Figure 1

An increasingly urban world

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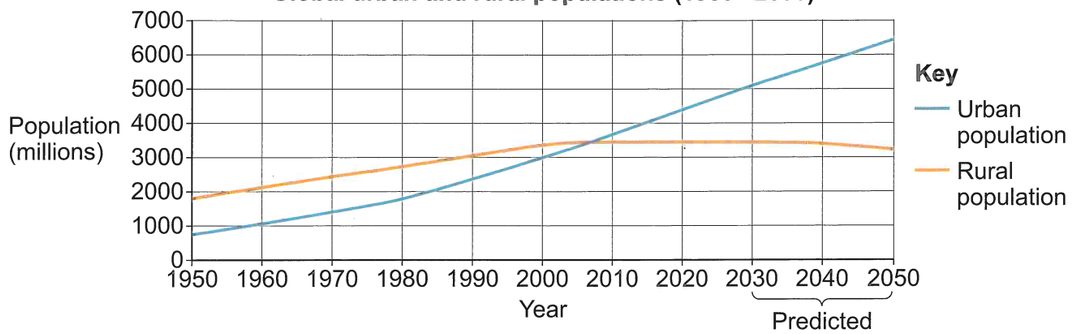
Since 1960 the world has seen a continued growth of urban populations as urban-industrial core areas develop around the world. In 1990, 43% of the world's population lived in urban areas. By the early part of the 21st century, for the first time, the majority of people lived in urban rather than rural areas.

This trend is likely to continue, estimates suggesting that global urban populations will reach 60% by 2030 and 70% by 2050. While the percentage increase is significant, it does not take into account the actual growth in the number of people living in urban areas, since populations are continuing to grow in those areas where the rate of urbanisation is highest.

Global urban and rural populations (1950–2050)



Rates of urban growth

The increase in urban populations has not been evenly spread throughout the world. Different regions have seen their urban populations grow more or less quickly, although virtually no region of the world has seen a decrease in urbanisation. (UN Habitat)

In 2015 Asia had by far the largest number of people living in urban areas, approximately 2 billion, this growth being seen as directly linked to economic development. Between 2000–2030 the urban population in Asia and Africa is set to double. Asia's urban population will grow from 1.4 billion to an estimated 2.6 billion. Africa's urban population will surge to more than twice its size, from 294 million to an estimated 742 million. This means that by 2030 Asia and Africa will account for almost 70% of all urban inhabitants globally, with poorer people making up the largest part of future urban growth.

Urban population (%)

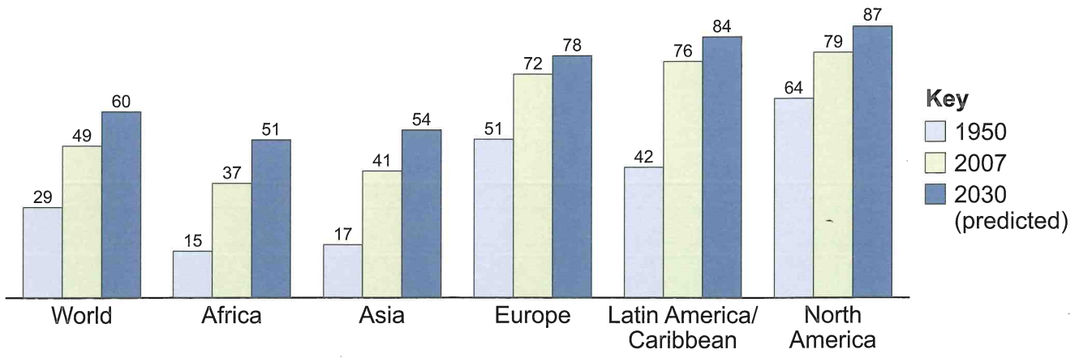
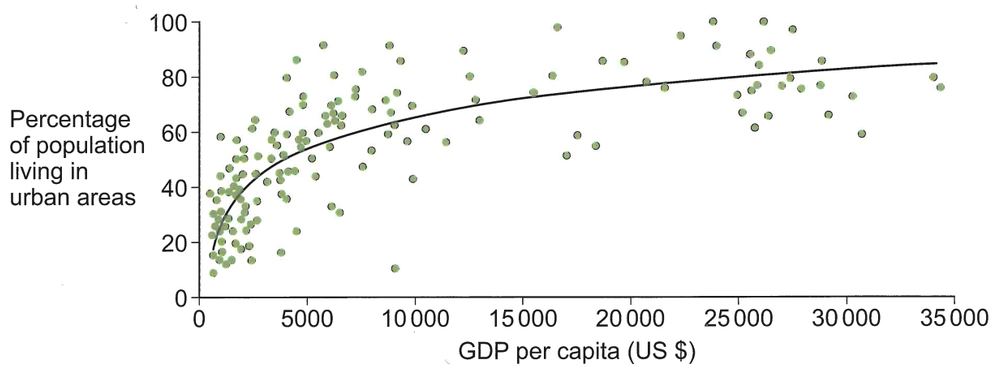


Figure 1 continued

Economic development and urbanisation

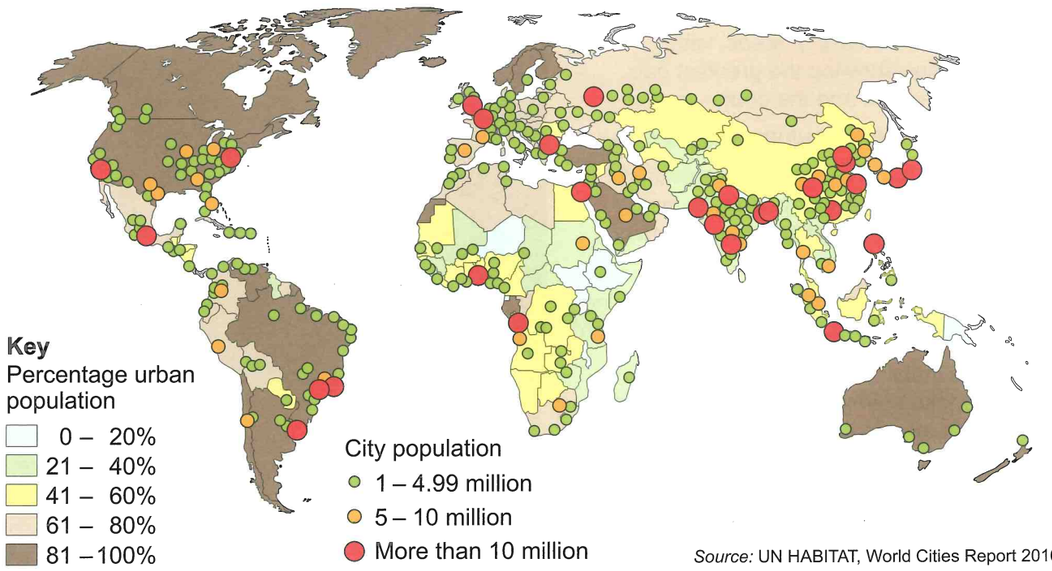
In many parts of the world urbanisation is seen as an important factor in improving living standards. This is because in urban areas people might have better access to the social and economic facilities required to improve quality of life. For example, China's economic transformation has been driven by urbanisation and industrialisation. Between 1985 and 2010 the urban population in China doubled and today the ten biggest cities in China account for 20% of the country's wealth.



The growth of cities

Large cities are defined as having between 5 and 10 million inhabitants and megacities as having 10 million or more inhabitants. The last 30 years have seen a significant increase in both categories of city. In some of the poorest cities this growth has led to the development of massive slums and squatter settlements, often lacking basic facilities. They are built in areas threatened by floods, landslides and other natural hazards. At the same time rural-urban migration has led to the decline of rural communities, where the population structure is increasingly unbalanced and a lack of investment has widened the gap in living standards between urban and rural areas.

Global patterns of urbanisation, 2015



Source: UN HABITAT, World Cities Report 2016

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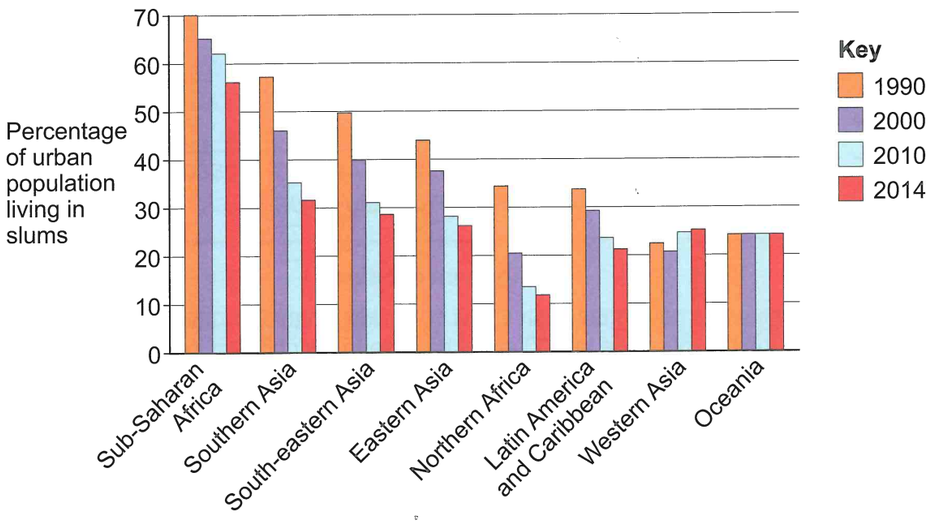
Figure 2

The growth of slums in LICs and NEEs

The number of slum-dwellers continues to grow

Although the percentage of slum-dwellers in urban areas has decreased, the actual number of people living in slums continues to increase. In LICs and NEEs 881 million urban residents lived in slums in 2015, compared to 689 million in 1990. Many cities cannot keep up with the rate of urban growth, shown by the lack of basic facilities in some of the poorest areas of urban slums. The majority of people migrating to urban areas are from rural areas where conditions are poor and opportunities limited. Consequently, even living in an urban slum may offer a first step towards better living conditions.

Percentage of urban population living in slums, 1990–2014



Inequality in LIC/NEE cities

Urban inequality has become a growing problem in a number of areas, with African cities showing the greatest gap between the rich and the poor.

Inequality creates a number of problems, including:

- the image of poor people as lazy or criminal, resulting in their unfair treatment
- the increasing wealth in cities pushing up prices, which the poor cannot afford
- the inability of the poorest people to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in urban areas
- a lack of security, as the poorest people often do not own their own homes, or are forced to build homes in unstable or hazardous areas.

São Paulo, Brazil

Figure 2 continued

Urbanisation can be a 'force for good' with better jobs and cheaper services

The author of a World Bank report for 2013 said, "If managed effectively, urbanisation can be a force for good because cities create better-paid jobs and allow better and cheaper access to basic services".

For example, in Niger the average price of piped water in urban areas is 24 pence per cubic metre, whereas in rural areas clean water can cost four times as much, and people may have to walk long distances to collect water which may be contaminated.

However, the report concludes that "conditions in the poorest slums are a risk to human life. About a billion people live in urban slums in poor countries and this number is likely to increase dramatically in future, with the fastest growth in Sub-Saharan Africa".

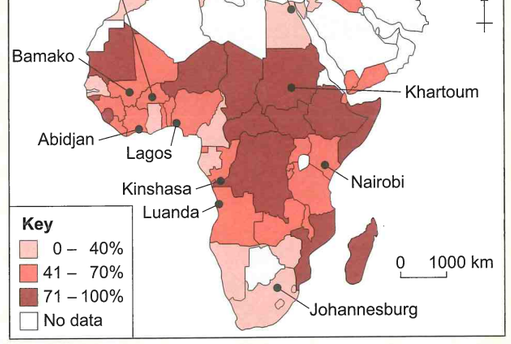
The director of the World Bank team that produced the report said that "providing basic services for the urban poor is a real challenge, but where it has been done successfully it has reduced the problems of rapid urbanisation".

Percentage access to piped water / improved sanitation		Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Sub-Saharan Africa	Piped water	33	5
	Improved sanitation	40	23
Southern Asia	Piped water	56	17
	Improved sanitation	67	36
South east Asia	Piped water	51	17
	Improved sanitation	81	64
Latin America	Piped water	94	68
	Improved sanitation	88	64

More than half of all urban dwellers in Sub-Saharan Africa live in slums

Lagos is already Nigeria's largest city and it is still growing rapidly. The population is predicted to increase by 77 people every hour between 2010 and 2030. This is approximately 56 000 a month, the size of a large town in the UK. Economic opportunities have encouraged the poor to migrate to the city and high birth rates have added to urban growth. The big question is whether the urban infrastructure can keep up with this growth. Lagos already suffers from electricity and water supply problems, a pattern repeated across Africa where growing urban populations put a strain on limited resources and increasing numbers of people live in some of the worst conditions in the world.

Percentage of urban population living in slums, 2014



These are Africa's fastest-growing cities

Population growth per hour, 2010–2030

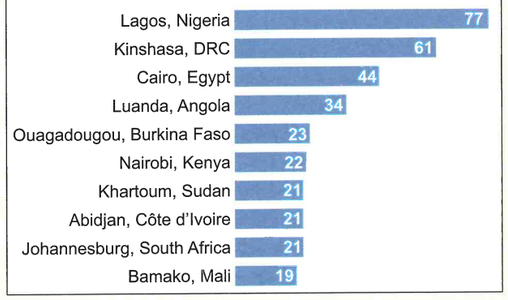


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Figure 3

Slums of hope or slums of despair?

Welcome to Lagos: how poor Nigerians scratch a living

Lagos is Africa's fastest-growing city with an estimated population of 20 million. Three quarters of the population live in slums. In many of these areas people live in one-room shacks, constantly at risk from floods and storms. Most have no running water or sanitation systems and open drains run through these areas with children playing amongst sewage and dangerous industrial chemicals. Around 50% of the population suffer from environmental diseases transmitted through air, water and food, or by insects.

Despite these problems and the constant threat of having your home bulldozed because of a lack of ownership rights, the city is seen as an example of tremendous business flair, where economic migrants strive to improve their life chances. Nothing is wasted in the city, as seen on the rubbish dumps where thousands of people work, scavenging for recyclable materials in order to earn a living. At Olusosun rubbish dump, there is a community of a thousand scavenger families and the area has a mosque, a barber shop and three small cinemas. Living conditions in these areas are often worse than in the rural areas from where migrants came, but people help each other and there is a strong community spirit. *(The Guardian)*

Kibera, Nairobi: one of Kenya's many slums

Kibera is thought to be the largest slum in Africa.

KIBERA – FACTFILE

- **Land ownership** – The government owns all of the land. Most of the residents are tenants who have no rights.
- **Housing** – The average size of a dwelling is 4 m × 4 m where a whole family live, usually sleeping on a dirt or concrete floor.
- **Electricity** – About 20% of Kibera has electricity. UN Habitat is extending this to include street lighting and direct connection to individual dwellings.
- **Water** – There are two main water pipes into Kibera where residents can collect water for a small fee. Water is not always clean and has caused outbreaks of typhoid and cholera.
- **Sewage** – There is one latrine (hole in the ground) for 50 families. People are paid to empty the latrines and the contents are dumped into a local river.
- **Drugs** – Cheap drugs and glue-sniffing are a growing problem.

Despite the obvious challenges Kibera has a number of thriving community projects that are bringing people together and improving conditions. These include health and education initiatives, children's feeding programmes and microfinance projects that are encouraging people to set up small local businesses.

Figure 3 continued

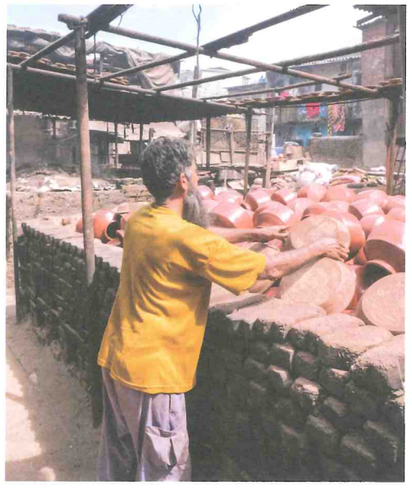
Extract from Bill Bryson's African Diary

In the morning we drove to Kibera, a sea of tin roofs filling miles of hillside. Kibera is the biggest slum in Nairobi and nobody really knows how many people live there. At least a fifth of the residents are HIV-positive and there are thousands of AIDS orphans. You cannot go into Kibera as an outsider as it is a dangerous place. It is a warren of dirt-floored hovels made of tin and most of it has no services – no running water, no rubbish collection, virtually no electricity and no sanitation beyond the open drains that run between the rows of dwellings. In the rainy season the area is flooded; in the dry season it looks like a rubbish tip – in all seasons it smells of rot. Kibera is one of nearly a hundred slums in Nairobi and is by no means the worst. At least there is work in the local factories, where slum dwellers can earn a few dollars a day.

In one slum, misery, work and hope

Dharavi, in the Indian city of Mumbai, is the largest slum in Asia, and is home to over a million people. It is also home to a wide range of thriving businesses. On the ground floor of one building, carpenters are constructing furniture, while upstairs a separate business is making a range of clothing, including shirts, trousers and suits. The slum is a hive of activity where just about anything can be bought, including clothing, leather goods, furniture and pottery. It is estimated that the area has around 20 000 factories, producing up to one billion US$ worth of products a year. Servicing these industries are hundreds of fast food outlets, which are found throughout the slum.

In addition, the area has one of the largest recycling operations in India, taking in waste from Mumbai and other parts of the country, as well as the wider world. The area is also an 'e-commerce' hub, with a growing number of hi-tech businesses. As you pass through Dharavi you notice the buzz of activity and the unity as people work and socialise together. Local people are welcoming and happy to talk to visitors and guided tours are offered to tourists. Children can be seen laughing and playing cricket in the passageways between the dwellings, where there are open drains and the constant smell of sewage. This is the other side of Dharavi, with crowded homes, and a lack of basic facilities.



In these conditions disease spreads easily and diarrhoea, malaria and tuberculosis are common. One local hospital treats thousands of people each day, including many children from slums who are malnourished, and suffering from stomach problems and breathing difficulties as a result of poor air quality.

This slum is seen as a beacon of hope where increasing numbers of children are able to get the education required to give them better opportunities. As one mother said, "Education is hope. My daughters are learning English and one wants to be a teacher and the other a doctor. My hardships will ensure that their lives are better." The local government is aiming to renovate and upgrade the area, giving local people more secure homes with running water, sanitation systems and electricity.

END OF SOURCES