

Forum: *Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)*

Issue: *Measures to ensure access of vulnerable populations to a more equitable standard of living in the drive for sustainable cities and communities*

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Introduction

In the immense growth of technology, healthcare, and public demands, those who are left in the most vulnerable parts of a nation, such as the poor, the ill, the discriminated against, etc., are the ones who do not have access to equitable standards of living and sustainability. In the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it highlights 17 goals in which nations should work towards in order to provide the foundations for a sustainable and prosperous future, or even a livable future at all. For SDG 11, the exact wording provided is to: “Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” As of 2007, half of the world’s population lives in cities and that number is only growing as the world becomes increasingly urbanized. Several issues — overpopulation, job unemployment, urban poverty, inequality against vulnerable populations, pollution — come along with urbanization. Meanwhile, as countries work to achieve the SDGs and go green for the environment, the vulnerable populations often don't have equal access to such development. For instance, although electric cars are introduced, not all can afford them. Although nations endeavor to improve air quality, the poorest sector is still threatened by worsening pollution while the rich live in leafy and well-ventilated abodes. The rich also have access to clean and safe drinking water while the poor don't. As for the focus of this issue, it is critical to ensure that those vulnerable populations, which vary from country to country, have access to equal development and standard of living. Equity is a key contributor to sustainability.

Definition of Key Terms

Vulnerable populations

Vulnerable populations encompass the poor, the chronically ill, the disabled, the elderly, the racially or ethnically disadvantaged, and those who are disadvantaged in any form due to the unfair allocation of resources. They constitute the sub-segment of a population deprived of access to certain services and resources, such as education. Most importantly, when cities and countries pursue sustainability, these individuals may not have access to the developments. Different nations have different vulnerable populations. To determine how vulnerable populations are denied access to sustainable development and allocation of resources, it is critical to identify them within each nation.

Standard of living

Standard of living is an evaluation of one's quality of life based on his or her ownership of necessities and luxuries. It acts as an indicator of one's well-being.

Sustainability

Sustainability refers to the ability to exist long. Gradually emerging social, economic, cultural, and environmental issues threaten sustainability to the world and human species. For the focus of this issue — sustainability in cities and communities — social and economic issues might be the most relevant. For instance, inequality may threaten the sustainability of cities since social imbalance may entice uprising or lead to economic decline.

Equity

Equity refers to equal access to resources and sustainable development. Many individuals, such as those living in extreme poverty, are deprived of access to public services and infrastructure. Achieving equity for urban populations, especially the vulnerable communities, is the focus of this issue.

Urbanization

Urbanization refers to the phenomenon of increasing population in urban areas. It results in several issues, such as pollution, overpopulation, and high unemployment rate.

Informal settlement

An informal settlement is indicated by inadequate housing, dense populations, and social disorganization. Urban slums exemplify informal human settlements. Slum dwellers often cannot afford housing and basic infrastructure and services. Diseases spread among slums due to the lack of proper

sanitation. Moreover, under COVID-19, it's even harder to ensure social distancing in informal settlements. The lack of medical resources and accessibility also affects efficiency in treating infected slum dwellers.

Population explosion

Population explosion refers to a rapid increase of population in an area, which results in overpopulation. When an economy is unable to adapt to a growing population, people's living standards worsen (due to problems such as job opportunity shortages and high living costs).

Background Information

History of urbanization and its patterns

To investigate sustainable cities, communities, and factors that contribute to sustainability, examining the causes and effects of urbanization is essential. Over half the global population resided in cities in 2007. By 2030, the urban population is expected to consist of 60% of the world. Human settlements can date back to the Neolithic Period, namely the New Stone Age, when civilization and agriculture were introduced. As time progressed, families formed clans, clans formed villages, villages formed cities, and people started to swarm into cities.

Industrial Revolution and population explosion

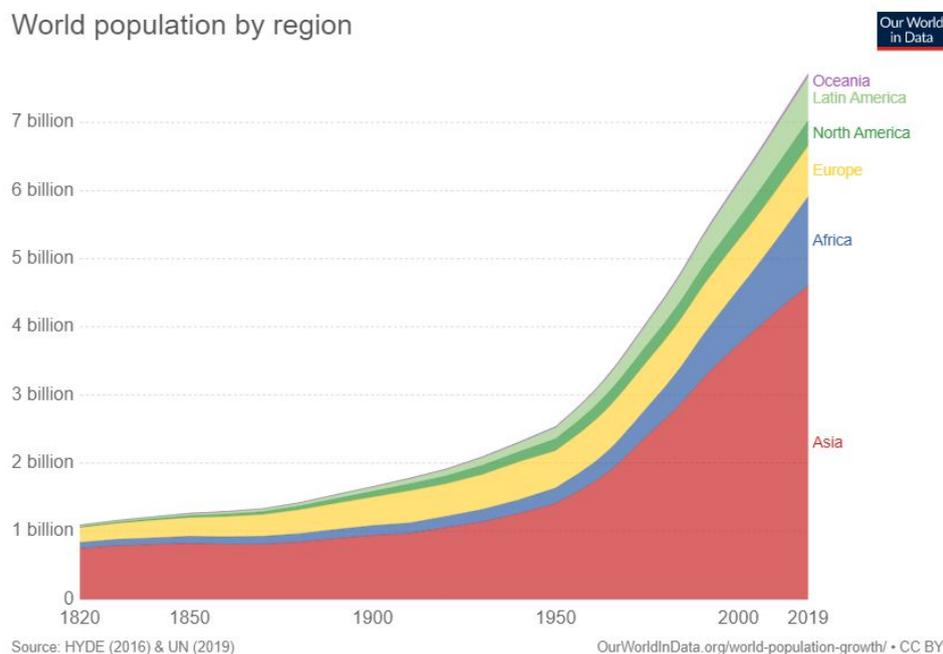
As cities and metropolitan areas emerged around the world, commerce became a crucial factor in drawing people to urban life. Technological developments, a feature of industrialization and growing commerce, resulted in the proliferation of factories and an increased demand for labor. By the 19th century, a deluge of individuals, in search of job opportunities and better lives, moved into urban areas and became industrial workers. However, they were not better off in the cities. They were forced to live in overcrowded slums with inadequate sanitation and rampant spreads of diseases. Healthcare, unable to adapt to such a large population, was not able to cover every immigrant. This pattern still exists today, but mostly in developing countries. Not only did they live in informal settlements, but most workers also got paid at the very minimum, only at the level where they were able to sustain themselves. Some who were unemployed were in worse conditions.

Pollution was also a major player in the industrial revolution. Due to the establishment of plenty of factories and the discovery of coal, pollution grew increasingly severe. However, since

urbanization brought great economic profit and development, pollution and its impacts were neglected.

Post-industrialization and population growth in the 2000s

In the post-industrialization periods, which vary from country to country, industrial societies lowered their birth rate voluntarily in response to population growth. During industrialization, death rates reduced as medical knowledge advanced. In the 19th century, with reduced death rate and consistent birth rate, most European nations experienced population explosions. As a result, we can see their effort to reduce their populations in the early 20th century. Those countries that industrialized later, including China, Japan, and Singapore, also followed the same pattern. Although not as rampant as compared to the industrialization era, steady population growth in the 2000s is still a concern to many countries. Overpopulation will eventually lead to a series of environmental, economic, and social issues.



Caption #1: This graph presents how multiple countries are experiencing a rapid growth in population from the 1950s onwards.

Key Issues

Urban poverty and affordable housing

Overpopulation leads to unequal distribution of resources and services, including healthcare and education. Moreover, the growing demand for job opportunities also contributes to the rise in the

unemployment rate, which leads to urban poverty. Under the dire climate change conditions, not all citizens have access to this “standard”: many are left out from the sustainable development movement. In 2014, an estimated 800 million people were living in slums due to the high cost of living, pushing people behind the poverty line. Informal settlements often come with diseases. Under COVID-19, the conditions exacerbate since maintaining social distancing and practicing self-isolation are difficult in overcrowded and densely populated areas. It is urgent to offer slum dwellers safe, hygienic, and sustainable settlements.

Overburdened infrastructure

Due to rapid urbanization and the inability to adapt, many developing countries suffer from overburdened public infrastructures and services. Despite the effort of governments across the world to achieve sustainability, many necessities became less accessible. Take public transport as an example. Citizens’ mobility and food distribution, both relying on transport, are vital to a city’s sustainability and growth. To pursue sustainability, governments initiated programs to abandon old and inefficient vehicles and popularize hybrid, or even electric, vehicles. However, data has indicated that in 2019, half the world’s urban population was not able to access convenient public transport. This is due to the fact that vulnerable populations, such as the poor, cannot afford new vehicles. It is also worth noting that it may be hard to convince them to spend money and abandon vehicles that still function. Therefore, some do not have access to sustainable transport.

Moreover, poor sanitation and bad health are prevalent among the urban poor. From 1990 to 2012, the world’s urban population without adequate sanitation infrastructure and services increased by 201 million, while the population lacking access to improved water increased by 112 million. Ensuring access to clean water and basic sanitation to the often neglected poor urban dwellers will be a key point of making cities resilient and sustainable. Access to clean water and basic sanitation will be the first step of resolving other major issues such as global health, food, and energy.

Pollution

Although cities and metropolitan areas contribute the most to global economic growth, it is also the culprit of 70% of the world’s carbon emissions. Urbanization is a product of a developing economy and a worsening environment. Increasing usage of fossil fuel and coal as the main source of energy endangering both the environment and people’s lives. By burning them for energy, large amounts of carbon dioxide are produced, which is the main cause of air pollution. Carbon dioxide is deadly as we are surrounded by air, and, unknowingly, bad air quality jeopardizes our health. Respiratory infections and diseases take up 9% of global death, becoming one of the world’s leading factors of death. It is especially severe in developing countries. Laws and regulations on emissions and the use of coal are not

strictly applied. Therefore, to ensure an equitable standard of living to every global citizen and to pursue sustainability for all, air pollution has to be dealt with in a serious manner.

Not only affecting the developing countries, air pollution or pollution of any sorts also impacts the poorest sectors of developed countries. Although most developed countries are dedicated to eliminating air pollution in the common drive of becoming sustainable, they fail to make it inclusive. In informal settlements, or urban slums, indoor air quality is harmful due to the lack of proper ventilation. While others enjoy improved air quality from cleaner energy sources and or the convenience of more environmentally friendly devices, the poor are neglected and excluded from these privileges.

Allocation of resources

Inequalities can not only be observed within a city, but also among cities within a country. Within a country, different cities might receive different amounts of resources and assistance for sustainable development. For instance, San Francisco, being an economically developed city, will receive a disproportionate amount of resources relative to other cities. As a result, less developed cities are given less to develop, which only heightens inequality. This phenomena affects vulnerable populations that dwell in different cities with different extents of development. Therefore, this issue is critical for ensuring access to equitable sustainability for all.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

China

As a Newly Industrialized Country (NIC), wealth disparity is still a major issue in China. Although China has successfully made progress in poverty eradication in the past few years, inequality still exists between different cities. For instance, poverty is mostly eradicated in the eastern and more industrialized cities. As a result, western cities do not benefit as much from the efforts to pursue equality. More resources are allocated to the more industrialized cities, which results in citizens in the more industrialized cities being privileged. They have a higher chance of affording, for instance, sustainable transport, while the rest suffer to catch up.

The United States

The distribution of resources and efforts devoted to pursuing sustainability differ drastically from cities to cities (see Key Issue section). Inspecting each city, it is evident that the non-whites, especially the African American community, suffer from discrimination. Discrimination often results in concentrated

poverty, when the targeted groups are deprived of access to education and job opportunities. As a result of inequality and the poverty that follows, they do not have equal access to sustainable development.

The United States is also a country that underwent an affordable housing crisis. Although the housing market has recovered from the Great Recession, as the price of housing units continues to climb, many individuals are unable to afford adequate housing. Past attempts to reduce urban poverty and offer housing include the legislation of the Fair Housing Act and Housing Choice Vouchers. However, they still fail to address the large community of urban poverty seeing that there are still numerous homeless people on the streets. As a matter of fact, the Housing Choice Vouchers were blamed for further confining the poor in impoverished neighborhoods where the landlords accepted the vouchers. The United States is still diligently searching for solutions to reduce the number of urban slum dwellers.

Singapore

Singapore, as one of the countries with the highest income per capita in the world, has contributed generously to meeting the SDGs. For instance, it cooperates with developing countries in areas such as SDG 6 — water and sanitation — and SDG 11 — sustainable cities. However, even with such development, two of the highest ranked domestic concerns are poverty and social inequality. Inequalities are most inherent in the disabled and low-income population. According to the data, “nearly 20% of households have a monthly household income of less than \$2,000.” The economy is controlled by the rich and powerful, so are the resources. As a result, only a portion of the population benefits from Singapore’s “green” actions and sustainable development. The neglected segment of the population is yet to be dealt with.

India

In India, society is divided by gender, class, caste, and ethnic identity. The divided society results in women having little to no rights under their patriarchal system. Moreover, its regional caste system contributes to an unequal society. It is a special form of social stratification based on ritual purity. The caste system determines the members’ possession of natural and livelihood resources. Since possession is linked to the system, it affects the access to food, education, healthcare, and other basic services of those people who are subjugated by those from higher castes. People in lower castes of this hierarchy cannot afford and don’t have access to sustainable infrastructure, transport, and housing. The pervasive impact that air pollution exerts on the population demonstrates such a concern. To combat air pollution, India has constructed large air purifiers in cities. However, such infrastructures are only accessible to richer cities, and air pollution persists as the leading cause of death in India. The structural

discrimination created by this culturally ingrained sense of inequality makes India an essential player when it comes to achieving an equitable standard of living.

Bangladesh

As a developing country, Bangladesh is undergoing rapid urbanization and intense development. As a result, Bangladesh also has the most severe air pollution and water pollution in the world. It has a PM 2.5 concentration of 83.3, and ineffective waste management. On the other hand, Bangladesh also suffers from extreme wealth disparity. Despite its efforts in reducing poverty, the wealthiest 20% of the population still controls almost 43% of the wealth. With public infrastructures incapable to cope with tremendous population growth, the poorest sector does not benefit from sustainable development. It is crucial to ensure access to sustainability and equitable living standards for all by mitigating pollution, handling rapid urbanization, and eliminating urban poverty.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
September 2000	<p>Millenium Development Goals (MDGs)</p> <p>The eight MDGs were launched in the year 2000 for the international community to achieve in the following 15 years. There were eight goals, with the most relevant being to reduce poverty and social exclusion.</p>
September 2015	<p>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</p> <p>As 2015 arrived, a new set of goals- the SDGs, are introduced after the MDGs. They are the 2030 agenda, for which countries are committed to achieve by the year of 2030. Related to this issue would be SDG 11, which is to promote sustainable cities and communities.</p>
2016	<p>United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)</p> <p>2016 was the year the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the establishment of UN-Habitat, for the common goal of promoting urban sustainability. It aims to achieve changes such as reducing spatial inequality, and improving urban environment.</p>
October 2016	<p>Habitat III</p> <p>In 2016, Habitat III, namely the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, was held in Quito, Ecuador. It emphasized on</p>

the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, and reminded the international community of its commitment to sustainable urbanization. For instance, it asks for adequate shelters for all.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Indicators of Sustainable Development: Guidelines and Methodologies, October 2007
- Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), 22 December 2011, **(A/RES/66/207)**
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 25 September 2015, **(A/RES/70/1)**
- New Urban Agenda, 25 January 2017, **(A/RES/71/256)**

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

International conferences were held in the past in an attempt to make cities more socially and environmentally sustainable. There were three conferences convened by the United Nations General Assembly, which were Habitat I, Habitat II, and Habitat III. Habitat I, the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, took place in Vancouver, Canada in June 1976. It was the time when the international community started to notice the impacts of rapid urbanization, especially in developing countries. The conference contributed to the later creation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, namely the UN-Habitat. It also produced the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, recommending nations ways to cope with urbanization and population growth.

Twenty years later, Habitat II was held in Turkey. The notions of sustainable human settlements and adequate housing for all were adopted in the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and Habitat Agenda. Just after five years, the UN founded the World Urban Forum to negotiate the impacts of urbanization on communities, economies, and climate change. It also assessed the progress of implementing Habitat Agendas across nations. In 2016, Habitat III was held in Quito, Ecuador. The conference produced the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All. Worth noting was the New Urban Agenda, an “action-oriented document” asking for localization of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, proposed in the Quito Declaration.

The conferences were important for promoting sustainability since they provided a basis for collaborations at every level- the international community, stakeholders, and the general public. They

promoted the exchange of knowledge on inclusive urban development and recommended policies for nations to follow. Moreover, the founding of UN-Habitat was also a significant milestone. Now, UN-Habitat is at the forefront of promoting environmental and social sustainability in cities and communities. It provides credible information and data on urban conditions and monitors nations' implementation of global agendas such as the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda. The Global Urban Observatory and City Prosperity Initiative exemplify its efforts toward reporting urban issues and developing approaches to resolve them.

Possible Solutions

Partnerships and cooperation at every level

Many countries may lack proper guidance and funding to carry out such construction products and remodeling within their cities. The integration of Habitat Agenda Partners (HAP), which includes political and civil actors, can help to implement urban programmes and policies. Aside from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), it is also important to look into regional, sub-regional, national, and local actors. For instance, cooperating with local authorities will be effective. Local authorities are closer to the people rather than a distant IGO. Another example may be cooperating with trade unions. Since trade unions represent the interest of the working population, collaborating with them can be a direct way of increasing employment opportunities and administering substance support to promote equality. National trade unions may influence the governments' policies toward urban development. This may help with promoting human settlement, economic growth, and urban poverty's rights.

Inclusiveness of urban communities

To ameliorate the impact of discriminatory urban environments on the vulnerable populations, strengthening the bond between citizens and urban migrants is essential. When facing a large influx of people into cities, residents naturally tend to react with hostility. Hostility results in discrimination, which later leads to inequitable standard of living. To effectively prevent urban crisis rooted in discrimination, fortifying social cohesion among communities is important.

Another way of making urban communities inclusive is through providing affordable housing for low-income populations. This may be achieved by seeking public funding sources for affordable housing programmes and job opportunities. However, it is possible that it ends up only receiving funds from governmental facilities. Therefore, incentivizing the people to take part in promoting urban sustainability is a crucial step. To increase supply, governments can incentivize private sectors, such as tech

companies and construction enterprises, to provide affordable housing units. By offering free city lands for affordable housing programmes, or subsidizing companies that keep their building units affordable for low-income tenants, companies may be incentivized to assist the urban poor. It is even better if those affordable housing sites are close to public transportation, which can improve their accessibility to transport.

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