

**Forum:** United Nations Development Programme

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## Introduction

With the constant development of the world and the rapid decrease of the planet's natural resources, discussions about sustainable communities have entered the spotlight. Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, it has become clear that not only have the planet's resources been exploited and used up at an alarming rate, but the culture that we live in today has changed.

We now live in a society where the ideal lifestyle is to live in the big, well-known cities and have high paying jobs, causing the rise of so-called "megacities". The first megacity to appear in the world was New York, which exceeded a population of 10 million in 1930, 20 years later, the second megacity rose, with Tokyo joining New York, as the second country to surpass a population of 10 million. With the idea of living in cities leading to success and better opportunities becoming ever-so-popular, the migration from rural to urban areas has drastically increased. In a bit over half a century, the number of cities and metropolitan areas exceeding a population of 10 million rose from 2 to 46, as of 2014 over half of the world's population lived in urban areas and its believed that two-thirds of the population will live in cities by 2050.

As of 2017, there exist a total of 47 mega-cities and metropolitan areas across the globe: 33 in Asia, 5 in South America, and 3 each in North America, Europe, and Africa. There is no doubt that the rise of megacities and the increasing migration from rural areas to urban areas has caused issues ranging from poverty and crime to the blistering decrease of natural resources. As the migration from rural areas to urban areas becomes ever so popular, the consequences of megacities, which are slowly becoming apparent, will become clear.

In order to combat humanitarian issues, the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit created the framework “Transforming our world: 2030 for sustainable development”, consisting of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, specifically deals with making cities and human settlements “inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable”. Even though each country deals with creating a sustainable environment in its own ways, there are general guidelines and targets set by the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, which consist of 7 main targets they wish to achieve by 2030. Addressing issues regarding the growth of megacities should be done with caution and conviction, as possible solutions and changes will vary depending on the country or region.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Sustainable Development**

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

### **Urban Agglomeration**

An extended city or area made up of multiple suburbs connected and merged in order to make an urban area.

### **Megacity**

An urban agglomeration with a population exceeding at least 10 million people.

### **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

Also known as the Global Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals were first thought of during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development back in 2012, however, the current 17 SDGs were established during the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, where they adopted the “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development”. They were built upon the success of the Millennium Goals (MDGs) and revolve around dealing with sustainability issues around the world. The 17 goals deal with issues such as injustice, poverty, and hunger, education, sexism, health, renewable energy, clean water sources, among others.

### **Slums**

An overpopulated urban area marked by crowding, poor housing, poverty, and social disorganization.

### **Metropolitan Area**

A combination of cities, suburbs, towns, and environs where a major city has a commanding economic and social influence.

### **General Overview**

The popular opinion about megacities is that they are beneficial and crucial to the development of a country and its economy. Most people prefer to overlook the consequences and regard them as sacrifices needed to be made in order for the development of the world. However, we must realize that these issues will continue to grow alongside the megacities themselves. In order to ensure the safe development of the world and countries, measures must be taken in order to avoid further disasters that could arise from these issues.

### **Positive Impacts of Megacities**

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, the idea of success and the “ideal” life has changed; people started realizing that urbanization could bring benefits, which they would never obtain with a rural lifestyle. These benefits include employment, higher pay, better healthcare, transportation, readily available water and energy supply, etc. They started connecting rural life with one full of hardships and thought it to be primitive. Over the course of history, cities have always been considered as hubs where innovation and progress take place, a place where individuals may become experts on certain fields without having to worry about survival. A lot of this “security” comes from the fact that most, if not all, cities have a group of leaders in charge of making the city suitable and comfortable for its inhabitants. These groups ensure that the majority of the population do not suffer from lack of basic needs and have opportunities allowing them to become contributing members of the society. There are other reasons why cities are able to have these benefits, such as industrialization and commercialization. Industrialization, the development of industries, and commercialization, the process of managing something for financial gain, have allowed cities to gain monetary profit thus allowing them to invest and develop the benefits most people seek when they migrate to urban areas.

Due to the rapid development of cities and people being able to reap the benefits of living in urban areas, these have brought countless positive impacts to society over the last few centuries. One of the most commonly talked about impacts that have been brought by urbanization is accessibility and efficiency. Because of the nature of cities, basic necessities such as food, healthcare, education, and social services, are easily found and obtainable for the majority of the population. As previously mentioned, since basic necessities are not the priority for most people, cities have allowed them to specialize in certain fields, some even consider urbanization to be the base of overall development and growth. The rise of cities has also lead to a lot of economic impacts. Since the introduction of industrialization and commercialization, the manner in which money, goods, and services are handled has become very important. Most people also correlate the overall development of cities to the increase in the economy of cities. As cities and society develop, they tend to need more and more workers who actively participate in the economy, which could lead to an economic growth for the city.

### **Complications Arising from Urbanization into Cities**

There is no denying that the rise of megacities has done a lot for the world and given results that would have never been obtained had people stayed in rural areas. However, the rapidly increasing urbanization has also created many consequences we must be aware of. Most of the issues megacities face are directly correlated to the size of its population. One of the problems that are clear in megacities is the rising population that lives in poverty and in the slums, also known as urban poverty. Although one of the factors that make cities appealing are the possibilities for employment and a better life, the unfortunate truth is that it does not apply to everyone and that there are multiple people who suffer from this reality. The World Bank considers that there are five main factors that affect Urban Poverty: low income leading to inability to afford essential needs, poor health leads to inability to secure stable job, poor education leads to inability of getting high-income jobs, lack of security can lead to poor health and loss of basic needs, and lack of empowerment leads to loss of motivation to seek employment. Many of the people that move to cities from rural areas, seeking for better opportunities, face the reality that they are inadequate for a lot of the higher-income jobs. A prime example of this could be the Vietnamese immigrants who moved the United States during

the Vietnam War, although they moved to the US seeking better futures, a lot of the immigrants ended up working blue collar jobs.

Not only are megacities harshly affecting the living standards for a percentage of its population, but they are also affecting the environment and the world around. There are some who believe that having a large percentage of the population in one single area will reduce the overall pollution and have a smaller ecological footprint. However, it is also clear that the needs of the megacities are taking a toll on the environment and the planet. To put things into perspective of how much damage megacities and cities, in general, have caused over the years, cities only take up 3% of the Earth's land but are responsible for 60-70% of energy consumption and roughly 75% of carbon emissions. One of the reasons why carbon emissions tend to skyrocket when a substantial amount of people are put together is because of the benefits mentioned earlier. Due to urbanization, a grand majority of the world's population no longer grow their own food, instead, they rely on companies to transport crops from dedicated farms. The transportation of crops from farms to the cities causes an increase in carbon emissions. Some believe that due to urbanization, there should be fewer carbon emissions as everyone and everything is so close to each other, however, the issue is that the damage caused by carbon emissions is being concentrated in a specific location causing greater damage than if the damage was spread out around the globe.

In short, the increasing population in a limited area is causing a portion of the population to live under inadequate living standards such as poor and insecure housing, polluted areas, lack of proper energy and water supply, violence, lack of public service, between others. These could possibly be fixed if they lived in a more rural, spacious area or if countries and cities started working to improve the overall standards of living of the entire population.

### **Establishing Sustainable Communities**

According to the World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Talks about sustainable development originally started during the 1993 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, where Agenda 21 was created. This agenda is split into four different sections, each dealing with a different aspect

of sustainable development. Section 1: Social and Economic Dimensions dealt mainly with issues such as poverty, health, consumption, consumption, and promotion of sustainable human settlements and ecological decisions. Section 2: Conservation and Management of Resources for Development dealt with issues such as deforestation, pollution, radioactive waste, conservation of biodiversity, between others. Section 3: Strengthening the Role of Major Groups revolved around motivating different groups to join the battle for sustainable development. The last section, Section 4: Means of Implementation was about what countries and groups could do in order to achieve sustainable development. A lot of people see Agenda 21 as the base for working on sustainable development. It allowed countries and groups who were not educated on the topic to learn the importance of it and what they could do in their own way.

Since the creation of Agenda 21, there have been multiple reports showcasing the progress that has been made and new information that they have learned. Some of the more known ones include the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which was set during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the 2012 Rio+20, which was the last Earth Summit before Agenda 21 was changed into the SDGs. Both the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the 2012 Rio +20 revolved around evaluating the progress made since the prior Earth Summit and addressing new challenges that they had discovered. There are multiple other reports that deal with sustainable development, such as the Millenium Development Goals, were the development goals set before the SDGs were established and were set until the year 2015. Due to the time limit of the Millenium goals being up, they were eventually replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals in 2016 and were set until the year 2030. Sustainable Development has been a topic that has been talked about for multiple decades. However, due to the nature of the issue, each country regards sustainable development at different levels of urgency, causing countries to work on accomplishing the SDG 11 goals and targets in their own method.

For example, China has implemented different policies such as the New Urbanization Plan (2014-2020), which deals with improving the quality of life for lower income members of the population by aiding in the transition from a rural to urban lifestyle, create reforms around taxation, housing and environment, and refurbishing run-down urban areas. Other policies China

has set to establish sustainable communities are the 13th Five Year Plan and the Guidance on Strengthening Urban Planning and Construction Management. The 13th Five Year Plan is a list of overall goals and targets China wishes to meet from the years 2016-2020, however, this Five Year Plan has been especially centered around creating a more sustainable community. Some of the targets included in the Five Year Plan are to decrease carbon emissions, increase share in non-fossil fuel energy, and lift 55.7 million individuals out of poverty. Another example of how each country deals with sustainable communities in a different way in India. India, unlike China, has shown to focus more on improving public services for all members of the population, rather than focusing on those with lower incomes. One of their most prominent plans is the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, which has goals such as access to tap water and sewerage facilities for everyone, maintain parks and open spaces, create smart cities with internet access and weather prediction, and reduce pollution by promoting public transport.

## **Major Parties and Organizations Involved.**

### **China**

As the country with the most megacities in the world, China has a crucial stance and involvement in SDG 11. As of 2017, it has been recorded that China has 15 megacities, out of the existing 47, home to at least 260 million people. Due to China's size and population, it is one of the leading countries in terms of sustainable development. Over the years, China has implemented multiple policies and plans, such as the New Urbanization Plan in 2014, the 13th Five Year Plan, and Guidance on Strengthening Urban Planning and Construction Management, all centered around the idea of making cities livable and improving life for citizens.

### **United States of America**

As one of the most powerful and influential countries in the world, the United States is home to two of the largest megacities in the world, New York City, and Los Angeles. Even though it only has two cities that are classified as megacities, there are still multiple cities across the country with a large population that face similar problems. Regarding SDG 11, the United States has been able to make improvements over time such as reducing the percentage of inadequate households occupied and implementing countermeasures for natural disasters and its consequences. However, there is much work still to be done, especially regarding issues

revolving around poverty, consumption of waste and resources, and development plans for public use.

## Japan

Even though Japan is one of the smaller countries in the world, it is home to the largest megacity, Tokyo, with a total population of roughly 38 million. Due to Japan being one of the world's leaders in technological development, it has managed to use technology to its advantage. One way the country has done this is by providing quick access to services such as healthcare, social welfare, and disaster migration, through networks that are accessible throughout most of the country. Due to its disaster-prone geographic location, Japan is also very advocating about goals establishing safer settlements and structures.

## India

India the 7th largest country in the world and the 2nd most populated and is home to two of the world's largest megacities, Delhi and Mumbai. Although a majority of the population live in rural areas, it is believed that by 2030, there will be at least 6 megacities in India. The government of India is very vocal about addressing SDG 11, they have multiple programs and plans working all over the country in order to ensure the safety of the population and create an adequate environment for all. Some of the plans and organizations they have are Smart Cities Mission, ATAL Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, all centered around improving city infrastructure and quality of life.

## Indonesia

Indonesia is one of the fastest growing middle-income cities in Asia: 53% of Indonesia's population now lives in urban areas, however, roughly 20% of the population still live in slums. Much like Japan, Indonesia's geographic location makes it prone to natural disasters; it was reported that in 2014, 1,559 disasters took place affecting over 2 million people. A lot of what Indonesia does to achieve the targets of SDG 11 is mainly done through the government and its plans to increase spending on public services, improving living standards, housing, etc. However, due to the lack of up-to-date technology and budget, Indonesia has been working with the World Bank Group (WBG) to accomplish its goals.



## Mexico

Although Mexico only has one megacity, it has been actively participating in achieving the SDGs. Mexico is part of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) seeking to create a more efficient government to promote transparency, citizen participation, and innovation. Most of the work Mexico has done regarding SDG 11 has been making fundamental changes to their existing laws and regulations, allowing them to further improve living standards across the country. Mexico's local authorities and governments are also actively involved in promoting approaches to sustainable development in the cities and also advocate for citizen engagement and participation.

## South Korea

One of the smaller countries in the world, South Korea is home to the 5th largest megacity, Seoul, with a population of roughly 25 million. South Korea has a total population of 51 million, meaning that roughly 50% of the total population lives in Seoul alone. South Korea already has multiple plans in action to improve living standards, mostly focusing on public infrastructure, public services, and environmental protection. Some of these plans are The Second Master Plan for Public Transportation, The Fifth Comprehensive Mid-term Plan for Environmental Protection, and Guideline for Evaluation of Sustainability and Living Infrastructure of Cities.

## Timeline

Date	Description of event
1930	New York City becomes the first megacity surpassing a population of 10 million
1950	Tokyo becomes the most populated city in the world and joins NYC as the second megacity
1962	Term “megacity” is first used in the same sense as it is used now

1980	Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Osaka join NYC and Tokyo as megacities
1992	Agenda 21, regarding the fight for sustainable development, is created during the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit
2000	World Leaders sign The United Nations Millennium Declaration, in order to fight poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women
2010	20 megacities spanning across all continents except Australia
2015	The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are established in the “Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for sustainable development”, SDG 11 specifically deals with sustainable communities
2016	Monitoring Framework for SDG 11 is created by UN-Habitat
2017	Total of 43 megacities and metropolitan areas exceeding 10 million areas
2018	Total of 29 megacities across the world

### **UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

Most of the UN involvement regarding sustainable communities comes from work done by the United Nations Development Programme. The UNDP is the main branch of the United Nations that focuses on resolving and achieving SDGs. It started out as an organization mainly dedicated to poverty reduction and inequality, so when they help countries with sustainable development, they focus on three main aspects; sustainability, inclusiveness, and resilience. They wish to create sustainable cities that will bounce back from any issues and resolve the ones they already face, with an inclusive environment where all groups of people are allowed to participate and share the benefits, and ones with opportunities for everyone. Since each country has different

needs and face different situations, the UNDP tries to help cities by suggesting solutions tailored for their specific situation and issues and by helping improve the systems that shape the cities (finance, environment, society enterprise, etc.). The UNDP joins forces with city-led initiatives and significant figures and organizations that all share a common goal. The following are some of the plans of actions and resolutions that have been established over the years, focusing on sustainable development and establishment of sustainable communities.

- Agenda 21: This is one of the first plans of actions set in order to create sustainable communities. Agenda 21 is a non-binding plan of action that was adopted by 178 countries which focuses on several different aspects of sustainable communities such as poverty, health, pollution, conservation of biodiversity, education, etc. Some of the main points of the Agenda include laying down the fundamentals of sustainable development and how to tackle it, such as finding out what is causing the issues and how to change for the better, such as improving education, raising awareness, involving the general public, constant monitoring, etc. Although Agenda 21 was not enforced by any international law, it was made clear that adopting it would carry a great moral obligation to ensure the implementation of the Agenda. It has been widely recognized to be the base for establishing sustainable communities.
- Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (A/CONF.199/20): This plan, also known as the Johannesburg Plan of Action, is an updated plan of action from the Agenda 21. It was set during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, it revolved around evaluating the progress made since the creation of Agenda 21 and the implementation of new targets and focuses.
- Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1): This resolution outlines and explains the 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on multiple different aspects, more than just establishing sustainable communities. Goal 11 specifically focuses on the establishment and creation of sustainable communities, but it can be said that all the goals are different aspects of establishing them.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Like previously mentioned, the UNDP is one of the main organizations that aids countries in the process of developing sustainable communities. Since this issue is a case by case situation and each city has its own needs, it is mostly up to the city or country to be able to identify its problems and act accordingly. However, the UNDP has been able to create a Monitoring Framework, allowing governments to effectively and swiftly identify their own progress in accomplishing the goals of SDG 11. The main way the UNDP aids in the establishment of sustainable communities is by teaching governments how to fix the issues they face. Although this is an effective way to secure sustainability, there are noticeable disadvantages to it as well. One of these is the time it takes and the focus of the UNDP. One of the disadvantages is that the UNDP focuses more on secondary and tertiary cities, cities with fewer than 3 million inhabitants. Given this, primary cities and megacities are left unattended, possibly leading to further damage and intensify already existing issues. Since the UNDP mostly aids cities and governments by suggesting improvements and solutions, another disadvantage is the time it takes for effects to be seen. It tends to take some time before governments are able to implement any effective changes as they must evaluate all the advantages, disadvantages, and possibilities that could come from any of them.

### **Possible Solutions**

Since the situation of every country and city varies, it becomes difficult to find possible solutions that can apply to all or at least to the majority, yet, it is not impossible. A mentorship program can be created where certain members of a sustainably developed country could externally aid the governments of lesser sustainable developed countries. Similar to how the UNDP aids cities but on a much wider scale, where they can partner with cities that have faced similar issues to those they are aiding.

Other possibilities include creating an international fund for governments and/or businesses. Development is a crucial key to sustainability, making businesses and the innovations that they bring very important. This fund, which would be managed by an organization such as the UNDP and funded by different organizations and countries, mainly through donations, would allow the businesses to implement newer and more sustainable

changes to the cities, such as improving infrastructure, providing better security, creating more jobs, and any other implementations leading to a more developed and sustainable city.

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## Appendix or Appendices

- I. SDG 11 Goals/Targets and some global facts  
<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-11-sustainable-cities-and-communities/targets.html>
- II. Article depicting importance of Megacities  
<https://www.globaldata.com/importance-megacities-contemporary-economy/>
- III. List of Megacities and Metropolitan Areas and their population sizes (from 2016)  
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- IV. Link to article depicting the importance of SDG 11 (Made by UNDP)  
[http://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/mongolia/docs/2016Docs/unct-mn-wim-11\\_Cities.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/mongolia/docs/2016Docs/unct-mn-wim-11_Cities.pdf)
- V. List of the most populated cities (2018)  
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- VI. Articles from World Bank with how they contribute to establishing sustainable communities  
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- VII. Article showcasing basic focuses when establishing sustainable communities  
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