

The Geneva Challenge: Advancing Development Goals 2016

The Challenges of Urbanisation

“The world is inexorably becoming urban. By 2030 all developing regions, including Asia and Africa, will have more people living in urban than rural areas. In the next 20 years, Homo sapiens, “the wise human”, will become Homo sapiens urbanus in virtually all regions of the planet” – State of the World’s Cities: Bridging the Urban Divide

Last year, almost 450 graduate students divided into 135 teams registered to take part in The Geneva Challenge - Advancing Development Goals Contest, with over 60% of the participants coming from a developing country university. Building on this success, the Graduate Institute is eager to continue to stimulate proactive interdisciplinary problem solving analysis among master students around the world. Thanks to the vision and support of Ambassador Jenö Staehelin, a long-standing partner and friend of the Graduate Institute, we are proud to launch the **third edition of The Geneva Challenge-Advancing Development Goals Contest, which in 2016 proposes discussions on “The Challenges of Urbanisation.”**

Managing urban growth has become one of the most important challenges of the 21st Century. As a result of skewed development notions and policies, instead of being places of opportunities and prosperity, in many cases cities have become places of deprivation, inequality and exclusion. Urban areas in the developing world currently face a number of challenges such as expanding slums (e.g., favelas, bidonvilles, Katchi Abadis or campamentos), water sanitation, social exclusion, crime, immigrant poverty, climate change, energy etc. **Today, 54 per cent of the world’s population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66 per cent by 2050. The 2014 revision of the World Urbanisation Prospects notes that the largest urban growth will take place in the developing world i.e. India, China and Nigeria. These three countries will account for 37 per cent of the projected growth of the world’s urban population between 2014 and 2050.** In 1950 New York and Tokyo were the world’s only megacities – ‘urban agglomerations’ with over 10 million residents. In 2014, there were 28 mega-cities worldwide, home to 453 million people or about 12 percent of the world’s urban dwellers. Of those 28 mega-cities, sixteen were located in Asia, four in Latin America, three each in Africa and Europe, and two in Northern America. By 2030, the world is projected to have 41 mega-cities with majority of them being in the developing world – and the quality of life for millions will be determined by the quality of their cities. **The question facing the world today is: what kind of urbanisation will nurture sustainable growth and development?** We believe the key to this significant challenge is an interdisciplinary solution that crosses traditional boundaries between academic disciplines, and thus we would like to invite graduate students from all academic programmes who can provide helpful strategic recommendations.

Urban areas are considered the powerhouses of growth that not only contain most of built assets but also hold more than half the world’s population. As Drew Erdmann, Principal with McKinsey & Company, wrote on the Global Trends 2030 blog, “For the first time in over 200 years, the majority of the world’s economic growth during this decade will occur in emerging markets, not the developed economies of the ‘West.’” However in many developing countries, the pressures and priorities of economic globalisation are pushing back proper and sustainable city planning. Faced with the challenges and costs of addressing sustainability problems, many urban centers choose to ignore quality of life and environmental issues, believing that it can be dealt with later. Although these

problems affect the whole population, the bulk of the risks fall disproportionately on the poor. Rapid, and often unplanned, urban growth is the source for many of the environmental hazards faced by cities within the developing world. Substandard housing on marginal land, crowding, increasing levels of air pollution, water pollution and over usage, inadequate sanitation services, inadequate solid waste collection, and motor vehicle traffic and traffic injuries are all associated with rapid growth of urban center. Although cities are often seen as the home of prosperity, the important step is to take full advantage of the potential benefits of urbanisation in an inclusive way while decreasing the evident potential negative.

Highlighted below are some issues and challenges related to urbanisation.

Urban Planning, Design, Housing & Slum Upgrading

- The fast-paced growth of cities has produced an urban crisis, one that is marked by the lack of adequate housing and infrastructure management. Urban planning must defend the 'public' against the ever-expanding 'private' interests and its consequences such as shrinking public spaces and reduced provision of public goods.
- Slums are an indicator of a high urban poverty and a poorly planned and managed urban region. Some low- and middle-income countries have up to 80 per cent of their population living in slums. Sub-Saharan Africa has a slum population of 199.5 million, South Asia 190.7 million, East Asia 189.6 million, Latin America and the Caribbean 110.7 million, Southeast Asia 88.9 million, West Asia 35 million and North Africa 11.8 million.
- Cities need to rethink public spaces such as parks, green areas, and streets. Well-designed public space not only contributes to improving the overall visual character, but also stimulates economic activities and enhances the functionality of the city.

Environment, Climate Change & Energy

- As cities expand, the resulting growth forces agricultural uses onto less agriculturally productive land, including previously forested areas, encouraging erosion and desertification. Urbanisation in coastal areas can result in destruction of essential wetlands and alter critical habitats, such as beaches and coral reefs. The loss of both of these habitats can result in seasonal flooding, mudslides, loss of food production, increases in certain insect and animal vectors (UNEP, 2002).
- Urban climate change-related risks are increasing (rising sea levels and storm surges, heat stress, extreme precipitation, inland and coastal flooding, landslides, drought, increased aridity, water scarcity, and air pollution) with widespread negative impacts on people (health, livelihoods, and assets) and on local and national economies and ecosystems.
- Cities consume about 75 per cent of global primary energy and emit between 50 and 60 per cent of the world's total greenhouse gases. Carbon-based energy generation has a large ecological footprint, not only due to rising greenhouse gas emissions and pollution caused by burning fuels, but also because of extraction techniques that contaminate the environment, and frequent production or delivery accidents.

Health, Water & Sanitation

- Often severe health crisis is observed in poor urban settlements, where concentrations of people and wastes create environments that undermine health and human dignity and add considerably to the challenges of daily survival. Diarrhoea and intestinal parasites still kill and sicken high numbers of children every year.

- Rapid urbanisation in developing countries is often accompanied by overwhelming demands on existing water systems. Most of the health problems and their wider implications are related to inadequacies in the provision of clean and safe drinking water and sanitation.
- Migration from rural to urban areas poses a major challenge for city planners; extending basic drinking water and sanitation services to periurban and slum areas to reach the poorest people is of the utmost importance to prevent outbreaks of cholera and other water-related diseases in these often overcrowded places.

Human Rights, Gender, Inequality & Social Exclusion

- The challenges of urbanisation, such as rising inequality and the prevalence of slums, are symptoms of a larger deficit to respect human rights in cities, particularly the right to adequate housing and the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Slum dwellers are often stigmatised on account of their location and are often discriminated against in terms of access to public and social services, as well as employment.
- Gender inequality and discrimination is a major aspect in a holistic urban development. Women and girls in cities face a range of barriers and vulnerabilities in the form of violence against women, poverty, unpaid care-work, limited control over assets, unequal participation in public and private decision-making; as well as, barriers to education, employment, housing and basic services.
- Often due to pressures of globalisation, the political will and the social mobilization necessary to instigate a climate of change are absent. Thus there is the tendency towards polarisation and situation of social exclusion. Local and municipal governments should seek to keep their cities competitive in an increasingly globalised world while also increasing responsibilities for addressing social problems, and making local economic development less exclusionary.

Safety & Resilience

- Crime emerges as another major impediment to the prosperity of cities. The growing violence and feeling of insecurity that city dwellers are facing daily is one of the major challenges around the world. High perceptions of crime and violence can also engender mistrust and alienation, eventually triggering various forms of social unrest. In some countries, crime and violence have been exacerbated by the proliferation of weapons, substance abuse, and youth unemployment.
- Many large cities are vulnerable to severe impacts from multiple disasters and environmental hazards including new impacts caused by climate change. The cost of urban disasters during 2011 alone is estimated at over US \$380 billion (UN Habitat 2012). Authorities should aim towards reduction of disaster risks and vulnerabilities for the poor and builds resilience to adverse forces of nature.

In many instances it is an absence of policy coordination between or within national and local governments that has led to a failure in launching policies and strategies that are targeted towards urban challenges. According to the UN Habitat 2012 report *“The challenge here is for local authorities and regional governments to adopt policies that maximise the benefits of urbanisation and respond to these forms of inter-connectivity and city interdependence. The rationale is to promote regional economic development growth, as well as to anticipate and manage the negative consequences of urban/regional growth, such as asymmetrical regional and urban development that has the potential to compound the urban divide.”*

This highlights the pivotal need for interdisciplinarity in confronting this emerging and pressing issue hence providing scope of participation from various disciplines, including, but not limited to: economics/political sciences/law/history/international affairs/anthropology/sociology (for policy making, governance, institutional development), architecture/urban planning/engineering/designing (for sustainable city planning), hard sciences/geology/public health/geography (for environmental impact), etc.

Hence we welcome students from diverse academic backgrounds to present their ideas and proposals to tackle this pressing issue.

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