Power Gap Behind India's Mass Blackouts," *New York Times*, Dot Earth blog, 31 July 2012, <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/31/the-power-gap-behind-indias-mass-blackouts/>

Montana Model UN High School Conference

History and Current Events

After World War II, improvements in agricultural technology and medical care allowed the world population to grow rapidly. Population growth was especially strong in developing countries, which had not previously benefited from increasing food supplies, declining infant mortality, and longer life expectancies.

According to the UN Population Division, in 1950, the world population was 2.5 billion. By 2014, it had grown to 7.24 billion. Between 1965 and 1970, the annual rate of world population growth rate peaked at 2 percent per year then began to decline. From 1980-2011, the world population grew at a rate of 1.45 percent per year. Due to declining birth rates, this rate is projected to fall. Nevertheless, by 2050, the world population is expected to reach 9.55 billion.¹⁶

As shown in Table 1, from 1950 to 2017, the percentage of the world's population living in less developed regions rose from 68 to 83 percent. Due to low fertility rates, the population of more-developed regions will remain largely unchanged between 2017 and 2050, growing from 1.26 billion in 2017 to 1.29 billion in 2100. By contrast, the population of less-developed regions is projected to grow 157 percent, from 6.3 billion in 2017 to 9.9 billion in 2100. According to the UN, less developed regions include "Africa, Asia (excluding Japan), Latin America and the Caribbean plus Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia."¹⁷

Table 1¹⁸
World Population and Population Density in More- and Less-Developed Regions

Year	Population in More Developed Regions			Population in Less Developed Regions		
	#(Billions)	%*	density [±]	#(Billions)	%*	density [±]
1950	0.82	32%	16.6	1.7	68%	21.3
2017	1.26	18	25.7	6.3	83	77.7
2050 (est)	1.30	14	26.4	8.4	87	104.6
2100 (est)	1.29	12	26.2	9.9	89	122.2

* Percentage is of total world population

± Population density refers to persons per sq. km

Table 1 also shows that population density is currently three-times higher in less developing regions (83 persons per sq. km) than in more developed regions (26 persons per sq. km). Population density is a marker of urbanization. In less developed regions, population density increased 264 percent from 1950 to 2017, compared to just 57 percent in more developed regions.

Together, these data show that levels and rates of urbanization are highest in less-developed countries. According to the UN Population Division, in 2007, the five largest cities were Tokyo, New York, Mexico City, Mumbai, and Sao Paolo. In 2025, the five largest cities will be Tokyo, Mumbai, Delhi, Dhaka, and Sao Paolo.¹⁹

According to the UN, from 2014 to 2050, the proportion of people in less-developed regions who live in cities is likely to increase from 48 to 63 percent.²⁰

¹⁶ UN Population Division, "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision," p. 21,

¹⁷ UN Population Division, "Definition of Major Areas and Regions," in "World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision," 2008, http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2008/wpp2008_highlights.pdf.

¹⁸ Derived from UN Population Division, "World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision," Custom Data Query, <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/>, accessed 25 September 2017.

¹⁹ UN Population Division, "Urban Agglomerations 2007: Wall Chart," http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wup2007/2007urban_agglo.htm

Montana Model UN High School Conference

Although the rate of urbanization has increased, 60 percent of urban dwellers currently live in small cities of less than one million. By 2025, the UN predicts that just half of urban dwellers will live in cities less than one million. This growth in large urban centers will contribute to the growth of megacities. In 1970, the world had only two megacities: Tokyo and New York. Since then, their number has increased, and most new megacities are in developing countries. "In 2014, 18 countries accommodated 28 so-called megacities, that is, urban agglomerations with 10 million inhabitants or more. China and India... host six and three of these largest cities respectively. Brazil, Japan and the United States have two megacities each, and the remaining 13 countries have one megacity each."

In addition, the UN notes that

Cities that are expected to surpass for the first time the 10 million mark before 2030 are located in countries that had no megacities up to now, except for China and India, who will be adding one more and four more cities, respectively. Several capital cities of Asian, African and South American countries will become megacities before 2030, i.e., Bangkok, Bogotá, Lima and Luanda, along with former capitals Dar es Salaam (United Republic of Tanzania) and Ho Chi Minh City (Viet Nam), and other cities such as Johannesburg (South Africa), and Lahore (Pakistan).²¹

Because economic growth rates have generally exceeded urbanization rates, urbanization has offered opportunities to individuals and governments. But the benefits of economic growth have not been spread equally. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), from 1970 to 2007, gross domestic product (GDP, or national income) per capita (per person) in Africa grew by a factor of 4.5, compared to 10.5 in Latin America and 17.3 in Asia.²²

There are also important differences among countries. According to UNCTAD, from 1990 to 1998, twenty-two LDCs were "stagnant or in economic regress. In 11 of these, all of which experienced serious armed conflicts and internal instability during the 1990s, the real GDP per capita ... [declined] by more than 3% annually."²³ By contrast, from 2002 to 2007, even the poorest or "least developed" LDCs experienced some economic growth.²⁴

The financial crisis that began in 2008 slowed the growth of most countries in the world. In October 2008, as the crisis was breaking, UN-Habitat Executive Director Anna Tibaijuka addressed the GA-2, arguing that "rapid, uncontrolled urbanization and a dearth of affordable housing were the underlying causes of the current financial crisis." When low-income Americans were given "access to housing through risky lending and borrowing practices, the results [were] devastating, prompting ... government intervention and ... [a] resurgence of homelessness."²⁵

According to Tibaijuka, the economic crisis in developed countries that spread to LDCs through a downturn in trade, investment, and aid meant that the number of people living in slums (which was already 1 billion)

²⁰ UN Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*, p. 23.

²¹ UN Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*, pp. 18, 90-92.

²² Prices are in current dollars. UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Handbook of Statistics 2008*, Table 8.1, <http://stats.unctad.org/Handbook/TableViewer/tableView.aspx>; accessed 21 October 2009.

²³ UNCTAD, "Least Developed Countries Report 2000," December 2000, available at <http://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationArchive.aspx?publicationid=119>.

²⁴ UNCTAD, *LDC Report 2009*, pp. 1-7, http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ldc2009_en.pdf

²⁵ UN General Assembly, "UN-Habitat Chief, in Second Committee, Cites 'Rapid and Chaotic Urbanization,' Shortage of Affordable Housing as Causes of Global Financial Crisis," Press Release GA/EF/3224, 28 October 2008; <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/gaef3224.doc.htm>

Montana Model UN High School Conference

would rise even faster than before. Unless governments addressed the “urban poverty crisis,” she argued that civil rest would occur.²⁶

Fortunately, after several years of recovery, a new economic cycle “commenced with a resumption of economic growth in 2010.”²⁷ Yet the majority (64 percent) of wealth remains in developed countries, and the very least developed countries have seen their gross domestic product per capita (per person) fall to the lowest levels since 1971.²⁸

In 2006, before the economic crisis began, one-third of urban residents worldwide lived in slums. According to UN-Habitat Executive Director Tibaijuka, rates of slum living ranged from 6 percent of urban populations in the developed world to 72 percent in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, and nearly 100 percent in some sub-Saharan African states. In between were Latin American countries, at 31 percent, and Asian countries, at 57 percent.²⁹

According to UN-Habitat, “the global slum population grew on average by six million a year” between 2000 and 2016. In 2015, 59 percent of urban populations in Sub-Saharan Africa lived in slums.³⁰ According to UN-Habitat, “Every year 14 million more people join the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately 30% of these go on to live in ‘formal’ urban areas. The remaining 70% live in informal settlements or slum conditions. Of these just 2% can expect to escape these conditions.”³¹

Countries in Asia have had greater success in eliminating slums,³² largely due to China and India which together lifted 125 million people out of slum conditions between 1990 and 2010. China has made the most progress with a 25 percent decrease in slum conditions between 2000 and 2010.³³ Latin American has also achieved a 17 percent reduction since 2000.³⁴

Causes of Urbanization

According to *Science* magazine, urbanization occurs in three ways. First, people move from rural areas to cities (rural-urban migration). Second, although birth rates are usually lower in urban areas, death rates are too, which yields a larger population. Third, as rural towns grow, they are reclassified as urban areas. Of these, rural-urban migration is the most significant. It is responsible for 40 to 50 percent of urban population growth.³⁵

Rural-urban migration occurs for several reasons. Most important is the search for jobs. When there is a demand for unskilled labor, rural to urban migrants can gain employment and avoid slum living. However, with continuing global economic difficulties, and cycles in the market, migrants often do not find adequate employment

²⁶ UN News Centre, “Top UN official highlights impact of financial crisis on world’s urban poor.”

²⁷ UNCTAD, “Development and Globalization: Facts and Figures 2017.”

²⁸ UNCTAD, “Development and Globalization: Facts and Figures 2012,” <http://dgff.unctad.org/chapter2/2.1.html>.

²⁹ BBC News, “Report reveals global slum crisis,” 16 June 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/in_depth/5078654.stm

³⁰ UN-Habitat, “Slum Almanac 2015-2016,” available at <https://unhabitat.org/slum-almanac-2015-2016/>.

³¹ UN-Habitat, “Urban Trends: 227 Million Escape Slums,” <http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/SOWC10/R1.pdf>

³² UN-Habitat, “Slum Almanac 2015-2016.”

³³ UN-Habitat, “Urban Trends: 227 Million Escape Slums.”

³⁴ UN-Habitat, “Slum Almanac 2015-2016.”

³⁵ Bloom et al., “Urbanization and the Wealth of Nations,” p. 774.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

to ensure access to affordable housing outside of slums.³⁶ Rural-urban migration is also encouraged by government policies favoring city dwellers, who are more politically active than their rural counterparts.

In addition, wars and natural disasters create refugees, who generally settle in urban areas. According to the Brookings Institution, “[d]isplacement is increasingly an urban phenomenon. The displaced are also more likely than ever before to seek protection in cities, rather than in refugee camps.” Approximately 60 percent of refugees seek asylum in urban environments as opposed to traditional camps today. Refugees from the ongoing conflict in Syria offer a clear example of this. Syrian refugees have overwhelmingly relocated major cities throughout Europe and in Turkey.³⁷

Historically, Asian urbanization has been largely the result of industrialization and employment opportunities. By contrast, African urbanization has been strongly affected by political instability, civil conflict and ethnic tension.³⁸

Climate Change Challenges

In 2015, about 100 million people were affected by natural disasters.³⁹ Climate change is expected to increase this number. Thus it is likely to contribute to further rural-urban migration. Increasing urbanization will, in turn, increase vulnerability to natural disasters. Urbanization concentrates people in coastal areas, along rivers, and in areas marked by environmental degradation, all of which are especially vulnerable to disaster.⁴⁰ In addition, urban residents use more resources and emit more greenhouse gases than their rural counterparts, which contributes to climate change.⁴¹ Recent natural disasters -- such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2005 Pakistani Earthquake, the Australian bushfires, and Hurricane Harvey (among other recent hurricanes in the region in 2017) show the effects of climate change on human settlements.⁴²

Climate change is also expected to raise sea levels. Because two-thirds of the world’s largest cities are located in coastal areas, this will have profound effects on the quality of life for urban residents and will create pressures to resettle them elsewhere. According to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),

Many millions more people are projected to be flooded every year due to sea-level rise by the 2080s. Those densely-populated and low-lying areas where adaptive capacity is relatively low, and which already face other challenges such as tropical storms or local coastal subsidence, are especially at risk. The numbers affected will be largest in the mega-deltas of Asia and Africa while small islands are especially

³⁶ UN-Habitat, “Slum Dwellers to double by 2030: Millennium Development Goal Could Fall Short,” 2007, available at http://mirror.unhabitat.org/documents/Preskit_whd2005.pdf.

³⁷ Jessica Brandt, Bruce Jones, and Bruce Katz, “What Makes Displacement Different Today?” *Brookings*, 13 September 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/metropolitan-revolution/2017/09/13/what-makes-displacement-different-today/>.

³⁸ Bloom et al., “Urbanization and the Wealth of Nations.”

³⁹ UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, “2015 Disasters in Numbers,” 2016, http://www.unisdr.org/files/47804_2015disastertrendsininfographic.pdf.

⁴⁰ William Donner and Havidan Roderiguez, “Population Composition, Migration and Inequality,” *Social Forces* 87:2 (December 2008), pp. 1090-1093.

⁴¹ UN General Assembly, “UN-Habitat Chief, in Second Committee.”

⁴² “Natural disasters and extreme weather,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/natural-disasters>, accessed 3 March 2009; Robinson Meyer, “Did Climate Change Intensify Hurricane Harvey?” *The Atlantic*, 27 August 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/08/did-climate-change-intensify-hurricane-harvey/538158/>.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

vulnerable. Adaptation for coasts will be more challenging in developing countries than in developed countries, due to constraints on adaptive capacity.⁴³

More than 634 million people are in coastal regions that could be inundated. Among the cities threatened are: Mumbai, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Miami, Ho Chi Minh City, Kolkata, New York, Osaka-Kobe, Alexandria, Tokyo, Tianjin, Bangkok, Dhaka, and Hai Phong.⁴⁴ If and when it becomes necessary to evacuate these cities, inland cities will be stretched further. All cities are likely to face increased demand for energy for cooling, which could lead to electrical black-outs, loss of vital service such as water, loss of economic productivity, and civil uncertainty, as well as even faster climate change, since today's carbon-based energy sources such as oil and coal contribute to the greenhouse effect.⁴⁵

Previous Committee Work on This Topic

UN Member States first addressed human settlements in 1976, at the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I), which was called by the General Assembly. Because they are closely related and must be addressed simultaneously to achieve sustainable progress, states decided to address housing, building, transportation, water, sewage, the environment, and development together in the concept of human settlements.

The result of HABITAT I was the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements (1976), in which UN Member States noted that “the condition of human settlements largely determines the quality of life, the improvement of which is a prerequisite for the full satisfaction of basic needs, such as employment, housing, health services, education and recreation.” The Vancouver Declaration articulated objectives, principles, and guidelines for both rural and urban settlements.⁴⁶ According to the Declaration, it is each government's responsibility to create sustainable human settlements.

In 1978, the GA launched UN-Habitat to assist in the creation of socially and environmentally sustainable development. The full name of UN-Habitat is the UN Human Settlements Programme.⁴⁷ UN-Habitat reports to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which in turn reports to the GA. Most substantive debate on human settlements occurs in the GA-2, due to its concern with economic development.

In 1992, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, Member States created the Commission on Sustainable Development and called on it to use effective human settlements as an indicator and goal of sustainable development. In addition, Agenda 21 called on developed countries to increase their foreign aid to developing countries to 0.7 percent of their GDP.⁴⁸

⁴³ IPCC, “IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Working Group II, Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability,” 2007, p. 12, <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

⁴⁴ IPCC, “IPCC Fifth Assessment Report: Working Group II, Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability,” 2007, p. 555, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/>.

⁴⁵ Elisabeth Rosenthal, “The Cost of Cool,” *New York Times*, 18 August 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/sunday-review/air-conditioning-is-an-environmental-quandary.html?pagewanted=all>

⁴⁶ Vancouver Declaration On Human Settlements (1976), http://mirror.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/The_Vancouver_Declaration.pdf.

⁴⁷ UN-Habitat, “History, Mandate, and Role in the UN System,” <http://www.unhabitat.org/history-mandate-role-in-the-un-system/>, accessed 25 September 2017. See also UN General Assembly, Resolution A/56/206 (1 January 2002), <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?ID=2070&catid=10&typeid=231&subMenuId=0>

⁴⁸ UN-HABITAT, “Habitat Debate: 30+ dreams and reality,” mirror.unhabitat.org/pmss/getElectronicVersion.aspx?nr=2104&alt=1

Montana Model UN High School Conference

In 1996, the GA called a second Habitat conference in Istanbul. At Habitat II, 171 UN Member States approved the Habitat Agenda, which establishes a global plan of action for “adequate shelter for all” and “sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world.” In 2001, the GA adopted the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium. This declaration noted failures in implementing the Habitat Agenda and urged further action to eradicate poverty.⁴⁹

In 2016, the GA held a third Habitat conference in Quito, Ecuador. At the conference, states adopted a plan entitled the “New Urban Agenda.” In it, the 167 participating countries state that they believed that cities “can be the source of solutions to” problems facing the world, instead of the cause of problems. The plan

lays out standards and principles for the planning, construction, development, management, and improvement of urban areas along its five main pillars of implementation: national urban policies, urban legislation and regulations, urban planning and design, local economy and municipal finance, and local implementation.⁵⁰

In December 2016, the General Assembly unanimously adopted the New Urban Agenda in Resolution 71/256. In resolution 235, adopted unanimously in the same month, the UN adopted a resolution on the implementation of the outcome of Habitat III (i.e. the New Urban Agenda). The latter resolution noted the “importance of promoting and taking concrete action for the full, effective and timely implementation of the New Urban Agenda at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels.”⁵¹

Since 2000, UN-Habitat hosted sessions of the World Urban Forum to support governments in implementing the Habitat Agenda. The ninth forum will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2018. The forum will be the first held since the adoption of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 (see below). The forum will focus on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.⁵²

In 2000, world leaders gathered in New York to draft the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were intended to realize measurable progress towards reducing poverty and improving the well-being of individuals throughout the world by 2015.⁵³ By 2015, while there were many successes or on targets aimed to reduce poverty and hunger, improve the lives of slum-dwellers, improve sanitation, and provide clean drinking water, many regions fell short of their targets, especially with regard to improving the lives of slum-dwellers.⁵⁴

As part of the 2000 Millennium Declaration, UN Member States adopted a goal for developed countries to contribute 0.7 percent of their GDP in aid to achieve the MDGs. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), if all developed countries had met this goal, there would have been sufficient funds to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to a report from the MDG gap Task Force, only a handful of

⁴⁹ General Assembly Resolution A/S-25/2, “Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium,” 16 August 2001, <http://www.un-documents.net/s25r2.htm>.

⁵⁰ UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), “New Urban Agenda,” 10 October 2016, <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf>.

⁵¹ Both resolutions are available on the Resolutions page of the UN General Assembly website. For these and other resolutions from the 71st Session, go to “Resolutions adopted in the 71st Session of the General Assembly,” Dag Hammarskjöld Library, <http://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/71>.

⁵² UN-Habitat “World Urban Forum,” <https://unhabitat.org/wuf/>, accessed 26 September 2017.

⁵³ United Nations, “End Poverty: Millennium Development,” <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>.

⁵⁴ United Nations, “The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015,” available at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/reports.shtml>.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

developed countries abided by the 0.7 percent assistance goal. By 2014, developed states had only delivered about \$135 billion of the \$326 billion (about 40 percent) of the aid that would have been necessary to achieve the MDGs.⁵⁵

As 2015 approached, given the lack of progress in many areas of the MDGs and the need to generate sustainable forms of development, Member States began developing a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the MDGs. In September 2015, the UN adopted 17 SDGs based on 169 specific targets for the UN to achieve by 2030.⁵⁶

The new SDGs aim to “not only to eradicate extreme poverty, but also to integrate and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social and environmental—in a comprehensive global vision.” Goal 11 prioritizes people living in urban areas specifically, as it aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.” Many of the other goals, such as ending poverty, taking action on climate change, and reducing inequality, among others, will also have indirect impacts on people in cities if they are achieved.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Although less-developed countries have seen some resurgence in their economies and have made important improvements in poverty, access to water, and conditions for hundreds of millions of today’s 880 million slum dwellers, there is much still to do with regard to human settlements. How can the GA-2 help UN Member States improve conditions for today’s slum dwellers and prepare for the long-term growth of cities and the challenges that cities will face as climate change continues? In developing your country’s position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- What is the level and rate of urbanization in your country? If people are moving to cities, why are they doing so? What are your country’s cities like? What percentage of your country’s urban population lives in slums?
- How economically developed is your country? Are economic growth rates keeping up with the rate of urbanization? Why or why not?
- If your country is still developing, what progress did it make on the MDGs, especially the goals noted above? Has it made progress on the SDGs, especially Goal 11? What challenges does it face?
- If your country is a more-developed country, did it meet the target of giving 0.7 percent of GDP in foreign aid? Why or why not? Could it and would it be willing to provide aid for the SDGs?
- Has your country experienced natural disasters? Has it received large numbers of refugees? How vulnerable is it to climate change? Has your country received or given international assistance to address these problems?
- Are your country’s policies consistent with the Habitat Agenda and other UN declarations about human settlements?
- Given the continuing international economic crisis and projections about the effects of climate change, how can and should the UN address human settlements? For example, should the GA endorse restrictions on rural-urban migration to prevent slum development or on energy use to prevent electrical black-outs and over-reliance on carbon-based fuels?

Recommended Reading

⁵⁵ UN Integrated Implementation Framework, “Official Development Assistance,” <http://iif.un.org/content/official-development-assistance>.

⁵⁶ “Breakdown of U.N. Sustainable Development Goals,” The New York Times, 25 September 2015, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/world/breakdown-of-un-sustainable-development-goals.html>.

⁵⁷ United Nations, “Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016,” 2016, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20Report%202016.pdf>.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

BBC News. “Urban Planet.” 15 August 2007. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/world/2006/urbanisation/

This BBC website features in-depth reports on slum dwellers, modern cities, urban migration, and the environmental impact of human settlements.

UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). “New Urban Agenda.” 10 October 2016. <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf>.

The New Urban Agenda is the outcome document of the third UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. The document contains descriptions not only on the commitment of states to sustainable development in cities and human settlements, but also a detailed description of the current plan of implementation for states’ commitments.

UN-Habitat. “Home.” Available at <https://unhabitat.org/>.

The UN-Habitat website provides a plethora of information on human settlements, including major cross-cutting issues and themes, information on the organizations existing programs, and news and recent publications on Human settlements. This site also provides access to the text of all of the UN declarations and resolutions related to human settlements.

UN-Habitat. “Cities and Climate Change: Global Report on Human Settlements 2011.” Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/cities-and-climate-change-global-report-human-settlements-2011-abridged-report>.

This report emphasizes issues facing the topic of human settlements with a particular emphasis on climate change. See also Chapter 8 of the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*, which discusses climate change’s effects on Urban Areas https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIIAR5-Chap8_FINAL.pdf.

UN-Habitat. “Information by Country.” Available at <http://open.unhabitat.org/countries/>.

This site provides access to information about UN-Habitat’s operations in 76 countries.

UN-Habitat. “WUF9.” Available at <http://wuf9.org/>.

You can find details about the Ninth World Urban Forum scheduled to meet in 2018 on this page.

United Nations. “World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision.” Available at <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/>.

This report addresses a number of issues related to urbanization and human settlements. The key findings and the section on urbanization and natural hazards are especially helpful. The report also contains statistics such as population densities and earthquake risks for major cities.

United Nations. “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016.” Available at <http://www.un.org.lb/Library/Assets/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2016-Global.pdf>.

This report provides analysis of the progress and challenges faced in attaining the SDGs in 2016. UNCTAD also offers a detailed examination of progress on the SDGs in its 2016 Development and Globalization: Facts and Figures report, available at <http://stats.unctad.org/Dgff2016/DGFF2016.pdf>. Another interesting document related to the MDGs is “SDG Toolkit” available at <http://www.undp.org/content/sdfinance/en/home/how-to-use-this-toolkit.html>.