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Cities Transformed: Demographic Change and its Implications in the Developing World

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Thus far the field of urbanization in the developing countries has seen demographers in the forefront. Primarily they have dealt with the relationship between industrialization and urbanization and have lent support to the over-urbanization thesis. Their studies were based on macro level data on development and urbanization obtained from national censuses and the United Nation's population estimates. Such studies raised issues about measurement and prediction of urbanization, differences between regions and countries, and the role of colonial history in shaping the city morphology. The mechanisms through which urbanization affects demographic transition and the dynamic aspects of urban economy and governance remain ill-understood. The present report by a distinguished panel of experts attempts to fill this gap. It focuses on various aspects of the urban transformation with emphasis on inter- and intra-urban differentials in economic and demographic consequences of spatial reorganization. The panel of experts is drawn from the Population Council, Overseas Development Institute, International Institute for Environment and Development, and university departments from a number of countries. The report is self-explanatory and covers the following six areas: (a) urban population dynamics and city growth, (b) social and economic differentials within and across cities, (c) fertility and reproductive health in urban areas, (d) mortality and morbidity in urban areas, (e) labor force implications of a changing urban economy, and (f) the challenge of urban governance.

The report is divided into ten chapters, references (which run into sixty pages) and six appendices, biographical sketches of both panel members and staff, and an index. The report begins with an introduction to the nature of demographic transformation under way in the developing countries (Chapter I). This is followed by a discussion of the aspects of social and spatial environments that influence demographic behavior (Chapter II), major

regional variations in the pattern of urbanizations, and their relationship with the forces of globalization, democratization and decentralization (Chapter III). The report supports the dual city thesis and observes the presence of a “European space” and an “indigenous space” in cities in the developing countries. While the former is shown enjoying a high level of urban infrastructure and services, the latter is only marginally served. And following this core issues in definitions and measurements, and projections of urban populations are discussed (Chapter IV).

The report identifies gaps in research on urban well-being (Chapter V), fertility and reproductive health (Chapter VI), mortality (Chapter VII), and migration (Chapter VIII). The report also covers issues in urban governance (IX). At the end of the report (Chapter X), there are suggestions for future research and improvement in research infrastructure.

The report is based on an extensive review of theoretical literature on various aspects of urbanization, compilation of unpublished and published data from sources such as Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), published and unpublished data from United Nations Demographic Year Book (DYB), sound research and analysis. The report deals with both methodological and substantive issues in urban processes and prospects. The panelists have done a formidable work in matching data from DHS with those of *World Urbanization Prospects*, United Nations population estimates and other national and international sources. They have suggested sound approaches to arrive at comparable estimates on population, demographic behavior, poverty and related issues. The report lends support to the thesis of similarity in the rate of urbanization experienced by developing countries of our times and that experienced by developed countries a century ago, highly uncertain urban futures in some countries, continuing urban-rural differentials in access to basic services, crisis-led fertility transition and the possibility of its continuation even after economic recovery, urban advantages in health and infant and child survival, better returns on education in urban areas and its implications, and the need for reform in local governance. It stresses that the fundamental task of urban governance today is the management of diversity and inequality. One has to accept the fact that in the future not only more people in the developing countries will be living in cities but the cities themselves will be transformed. The differences between cities according to size, region, surroundings, and constitutional and political differences governing the countries in which they are located are so pronounced that a comprehensive model of governance cannot do justice to people’s needs. What is needed is a fragmented model that attempts to find participatory local solutions.

The strongest part of the report lies in the discussion of challenges in conceptualization of location, and recommendations for future research. It argues for generation of more spatially disaggregated data, inclusion of population sizes in urban database, making projections inputs public, and refining urban indicators in the DHS. It also suggests ways of generating detailed and comparable data on urbanization without involving ethical violations.

The report is a most valuable contribution on urbanization in the developing countries. It is useful for demographers, urban planners, sociologists and economists interested in issues of urban planning and policies. Those dealing with planning and execution of surveys, including poverty studies, projections of populations, and consequences of globalization on the developing countries may also gain insights from the report.