

## URBAN TRENDS: URBAN SPRAWL NOW A GLOBAL PROBLEM

Urban sprawl, a trend long associated with North American cities, is fast engulfing many developing countries where real estate developers are pushing a “world class lifestyle”.

In its report, *State of the World Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide*, UN-HABITAT says research into urban sprawl in the Mexican city of Guadalajara is a good example: Between 1970 and 2000 the surface area of the city grew 1.5 times faster than the population. The same is true for cities in **China**; **Antananarivo**, the capital of Madagascar; **Johannesburg**, South Africa's largest commercial hub and the capitals of Egypt and Mexico, **Cairo and Mexico City** respectively.

In many developing countries, urban sprawl comprises two main, contrasting types of development in the same city: one is characterized by large peri-urban areas with informal and illegal patterns of land use. This is combined with a lack of infrastructure, public facilities and basic services, and often is accompanied by little or no public transport and by inadequate access roads.

The other is a form of “suburban sprawl” in which residential zones for high- and middle-income groups and highly-valued commercial and retail complexes are well-connected by individual rather than public transport.

Urban sprawl adds to the urban divide, pushing social segregation along economic lines that result in spatial difference in wealth and quality of life across various parts of cities and metropolitan areas run down inner cities and more suburbs.

Suburbanization in developing countries happens mainly because people – rich and poor – flee poor governance, lack of planning and poor access to amenities. “In a nutshell: sprawl is a symptom of a divided city,” the report says.

Urban sprawl involving the poor occurs because authorities pay little attention to slums, land, services and transport. Authorities lack the ability to predict urban growth and, as a result, fail to provide land for the urbanizing poor. In addition, the urban poor are denied land rights which is one of the main factors driving people to the periphery of towns, associated with urban sprawl in developing countries.

Other features typically associated with sprawl include overdependence on personal motorized transport coupled with a lack of alternatives, limited housing options and urban spaces that discourage pedestrian traffic. Most South African cities are an example of this. They are expanding primarily through development of new housing areas which, being located beyond the existing urban periphery, are relatively unplanned. As a result, the urban periphery consists of pockets of housing developments that are isolated and separated from each other by trunk roads or open spaces.

### OUTCOME OF SPRAWL

Urban sprawl has a negative impact on infrastructure and the sustainability of cities. In most cases, sprawl translates to an increase in the cost of transport, public infrastructure and of residential and commercial development. Moreover, sprawling metropolitan areas require more energy, metal, concrete and asphalt than do compact cities because homes, offices and utilities are set farther apart.

In many places, urban sprawl encourages new developments that cause significant loss of prime farmland. When cities are improperly planned urban sprawl also adds to environmental degradation. Such is the case around several cities in Latin America where sizeable damage has been caused to environmentally sensitive areas. These include **Panama City** (Panama) and its surrounding Canal Zone, **Caracas** (Venezuela) and its adjacent coastline, **San José de Costa Rica** and its mountainous area and **São Paulo** (Brazil) and its water basins.

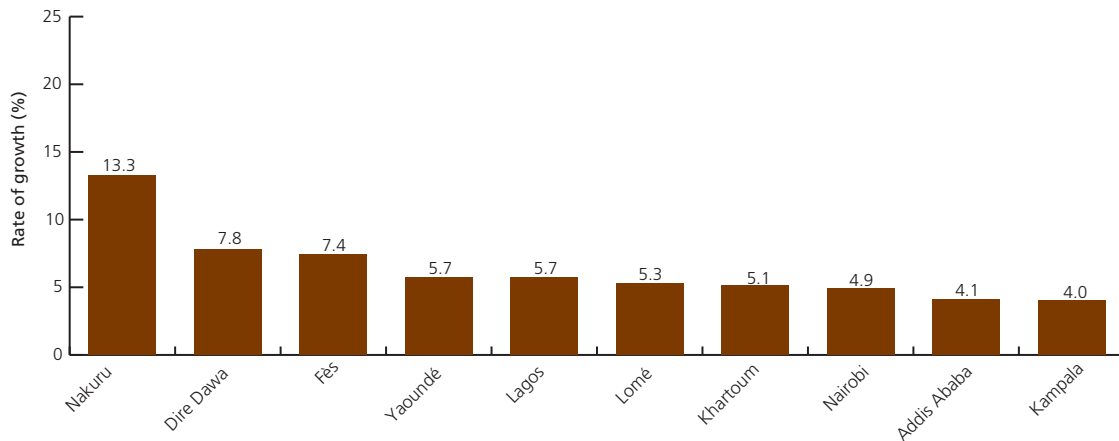
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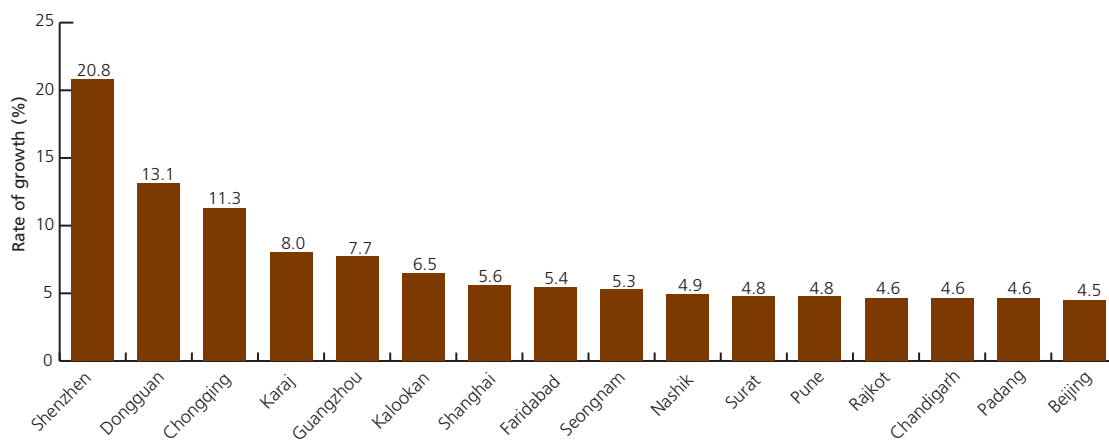
(World Population in Billions)

Sprawl also creates fiscal problems for cities, as it takes place outside of urban administrative boundaries. While suburban municipalities receive tax income with more development, it is the central cities or downtown municipalities that pay for most of the daytime services to suburban residents.

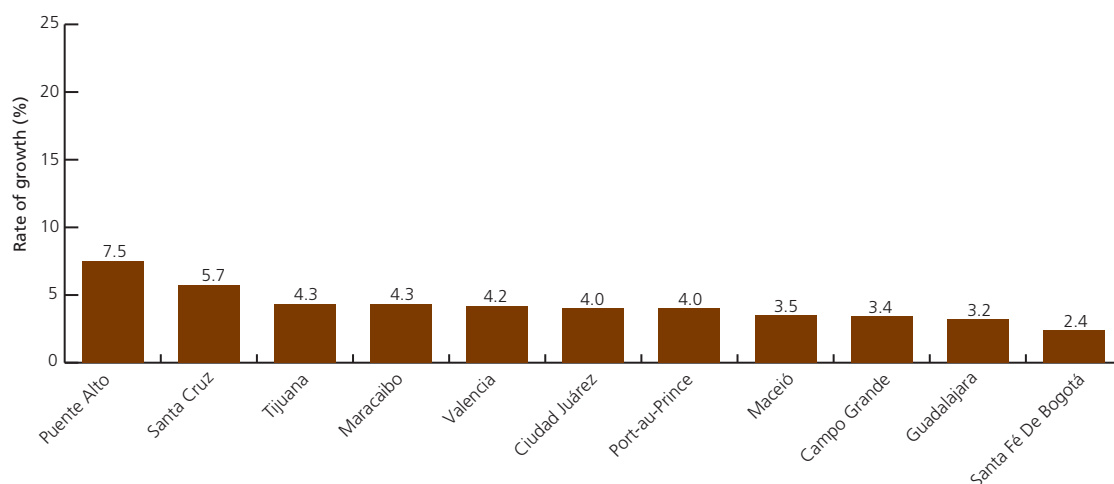
### AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF SELECTED FAST GROWING CITIES IN AFRICA BETWEEN 1990 AND 2006



### AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF SELECTED FAST GROWING CITIES IN ASIA BETWEEN 1990 AND 2006



### AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF SELECTED FAST GROWING CITIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN REGION BETWEEN 1990 AND 2006



Source: Demographic Yearbook, Various Years 1990 - 2006.