

Green Urbanization is a Remedy for Sustainable Development

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The vast number of people moving into cities is historically unprecedented. As a consequence, the number of megacities is rising and cities are expected to have even higher population densities. To meet such challenges, we must follow a green urbanization path by instituting policies that exploit its late comer's advantage and the unique features of urbanization. Responses to the challenges include developing satellite cities linked by train, rail, or metro rather than highways with megacities; conserving resources and improving the efficiency; and promoting the use of new technologies and renewable energy. In addition, the green urbanization process must protect the urban poor to ensure that the growth is inclusive and sustainable. Green policies need to be at the core of urban development in the 21st century if the challenges are to be properly managed. In the absence of appropriate legal mechanism, urbanization and further economic growth may result in greater deterioration of the environment.

This article focuses on the environmental challenges faces as it urbanizes. It begins by highlighting features of urbanization; its fast pace and more growing megacities. Also, concentrates on environmental challenges associated with urbanization, like air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, access to water and sanitation, loss of natural ecosystems and amenities, and urban slums and poverty. Finally, it concludes that future depends on using the best practices and policy innovations to promote green urbanization, thereby ensuring a better life for its urban residents, and the world.

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Green urbanization resurrects debates on what constitutes the nebulous sustainability goal. Moving away from the “mystic reverence for nature” that had empowered earlier conservation movements, the green urbanization or green growth model has been triggered by concerns over climate change and economic crisis. It demands a sharp reduction in carbon intensity in order to revitalize the ailing world economy on a more sustainable basis. Across the developed world, there is increased public investment in energy conservation, photovoltaic installations, urban public transport, housing rehabilitation and organic agriculture. Similarly, for developing countries, the policy challenge posed by climate change must be answered with low-emission industrial development and urbanization. However, in pursuing the “greening of catch-up growth” what constitutes the building blocks for this transformation to take place beyond technological and fiscal considerations.

Beyond the more traditional social policy functions, many countries are now designing social policy initiatives that also incorporate environmental concerns. These “eco-social policies” aim to shift behaviours or provide incentives for more sustainable environmental management or resource use, strengthening the resilience or adaptive capacities of individuals and communities while also achieving social goals. Examples include cash transfers to reduce exploitation of resources in environmentally sensitive zones or as payment for environmental services; employment schemes that rehabilitate environmentally degraded areas; energy efficient public transport or housing systems; and the use of fiscal savings from reduced energy subsidies to expand social programmes.

For sustainability, jobs—and economic policy more generally—must also be “green”. “Green economy” has emerged as a possible win-win approach to sustainable development, simultaneously creating employment, stimulating growth and reducing negative environmental impacts. Relevant policies may involve support for environmentally efficient or cleaner energy and technology, both in industry and

agriculture, and the expansion of low-carbon service sectors including public transport and retrofitting of housing stock. Community-based development, including drawing on the traditional knowledge and practices of, for example, small-scale farmers, fishing communities, indigenous peoples and forest dwellers may assist in generating jobs, improving livelihoods and protecting the environment.