



UN-HABITAT

MEETING DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN SMALL URBAN CENTRES



Rural Urban Dichotomy disguises the problems of small towns

Greatest future urban growth projected to be in small urban centres of less than half a million people

Overview

The Millennium Task Force for Water and Sanitation states that 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation and of these 22% are urban dwellers. In terms of water, one billion people do not have access to improved water supply and 15% of these live in urban areas.

However, in a world where already half of the population is urban and where it is predicted that within three decades the urban population in Asia, Africa and Latin America will double to nearly 4 billion - UN-HABITAT's new report *Achieving Global Goals in Small Urban Centres: Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities (2006)*, points out that in the year 2000, around a quarter of the world's population - nearly 1.5 billion people - lived in small urban centres, with less than half a million inhabitants.

Characterized by rapid unplanned growth, high concentration of low-income population, run-down and often non-existent basic infrastructure, most of these small urban areas serve as market centres for their rural hinterland, strengthen rural-urban linkages and contribute to national economic development. Often located on trading routes, these small urban centres experience huge population influxes during the day. Local authorities have little capacity to manage these influxes and their effect on urban service provision.

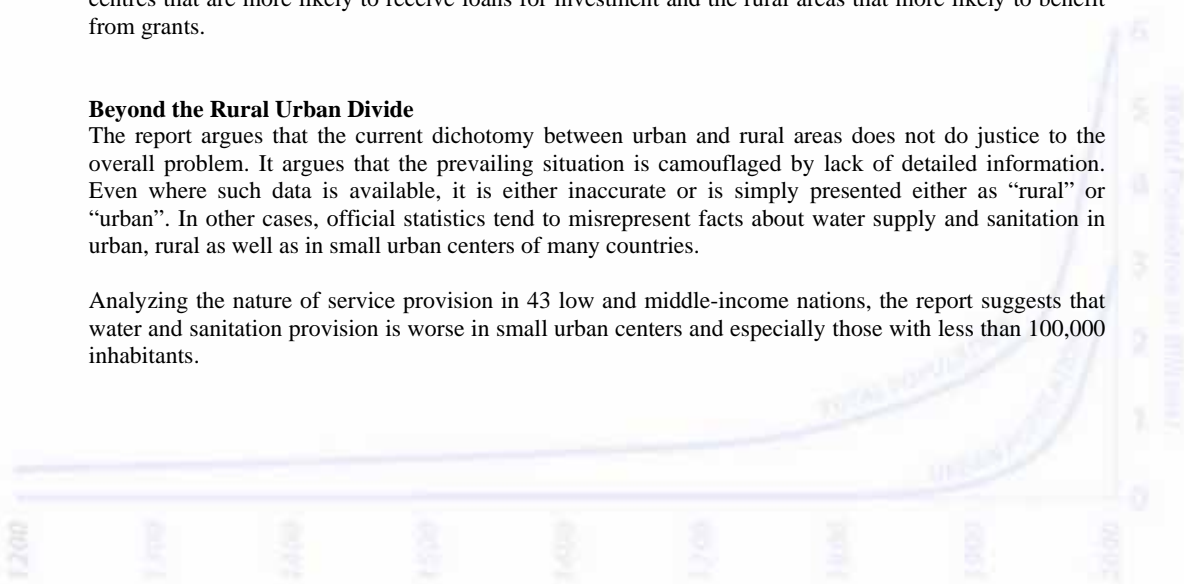
What is worse, as the report points out, the largest share of future urban growth will be in small urban centres of less than half a million people. This demographic shift, the report argues should bring into question the future of development assistance, especially in developing countries.

In terms of aid assistance, small urban centres tend to be overlooked. In 2003, funding of the water sector was \$3 billion in Official Development Assistance, of which only 13% was allocated to small urban centres. The reasoning for this is that small urban centers fall between the two categories: the larger urban centres that are more likely to receive loans for investment and the rural areas that more likely to benefit from grants.

Beyond the Rural Urban Divide

The report argues that the current dichotomy between urban and rural areas does not do justice to the overall problem. It argues that the prevailing situation is camouflaged by lack of detailed information. Even where such data is available, it is either inaccurate or is simply presented either as "rural" or "urban". In other cases, official statistics tend to misrepresent facts about water supply and sanitation in urban, rural as well as in small urban centers of many countries.

Analyzing the nature of service provision in 43 low and middle-income nations, the report suggests that water and sanitation provision is worse in small urban centers and especially those with less than 100,000 inhabitants.



United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) P.O. Box 30030 GPO Nairobi 00100, Kenya Tel: (254-20) 7623151 Fax: (254-20) 7624000 E-mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org website www.unhabitat.org

Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities 2006



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For instance, less than 40 percent of the inhabitants in such centers have flush toilets as compared to 70 percent for cities with between 1 and 5 million inhabitants, or with more than 80 percent for cities with over 5 million people. Further, national water institutions in such countries like Cameroon and Ghana do not operate in any of the small urban centers.

What emerges from the cases of water supply and sanitation sectors in small urban centers are:

- 1: That less of the people inhabiting many small urban centers have access to piped water either within their homes or close by. As a result, a high proportion of people in these centers rely on untreated water;
- 2: That most small urban centers in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia have no sewers at all. In addition, such centers lack public provision of sanitation and especially advice on how the inhabitants ought to construct pit latrines that do not pollute ground water;
- 3: Even where small urban centers appear to be well covered by water and sanitation schemes, such coverage masks high levels of inequality.

A case for extending the reach

The report is replete with examples and research studies that show the difficulties facing small towns. In some cases, people in small towns like Cancun are penalized because they have to pay private providers 10 times more for water than in larger neighboring cities. At the same time, case studies show that local entrepreneurs lack the capacity to provide good quality services and to extend the services to the needy population. For instance, the 10,000 inhabitants of Kyotera town in Uganda rely mainly on low-quality water supplied by a local church project. In addition, Homabay (Kenya), with a population of 32,600 inhabitants, depend on a water-supply project that was constructed in 1958 and had never been rehabilitated until 2001.

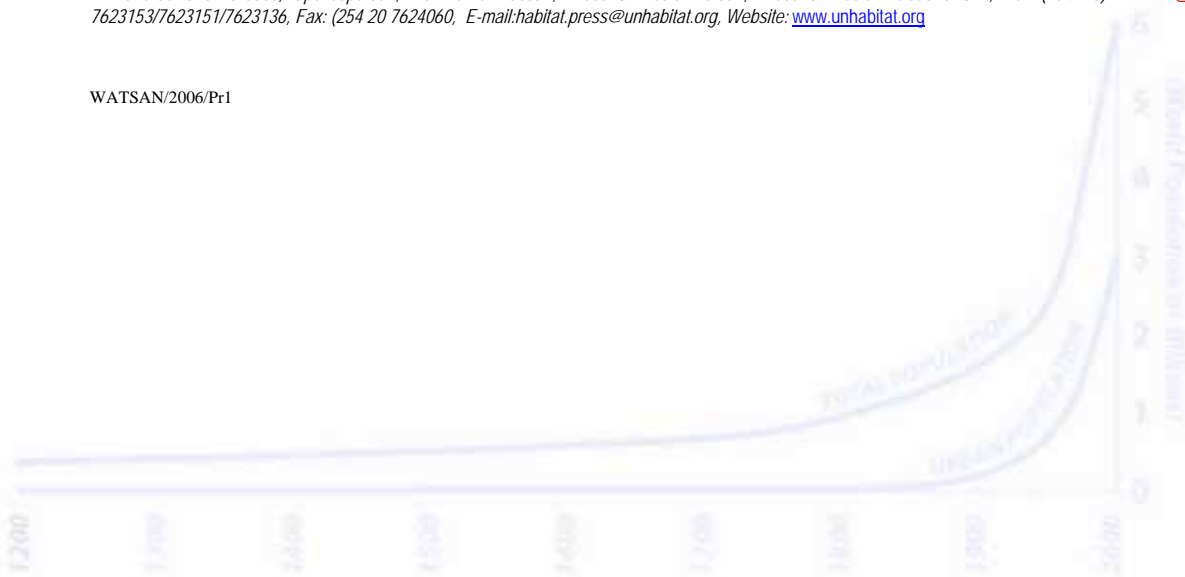
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Mr. Sharad Shankardass, Spokesperson, Ms. Zahra Hassan, Press & Media Liaison, Press & Media Relations Unit, Tel: (254 20) 7623153/7623151/7623136, Fax: (254 20) 7624060, E-mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org, Website: www.unhabitat.org

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