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|  | **Urbanization and Global Change** |

**Global Urban Population in Developed and Developing Countries**The human population has lived a rural lifestyle through most of history.  The world’s population, however, is quickly becoming urbanized as people migrate to the cities.  Figure 1 shows the urban population growth between 1950 and the year 2000.  In 1950, less than 30% of the world’s population lived in cities.  This number grew to 47% in the year 2000 (2.8 billion people), and it is expected to grow to 60% by the year 2025.[...]Developed nations have a higher percentage of urban residents than less developed countries.  However, urbanization is occurring rapidly in many less developed countries, and it is expected that most urban growth will occur in less developed countries during the next decades.  Figure 2 shows the projected growth of the urban and rural populations in developed and less developed countries.Cities with over 5 million inhabitants are known as megacities.  There were 41 in the year 2000.  This number is expected to grow as the population increases in the next few decades.  It is predicted that by the year 2015, 50 megacities will exist, and 23 of these are expected to have over 10 million people.  Table I is a list of the world’s 25 largest cities in 1995. **Why is the urban population increasing so fast?**The rapid growth of urban areas is the result of two factors:  natural increase in population (excess of births over deaths), and migration to urban areas.  Natural population growth has been covered in other units, and consequently, here we will concentrate on migration.Migration is defined as the long-term relocation of an individual, household or group to a new location outside the community of origin.  Today the movement of people from rural to urban areas (internal migration) is most significant.  Although smaller than the movement of people within borders, international migration is also increasing. Figure 3 shows the annual net international migration totals and migration rates in the world’s major areas between 1990 and 1995.  Both internal and international migration contribute to urbanization.[…]In order to better illustrate the causes of rural migration, we will consider policies that have led to migration in many developing countries.  In order to pay foreign debt and to be more competitive in international markets, national governments have encouraged the export of national resources and agricultural products.  Agricultural products (sugar, flowers, coffee, etc.), and primary-sector goods (timber, fish, minerals, etc) become natural resource capital that can be traded to bolster the national economy.  In order to produce agricultural products quickly, efficiently, and for a decent prize, national governments often look to decrease the number of small producers, and turn agricultural production and resource extraction over to larger enterprises, with larger production facilities, and a lower per-unit cost of production.  […]**What are the Problems Associated with Rapid Urban Growth?**The urbanization process refers to much more than simple population growth; it involves changes in the economic, social and political structures of a region.  Rapid urban growth is responsible for many environmental and social changes in the urban environment and its effects are strongly related to global change issues.  The rapid growth of cities strains their capacity to provide services such as energy, education, health care, transportation, sanitation and physical security.  Because governments have less revenue to spend on the basic upkeep of cities and the provision of services, cities have become areas of massive sprawl, serious environmental problems, and widespread poverty.During the 19th and early 20th centuries, urbanization resulted from and contributed to industrialization.  New job opportunities in the cities motivated the mass movement of surplus population away from the countryside.  At the same time, migrants provided cheap, plentiful labor for the emerging factories.  Today, due to movements such as globalization, the circumstances are similar in developing countries.  Here the concentration of investments in cities attracts large numbers of migrants looking for employment, thereby creating a large surplus labor force, which keeps wages low. This situation is attractive to foreign investment companies from developed countries who can produce goods for far less than if the goods were produced where wages are higher.  Thus, one might wonder if urban poverty serves a distinct function for the benefit of global capital. One of the major effects of rapid urban growth is “urban sprawl"- scattered development that increases traffic, saps local resources and destroys open space.  Urban sprawl is responsible for changes in the physical environment, and in the form and spatial organization of cities.Developed and less developed countries of the world differ not only in the percent living in cities, but also in the way in which urbanization is occurring.  In Mexico City (950 square miles), as in many other megacities in the developing world, urban sprawl exists as nearly 40% of city dwellers live in the urban periphery in poverty and environmental degradation.  These high density settlements are often highly polluted owing to the lack of urban services, including running water, trash pickup, electricity or paved roads.  Nevertheless, cities provide poor people with more opportunities and greater access to resources to transform their situation than rural areasIn the United States, poorly planned urban development is threatening our environment, our health, and our quality of life. In communities across the United States, sprawl is taking a serious toll.**Consequences of sprawl in the United States*** Increases traffic
* Pollutes air and water.
* Worsens the damage from floods.
* Destroys agricultural land, parks, and open space.
* Costs cities and counties millions of dollars for new water and sewer lines, new schools, and increased police and fire protection.
* Creates crowded schools in the suburbs and empty, crumbling schools in center cities.
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