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URBAN GROWTH

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ALTHOUGH THE LATEST world population report has generated a lot of headlines, some of the most urgent pleas made by this report for a just deal to the poor in urban growth have not received the attention these clearly deserve. The subject of this report is 'unleashing the potential of urban growth' and it makes a strong case for harnessing the potential of the poorer, weaker sections to meet the emerging challenges of fast urban growth.

In 2008, for the first time in history, more than half of human population, 3.3 billion people, will be living in urban areas. By 2030, world's urban population is likely to increase to 5 billion. Asia and Africa urban population is likely to double between 2000 and 2030. Poor people will make up a large part of future urban growth.

India's population is likely to grow

to 590 million by year 2030, about 40% of total population.

This report makes a scathing indictment of several unjust urban policies which are all too common in India. More specifically it says, "Many policy makers continue to try to prevent urban growth by discouraging rural-urban migration, with tactics such as evicting squatters and denying them services. These attempts to prevent migration are futile, counter-productive and above all, wrong, a violation of people's rights. If policy makers find urban growth rates too high, they have effective options which also respect human rights."

"Cities need a longer-term and broader vision of the use of urban space to reduce poverty and promote sustainability. This includes an explicit concern with the land needs of the poor. For poor families, having an adequate piece of land - with access to water, sewage, power and transport-on which they can construct their homes and improve their lives is essential. Providing it requires a new and pro-active approach."

"Poverty is increasing more rapidly in urban areas than in rural areas but has received far less attention. Aggregate statistics hide deep inequalities and gloss over concentrations of harsh poverty within cities. Most assessments actually underestimate the scale and depth of urban poverty."

Clearly the report makes a powerful case for a just response to the emerging challenge of urban growth—a response that helps the urban poor while also utilising their many-sided potential for meeting the diverse needs of cities. □□□