

## The Political Economy of Sprawl in the Developing World

*Multinational Monitor in an interview with Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka*

### Is economic globalization contributing to intensified urbanization in developing countries?

The process of globalization has a distinct spatial specificity. The outcomes of globalization also show particular geographic patterns. For example, though it has certainly affected rural areas, global forces of exchange are centered in cities. The result is that globalization has facilitated urbanization in many developing countries through a number of different factors.

For example, improvements in communication technologies have facilitated the location of industries in developing country cities, by "abolishing the tyranny of geographical distance."

These industries can now be managed globally from developed countries. We also know that as industries move to the cities of developing countries, with comparatively lower labor costs, it has changed the structure of employment. *This has also further facilitated the "bright lights"*



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*syndrome that lies behind rapid rural-to-urban migration. Such migration is now often across national and continental borders to cities perceived as offering good personal advancement opportunities.*

Even as globalization has facilitated urbanization, our research shows that it has not been equally beneficial. For example, we know that the development of global real estate markets, a process that has brought increased investment to developing country cities, has also often increased land costs beyond the reach of local people. *At the same time, it is clear that the investment patterns within the local economy have been skewed toward high-tech infrastructure investments in order to attract international capital. The result has been increasing disparities between the poor who live in slums and the rich who often live in gated communities and work in high-rise buildings with every modern convenience.*

In other words, the benefits attributed to globalization have not accrued to everyone alike. Indeed, while the conditions of many have improved, others have seen their situation deteriorate. In many countries, real incomes have fallen, the costs of living have gone up and the number of poor households has grown, especially in cities.

**Are there sizes at which cities are too big to be sustainable?  
Are there alternatives?**

In the 1950s, New York was the only mega-city with a population over 10 million; today there are about 19 and the figure is set to rise. Many of these cities will be in developing countries. For example, Lagos, which is currently the sixth largest city in the world with a population of 13.4 million,



will in the medium term become the third largest city in the world with a population of 23.2 million. Mumbai which currently has 18.1 million people will have 26.1 million and will be the second largest city. Such large cities clearly create problems of urban governance both in terms of environmental sustainability and social sustainability.

For example, it should be noted that in most of the cities in developing countries, up to 50 percent of the population live in slums and squatter settlements without adequate shelter and basic services. This is clearly unsustainable.

If we are to have truly sustainable cities, we have to prioritize a number of important strategies. *First, as our Campaign for Good Urban Governance points out, cities have to become inclusive. Better urban governance means that local authorities must be democratically elected and accountable to their citizens. At the same time, and most importantly, the concerns of all citizens, rich or poor, must be included in plans for urban development.*

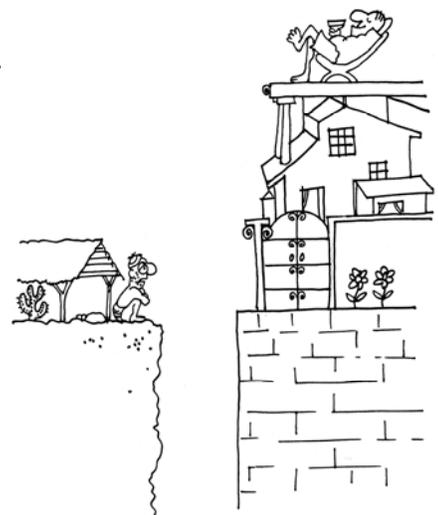
At the same time, we believe in integrated regional urban planning both for better environmental management and also to help control migration. *This does not mean that you can stop rural-to-urban migration, but one solution to the rise of mega-cities is comprehensive urban planning that encourages the development of smaller urban centers that provide jobs and economic incentives for the immediate rural areas.*

**What kind of community rights should be given in slums? How important is land tenure?**

Fifty percent of the world's population lives in urban areas this is about 3 billion people. Of this 3 billion people, about 1 billion live in slums and squatter settlements without adequate shelter and basic services. According to the latest Global Report on Human Settlements: The Slum Challenge, this figure may well increase to 2 billion by 2030.

It is one of the tragedies of our time that the urban

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poor are totally disenfranchised. They have no rights and live in constant fear of eviction. The lack of secure tenure discourages even the poorest of the poor from investing in improving their immediate environment. There are numerous best practices from around the world that indicate that if the poor are given some form of security, it acts as a catalyst for considerable investment from donors, the private sector and poor themselves.

It should be noted that though it is absolutely critical that land tenure systems be formalized, it is not always possible to give the poor individual title deeds. ... encourage innovations in community land tenure and, given that most of the poor are in fact tenants, legalize the whole rental market. At present, because many slum dwellings are not legally recognized, it is not possible to take the landlord to court for failing to deliver the necessary services. ▶

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