

Helpdesk Research Report: Costs of Urbanisation

Date: 25.11.09

Query: Please identify literature on the economic costs associated with rapid urbanisation (with a focus on developing countries, in particular South Asia and the rest of Asia). Costs of particular interest are loss of productivity; environmental costs; and security-related costs.

Enquirer: DFID Bangladesh

Contents

1. Overview
2. Asia
3. Bangladesh
4. Additional resources
5. Additional information

1. Overview

Half of the global population now lives in cities. Urban growth is occurring most rapidly in the developing world, where cities gain an average of 5 million residents every month (UN-HABITAT, 2008). Urbanisation processes have been prevalent in Asia and while they have raised living standards in many countries, they have also produced other economic, social and environmental costs. This helpdesk research report aims to outline some of these costs, focusing primarily on South Asia – and in particular, Bangladesh. This is of a descriptive nature as there is a dearth of quantitative estimates. The literature and expert comments stress the difficulty in determining clear estimates of costs.

Poor productivity and market inefficiencies

- Inefficient property markets: uncertainty over land tenure and urban planning and management in many Asian countries has resulted in inefficient operation of land and property markets, excessive speculation and high levels of disputes and litigation.
- Poor collateral: uncertainties in the housing markets in Asian urban areas have undermined the possibility of homeowners using their land and housing as collateral to support business investments.
- Inadequate infrastructure and services: insufficient supply to meet the growth in demand for urban infrastructure and services has limited private sector investment and development. In addition, existing infrastructure systems in Asia are poorly maintained, which results in high losses to the systems and higher cost of services.
- Congestion: the rapid expansion of cities and improper transport planning has produced significant traffic congestion in Asian cities. This has resulted in financial costs for urban residents due to lengthy travel times to work and time wasted; and higher transaction costs to businesses in moving goods and services.
- Limited incentives: urban workers who are self-employed or working in low paid informal jobs are often unable to earn more regardless of their efforts, which can undermine productivity.
- Fragmented production chains: high rent in urban centres has resulted in the location of suppliers away from producers. This can result in inefficient supply chain distribution structure and high local transaction costs in manufacturing industries.

Environmental and health issues and poor living conditions

- Poor waste management: rapid population growth in urban cities has placed immense pressure on solid waste management systems. The failure of such systems to cope has contributed to water pollution, environmental degradation and the spread of communicable diseases and fatalities. Due to overcrowding in slum areas, there is the potential for such diseases to reach large numbers of poor urban residents. Such health problems can also be spread to affluent areas as poor urban residents often seek work in the homes, businesses and industries of the more affluent. In addition to the social costs of poor health, there are also financial costs. related to medical treatment, and impaired productivity from employee work absence.
- Poor air quality: Air pollution is one of the key contributors to disease and fatalities globally, and is a significant problem in urban areas in Asia. The main sources are industrial plants, residential and commercial buildings, concentrations of hazardous waste, and motor vehicles.
- Environmental degradation: rapid urbanisation has resulted in deteriorating environmental conditions, including from illegal occupation of open spaces, loss of tree cover, reclamation of ponds and other water bodies, and construction on river flood plains.

Crime and insecurity

- Economic costs: crime and violence in urban areas has been associated with various economic costs. These include: costs related to medical treatment, foregone earnings, loss of productivity due to injuries, loss of competitiveness, losses through thefts and muggings, costs on private security, and costs to the judicial system.
- Social costs: crime and violence can also have significant non-monetary costs in terms of increased morbidity and mortality; erosion of social capital; and higher levels of fear, mistrust and anxiety.

The following paper provides a comprehensive overview of the conditions in urban environments and key issues that need to be addressed.

UN-HABITAT, 2008, 'State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities', UN HABITAT, Nairobi

<http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/getPage.asp?page=bookView&book=2562>

This comprehensive report provides data and analysis designed to enhance understanding of how cities function and how to increase their liveability and unity. The section on 'environmental burdens' outlines household and urban level costs. At the urban level, key concerns stem from the concentration of production and consumption activities, including industry and motorised transport. This includes air pollution (and related health risks and disease), urban ground and surface water extraction and contamination, urban waste dumping, and the impact of urban expansion on natural areas, agriculture and biodiversity. The World Health Organisation has estimated that more than one billion people in Asia are exposed to unsafe levels of air pollution, resulting in the premature death of half a million people annually. At the household level, key concerns stem from poor living conditions, e.g. inadequate access to water, inadequate access to proper sanitation, indoor air pollution, neighbourhood solid waste accumulation etc. These impacts are in turn connected to a range of health and environmental risks to urban populations.

The report also examines the impact that urban environments can have on emotional well-being. It references studies that find an association between poor quality housing and living environments and psychosocial disorders: "Among the urban poor, lack of financial resources and high costs of living, harsh living conditions and physical exhaustion from lack of transport

(especially when living far from the workplace) all contribute to sustained and chronic stress that predispose individuals and families to mental health problems. Overcrowding, noise and air pollution, poverty and dependence on a cash economy, high levels of violence and reduced social support in cities also weaken and devastate both individuals and the social supports that could serve as buffers against mental health problems” (p. 128). Overcrowding, or lack of adequate living space, has been found to be a key contributor to mental disorders, depression and frustration. In Dhaka, it was found that young men living in slums had higher “conduct problems” than those living in non-slum areas.

2. Asia

Roberts, B. and Kanaley, T., 2006, ‘Urbanisation and Sustainability in Asia’ in Urbanisation and Sustainability in Asia: Case Studies of Good Practice, eds. B. Roberts and T. Kanaley, Asian Development Bank, Cities Alliance, pp. 13-41
<http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Urbanization-Sustainability/urbanization-sustainability.pdf>

This chapter discusses the urbanisation process in Asia and aspects of sustainability, including issues of land, housing, infrastructure and services, and environment.

- **Land:** The stabilisation of urban densities will not on its own resolve problems with overcrowding, pollution, traffic congestion and environmental health problems. Further, uncertainty over land tenure and urban planning and management in many Asian countries has resulted in inefficient operation of land and property markets, excessive speculation and high levels of disputes and litigation.
- **Housing:** Countries in Asia suffer from a host of unresolved urban housing problems, including insufficient low-income housing and inadequate housing maintenance. Often, houses are built without a permit, with substandard materials, on land without secure title and in areas vulnerable to natural disasters and politicisation. This has resulted in vast uncertainties in housing markets, which in turn undermine the possibility of homeowners using their land and housing as collateral to support business investments. It also reduces the incentive to maintain housing such that it is sustainable.
- **Infrastructure and services:** The failure of Asian governments to invest sufficiently to meet demand for urban infrastructure and services, for example demand for electricity generation and distribution capacity, is undermining economic growth and private sector development. In addition, the failure to plan and invest in urban transport infrastructure in many Asian cities has resulted in tremendous traffic management and logistic problems. Bangkok, for example, has become one of the most congested and polluted cities in the world, due in large part to the failure to plan and implement an adequate system of secondary roads to match private sector development. The cost of reducing congestion in Bangkok is now considered much higher than if the problem had been dealt with at an earlier stage. Existing infrastructure systems in Asia are also poorly maintained, which results in high losses to the systems and higher cost of services.
- **Environment:** Asian cities face common environmental problems related to unsafe drinking water and sanitation (and associated health problems); air pollution from industry and vehicles and coal burning; widespread traffic congestion; polluted waterways; and poor drainage of low-lying areas. The chapter stresses that such environmental problems result in increased financial costs for urban residents due to lengthy travel times to work; and significant costs on businesses and overall economic activity from impaired productivity: “These costs range from employee work absences due to illness, to congestion costs in moving goods and services, to the impairment of whole industries such as fisheries caused by overfishing and the reduction or contamination of fish stocks” (p. 34).

Transport and Congestion

Ooi, G-L., 2008, 'Cities and Sustainability: Southeast Asian and European Perspectives', Asia Europe Journal, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 193–204

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/6234n63037282376/>

This paper focuses on the problems of urban traffic congestion, a problem common to many large Southeast Asian cities (e.g. Manila, Jakarta and Bangkok) as well as smaller capital cities (e.g. Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City and Singapore). The rapid growth rates of populations in these cities have put pressure on city governments to provide for infrastructure and services to meet growing demands, including those related to transport. The rapid expansion of cities, resulting in urban sprawl, has lengthened commuting distances of workers and at the same time has not contributed to easing congestion. The paper attributes much of the problems with congestion in Southeast Asia to the failure to establish a well-coordinated urban transport policy that emphasised sustainable, public forms of transport. Instead, most cities have resorted to private modes of transport. This has been problematic not only for urban congestion but also for air quality.

Urban Age, 2008, 'Integrated City Making: Governance, Planning and Transport', Urban Age, London School of Economics and Political Science, London/ Alfred Herrhausen Society, Deutsche Bank, Berlin

http://www.urbanage.net/0_downloads/ICM_Summary_Report.pdf

http://www.urban-age.net/0_downloads/ICM_Detailed_Report.pdf

This report is the outcome of research on integration of transport and land-use planning in four cities in India: Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi and Bangalore. It finds that the rapid growth of these cities, largely due to rural to urban migration, has placed significant pressure on infrastructure – in particular, roads and draining and sewage. The inefficiency, lack of integration, lack of reliability and overcrowding of public transport has resulted in an immense rise in car ownership and use. Roads that were not designed for cars are now highly congested, resulting in greater local pollution and reduced economic efficiency. Interviews of residents in the cities reveal that travel between industries and residential areas can take five to six hours a day. This increased car use has also created an unaccommodating environment for walking and cycling, modes of transport which could relieve congestion and the environmental costs of car use. Drainage and sewage systems are also overloaded, which has led to the spread of disease and fatalities. This is exacerbated by floods and changing weather patterns. Rapid urbanisation has impacted negatively on the environment, for example, through loss of tree cover, reclamation of ponds and other water bodies, construction on river flood plains, and disruption of discharge and recharge channels.

Tiwari, G., 2007, 'Urban Transport in Indian Cities', Newspaper Essay, Urban Age, London School of Economics and Political Science, London/ Alfred Herrhausen Society, Deutsche Bank, Berlin

http://www.urban-age.net/0_downloads/archive/_mumbai/Newspaper-essays_Tiwari.pdf

This brief article critiques the Indian public transport agenda, which focused initially on haphazard investments in road infrastructure and now investment in capital-intensive rail-based systems. The article notes that improvements to road have not resolved problems of congestion, traffic accidents, and air and noise pollution. Rail projects have thus far been running at operating losses and do not cater to the majority of the population. In particular, those living in urban slums are unable to afford a car or rail-use and often have shorter distances to travel than those offered by rail services. The article advocates instead for greater focus on public buses, which are more flexible and can be used for short-haul trips, and to include pedestrian and bicycle facilities in transport plans.

See also:

Rode, P., 2007, 'Mumbai: The Compact Megacity', Newspaper Essay, Urban Age, London School of Economics and Political Science, London/ Alfred Herrhausen Society, Deutsche Bank, Berlin

http://www.urbanage.net/0_downloads/archive/_mumbai/Newspaper-essays_Rode.pdf

Environment

Marcotullio, P. J., 2001, 'Asian Urban Sustainability in the Era of Globalization', Habitat International, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 577-598

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/els/01973975/2001/00000025/00000004/art00025>

The paper charts the development of city systems in the Asia-Pacific region and their impact on growth, environment and social issues. It classifies cities in the region as capital exporters (post-industrial cities) – e.g. Tokyo, Seoul and Taipei; sites of foreign direct investment (industrial cities) – e.g. Bangkok, Jakarta and Shanghai; and borderless cities – e.g. Hong Kong and Singapore. The category of relevance to this query is the industrial cities. The paper states that the concentration of manufacturing plants and the rise in energy demand has resulted in increasing levels of air and water pollution and concentrations of hazardous waste. In addition, the growth of vehicle ownership (in particular motorcycles, three-wheel taxis and diesel buses and trucks) has also negatively impacted on urban air quality – and in turn, health and productivity in these cities. It is estimated, for example, that the annual cost of air pollution in Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and the Klang Valley in Jakarta is US\$1.3-3.1 billion, US\$1.0-1.6 billion, and US\$400-800 million, respectively. Water is also being polluted by domestic wastewater and industrial wastes. The increase in solid waste production combined with inadequate garbage collection and storage has also contributed to water pollution and the risk of water borne diseases.

Van Dijk, M. P. and Mingshun, Z., 2008, 'Urban Environmental and Economic Performance Linked to Sustainability: Evidence from Big and Medium Size Chinese Cities', IHS Working Paper, no. 15, Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, Rotterdam <http://bibis.ihe.nl:8080/bibis/other/IHS%20working%20paper%2015.pdf>

This paper examines issues related to urban environmental performance and sustainability in emerging Chinese cities. It seeks to quantify and compare the costs of investing in environmental sustainability and the costs environmental damage, defined as natural resource depletion and environmental pollution. It finds that “the average environmental investment share in GDP is 2.9% for controlling urban environmental decay in 15 big cities, and 1.7% in 9 medium-sized cities” (see Tables 3 and 4, pp. 9-10); and estimates that the “costs of environmental damage sharing in GDP are 10% - 15% in urban China” (see Table 6, p. 11). The paper thus indicates that environmental investments will not have an overall negative influence on economic growth, but rather a positive one through preventing a greater degree of loss of GDP.

The paper stresses though that the relationship between economic development and environmental investment is controversial: “On one hand, some of the environmental prevention and treatment programs will have no direct economic profits, but will bring social and environmental profits. In this case, economic growth does decrease. On the other hand, most of the environmental programs, such as recycling waste, decreasing emissions by improving the production process and adopting clean technology, will generate not only social and environmental benefits, but also economic profit. In this case, environmental investment will have positive effects on local economic growth” (p12).

Peri-urban areas

Marshall, F. et al., 2009, 'On the Edge of Sustainability: Perspectives on Peri-urban Dynamics', STEPS Centre, University of Sussex, Brighton

<http://www.steps-centre.org/PDFs/Peri%20urban%20online%20version.pdf>

'Peri-urban' refers to the 'urban fringe and the geographic edge of cities as a place, it refers to the movement of goods and services between physical spaces and to the transition from rural to urban contexts as a process and finally, as a concept, it refers to an interface between rural and urban activities, institutions and perspectives' (p. 3). This paper explores aspects of peri-urban dynamics and issues of sustainability, drawing on South Asian examples in health service provision, water management and agriculture and food systems. It finds that issues of environmental degradation, natural resource conflicts, inadequate water and sanitation arrangements, health concerns and lack of access to health services, and social injustice are particularly acute in peri-urban situations. The paper profiles India and the environmental and health concerns in peri-urban areas. It finds that many of the prevalent diseases among marginalised urban inhabitants are associated with poor waste management (inadequate sewerage disposal and supplies of clean water) and poor air quality. Non-communicable diseases, such as depression and other mental health disorders are associated with poor social conditions and have also become a concern.

The paper stresses that the failure to address these issues in the periphery also undermines the ability to improve environmental integrity, social equity and poverty in growing cities. In addition, the paper notes that while public health planners may not see peri-urban areas as priorities, there can also be spillover effects for wealthy urban areas. This could be through the movement of contaminated agricultural produce to urban markets; and through the movement of slum dwellers who seek work in the homes, businesses and industries of the more affluent.

3. Bangladesh

Islam, N., 2006, 'Bangladesh' in Urbanisation and Sustainability in Asia: Case Studies of Good Practice, eds. B. Roberts and T. Kanaley, Asian Development Bank, Cities

Alliance, pp. 43-69 <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Urbanization-Sustainability/urbanization-sustainability.pdf>

This chapter provides an overview of issues affecting the planning and management of urban development in Bangladesh and presents three good practice cases studies. It highlights several problems faced by both large and small urban centres in the country (see p. 55). These include:

- a weak economic base in most towns and cities and common problems of poverty and inequality;
- inadequate urban utility services (water, sanitation and sewerage, electricity, gas, fuel, telephone, solid waste management, etc.);
- insufficient transport facilities and poor management of traffic, resulting in considerable traffic congestion, particularly in Dhaka City. This in turn results in significant financial losses in terms of time wasted, as well as from economic and health problems caused by vehicular air pollution;
- inadequate education, health, and recreation services;
- housing problems, which are particularly serious for those in the lower-income strata;
- deteriorating environmental conditions in cities and towns, including from air, water and sound pollution; from the illegal occupation of open spaces, parks, gardens, lakes, rivers, and other water bodies;

- deteriorating law and order situation, manifested in the escalation of crime and violence and the feeling of insecurity among the urban population;
- social problems, especially child abuse, the oppression of women and drug addiction among youth; and
- problems related to the preservation of socio-cultural heritage.

Hossain, S., 2006, 'Rapid Mass Urbanisation and Its Social Consequences in Bangladesh: The Case of the Megacity of Dhaka', Paper presented at the 16th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, 26-29 June, Wollongong
<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2006/Hossain-Shahadat-ASAA2006.pdf>

This paper explores the social consequences of rapid mass urbanisation in Bangladesh, focusing on the slums in Dhaka City. The tremendously rapid population growth of Dhaka has resulted in the creation and expansion of slum communities and put pressure on urban utility services and infrastructure. The paper finds that slum communities experience the highest level of poverty and vulnerability. They are vulnerable to flooding, unhealthy environments and diseases. In addition, income and wages are low among the urban poor. The paper notes that productivity is also low, since those who are self-employed or working in low paid informal jobs are often unable to earn more regardless of their efforts. Insufficient monthly household income and the subsequent sustained deprivation of necessary food have also resulted in chronic malnutrition and poor health. Poor health, in turn, often results in unemployment: the poor who work in the garment industry or other factories are not allowed leave for illness – and as such lose their jobs if they are absent.

Security

World Bank, 2007, 'Dhaka: Improving Living Conditions for the Urban Poor', World Bank Office: Dhaka
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BANGLADESHEXTN/Resources/295759-1182963268987/dhakaurbanreport.pdf>

This report discusses the pressing infrastructure, social and environmental problems experienced by Dhaka in the face of rapid population growth; and outlines priorities for addressing urban poverty. The last section of the report (pp 62-78) looks at the prevalent problem of crime and violence in Dhaka's slums and identifies significant economic costs. These include: costs related to medical treatment, foregone earnings, loss of productivity due to injuries, loss of competitiveness, losses through thefts and muggings, costs on private security, costs to the judicial system, etc. These costs have yet to be quantified, however.

The report also identifies some wider costs of crime and violence, which it terms 'economic multiplier effects'. These effects 'measure the overall impact that crime and violence have on the macroeconomic situation of a country, the labour market, as well as inter-generational productivity impacts. For example, victims of domestic violence have higher rates of absenteeism, are more likely to be fired from their jobs, and the domestic violence affects their earning power' (p. 132). The report highlights as well the importance of the non-monetary costs crime and violence pose on the population in terms of increased morbidity and mortality; erosion of social capital; and higher levels of fear, mistrust and anxiety.

Environment

WWF International, 2009, 'Mega-Stress for Mega-Cities: A Climate Vulnerability Ranking of Major Coastal Cities in Asia', World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) International, Gland, Switzerland [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/SNAA-7XQ8FX/\\$file/wwf_nov2009.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/SNAA-7XQ8FX/$file/wwf_nov2009.pdf?openelement)

This report outlines the high vulnerability of the Asian continent to climate change and climatic variability, which have and will continue to impact all sectors, including national and economic security, health, food production, infrastructure, water availability and ecosystems. The report highlights the especially high risk faced by coastal populations; many of Asia's largest cities were built on vulnerable lands such as deltas, which are significantly affected by coastal erosion, subsidence (sinking of the land), and sea-level rise. It finds that of the eleven Asian cities examined, Dhaka is overall the most vulnerable to climate change impacts as it is regularly impacted by tropical cyclones and flooding, and has very limited adaptive capacity. The large population of Dhaka and the relative importance of the city to the national economy render it one of the most sensitive cities to climate impacts in this study. In addition, mass migration to Dhaka from rural areas has caused massive problems with solid waste and resulted in one of the highest rates of death from infectious diseases of any Asian city. Concern over diseases, pollution, soil degradation, erosion, deforestation and heavy extraction of groundwater all contribute to the city's climate vulnerability.

UN-HABITAT, 2008, 'State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities', UN HABITAT, Nairobi <http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/getPage.asp?page=bookView&book=2562>

This report, cited earlier, also examines issues of climate change, and profiles Dhaka as particularly vulnerable. Its vulnerability to climate impacts stems from the absence of any urban planning; the high population density; the proximity to flood-prone rivers and risk of other natural disasters. The impacts are expected to be far-reaching: "The sheer number of people living in the city means that the negative consequences of climate change are likely to be felt by a large number of people, especially the urban poor who live in flood-prone and water-logged areas [...] A recent mapping and census of slums conducted by the Centre for Urban Studies in Dhaka shows that nearly 60 per cent of the slums in the city have poor or no drainage and are prone to frequent flooding. The problems associated with flooding are compounded by poor quality housing and overcrowding. The survey found that more than one-third of Dhaka's population lived in housing where almost all the structures were too weak to withstand large-scale environmental disasters. [...] Overcrowding is extremely prevalent; more than 90 per cent of slum dwellers share a single room with three or more people. Floods in dense, poorly serviced settlements can lead to other hazards, which have a significant impact on the health of urban poor residents. Floodwaters in slums can mix with raw sewage and breed water-borne diseases, such as diarrhoea, typhoid and scabies. Water supplies also become contaminated during floods, as pipes in slum areas are likely to be damaged or to leak. [...] Plans for flood protection are already underway in greater Dhaka [...] Technical solutions are possible, but these solutions must also take into consideration unresolved development problems, such as the city's growing slum population, which has doubled in the last decade, and which shows no signs of abating" (p. 152).

4. Additional resources

McGranahan, G., 2007, 'Urban Environments, Wealth and Health: Shifting Burdens and Possible Responses in Low and Middle-income Nations', Human Settlements Discussion Paper Series: Urban Environment, International Institute for Environment and Development, London <http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdfs/10553IIED.pdf>

This paper examines urban health in low- and middle-income countries in relation to infrastructure, services and housing deficiencies, and environmental issues. It outlines the various methods of transmission of faecal-oral diseases in urban settings due to poor housing, water and sanitation (see pp. 15-16). It also outlines how the spread of HIV/AIDS can be exacerbated due to these same poor conditions (see p. 24). Flood disasters and other climate-related events can also contribute to the spread of infectious diseases, such as diarrhoeal diseases and cholera, through the overflowing of septic tanks and damage of piped water supplies.

Stage, J. Stage, J. and McGranahan, G., 2006, 'Is Urbanisation Contributing to Higher Food Prices?', International Institute for Environment and Development, London/ United Nations Population Fund, New York <http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdfs/10573IIED.pdf>

This paper explores whether urbanisation, in particular the movement of populations from rural to urban areas, has contributed to higher food prices. It finds that urbanisation has resulted in building-over some agricultural land which may amount to a few years' worth of normal productivity increases in agriculture. It does not, however, consider this to be the key aspect of urbanisation contributing to rising food prices. Rather, it is the growing number of people living in urban areas who now depend on commercial purchases as their main source of food. As a result, food reserves have declined, translating into higher food prices in urban areas.

Additional information

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Websites visited

Asian Development Bank, Centre for Urban Studies, Environment and Urbanisation, Google, GSDRC, International Institute for Environment and Development, Sarai.net, STEPS Centre, World Bank, UN-HABITAT, UNESCO, University of Dhaka, Urban Age (London School of Economics)

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