

CHAPTER 10

New Frontiers for a Global Urban Commons

what policies and approaches might world cities — Global South and Global North alike—share and learn from this century of the city?

This book has cited many, from building climate change resilience to rethinking transportation, from improving urban health to enhancing professional planning. But each of those topics and more raise new possibilities of coordination and mutual learning—and intriguing questions:

coordination
and mutual
learning

Who are some of the critical players for cities now? Might not many be women—caregivers and social capital creators and potentially great income producers, if cities clear the way for their education and advancement? Or a combination of mayors, and leaders in civil society, and grassroots organizations communicating more closely and constantly, city to city, continent to continent, in the new global urban commons?

global urban
commons

This chapter explores some of these possibilities.

smart local economics in a century of markets

There is no doubt that the forces of globalization have plunged the world into a century of rapid worldwide exchange. Capital by the trillions circulates in global markets, looking for targets of opportunity, and—as we noted in Chapter 2, “Water, Sanitation, and Shelter: A Fresh Look at Finance”—could be tapped in part for development in some of the world’s most deprived urban neighborhoods. Manufactured goods carried through international trade keep multiplying in volume. Even sophisticated

services such as information technology are now up for grabs globally with 24-hour Internet connections.

Many less-developed countries have benefited, in terms of new jobs produced and foreign exchange earned, from the economic revolution sparked by globalization. The dramatic economic surges in such countries as China and India testify to the broad benefits. The smaller Asian dragons of Singapore and South Korea, plus to some extent Malaysia, Thailand, and, in South America, Brazil and Chile, also showed that advancing modern economies are hardly a Global North monopoly.

For cities, there is risk in the game. The globally mobile investments that hit them tend to be tremendously agnostic—what makes money gets money, whether it is green or polluting, supportive or destructive of local businesses, exacerbating or smoothing out social inequities. Sheer economic growth is substantially different from development that builds local skills, creates new capacities, does not pollute, and benefits more than a narrow cut of the city's population. But the raw forces of globalization make no differentiation.

creates new
capacities

The special challenge for developing world cities in the intense competition of the times is to develop niches that accentuate positive impacts, do not create the severe industrial pollution reported in fast-growing metropolises (most vividly reported from China), and help their burgeoning low-income, less-educated populations move toward secure, healthy, and dignified lives.

accentuate
positive
impacts

Cities, communicating across the globe, should be able to inform each other on multiple levels. Which are the exploiting or polluting industries that need to be accepted with great caution, if at all? Even on the high-technology side, what are the environmental dangers? What smart principles of regulation are emerging from cities' experience worldwide?

smart
principles of
regulation

One important reminder: Cities are critical economic actors themselves. The infrastructure they choose to build (or not build) has a major economic—and often social—impact. The thoroughness of the environmental regulations they establish can make significant differences in public health. The services they do or do not provide (for example, effective water, sanitation, and inspections to avert disease-producing waste accumulations) can play a major role in the sheer survival prospects in some slum populations. Their willingness to hear a full range of voices in their own citizenry, not just favored classes, can be critical to their morale and prospects for prosperity.

critical
economic
actors

a full range of
voices

As Mark Roseland and Lena Soots note in the Worldwatch Institute's 2007 State of the World, the tax decisions urban governments make can have profound outcomes. Are the heaviest levies laid on the "bads"—pollution, waste, urban sprawl, resource depletion? Conversely, is there an effort to keep the burden lighter on the "goods"—jobs, income, investment, good urban development, and resource conservation? And do local tax structures impede or facilitate entry of the poor—slum dwellers included—into the labor market?

globalized
economy

The globalized economy delivers numerous opportunities to today's major cities—oftentimes investors dangling jobs and investments before officials' eyes. A worldwide exchange of experience among cities might well deliver a message of caution: Look and analyze before you leap. The best course is proactive, to take seriously the modern method of "cluster analysis" of a region's best industrial/business prospects that Harvard University economist Michael Porter developed, asking basic questions: which industries "fit" the particular attributes, specialized knowledge, and workforce capacities of a city region? Where are the long-term wealth-building potentials? What changes in the city's education and worker training programs are necessary to realize the knowledge and wealth-building potentials?

cluster analysis

long-term
wealth-building

A companion principle: Municipalities, watching developers with a careful eye, can work to grow and sustain development from within. That means starting with a preference for locally owned businesses, which in most instances are more likely to be stable, lasting generators of wealth, more likely to train and develop local talent, and less likely than outside-owned firms to close up shop abruptly.

sustain
development
from within

Active exchanges of experience and findings of what works, what doesn't, and how to finance and regulate smartly—both among city governments and such interested observers as universities, public staff, even organizations of slum dwellers—are likely to pay the greater long-term dividends.

climate change and its many city frontiers

The world's cities—their buildings, factories, cars, and trucks—consume roughly 75 percent of the world's energy and account for 80 percent of the carbon emissions and consequent dangers of serious global warming. The big hemispheric issue is that the Global North, with its centuries of industrialization, bears most responsibility for causing the problem, while the Global South is likely to bear the early, severest brunt of climate change damage.

causing the
problem

But despite differing North–South emphases, climate change presents such massive challenges to cities that a big part of all 21st-century urban agendas will revolve around the issue. Direct city-to-city learning will be critical on many fronts: for example, the role of coastline levees, “moving” of whole neighborhoods (or indeed downtown sections) out of harm's way, protection of roadways and railroads, and radical energy-saving designs for buildings (whose power requirements generate the most greenhouse gas emissions of any major source, well beyond transportation, the most obvious culprit). New York City, for example, has an ambitious green agenda that includes making virtually all new and existing buildings far more energy efficient; the added insulation and equipment costs will be financed with inventive financial instruments by which the owner is held harmless while the debt is paid off out of the building's all-but-assured energy cost savings.

city-to-city
learning

an ambitious
green agenda

Even in China, facing some of the world's grimmest environmental challenges due to rapid industrialization, there are

islands of hope. Near Shanghai, a world model of a sustainable, non-carbon emitting city is about to rise on an island three-quarters of the size of Manhattan. With a team of specialists from Europe, North America, and Asia, the London-based design firm Arup is working with the Shanghai Investment Corp. on the project. The goal is to create the world's first fully green city, every block engineered in response to China's environmental crisis. It is expected that Dongtan (as it is to be named) will have a half million residents by 2050 and will be powered totally by local and renewable energy, with clustered, dense neighborhoods, a program that recycles 90 percent of all waste, a network of high-tech organic farms, and a ban on any vehicle that emits CO₂.

the world's first
fully green city

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon argues that such constructive responses to climate change—"green economics"—can actually pay dramatic dividends. Citing the International Panel on Climate Change, co-recipient of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, Ban argues that growth in global energy demand could be cut in half over the next 15 years by deploying existing technologies in buildings, transport, and appliances, all the investments returning a 10 percent yearly return or better.

deploying
existing
technologies

mysteries of the global urban footprint

From a city planning perspective, the issue of the century may be that of the global urban footprint: how large an area of the world's land surface is required for cities' dramatic population growth. Cities still occupy a small portion of land

global urban
footprint

urban island
heat effect

on the planet (even though, if their needs for food, fuels, water, and waste areas are included, they require vast areas of the world's surface). But cities' immediate footprint is also critical. The more they spread out physically, the more impervious land cover is created, the greater is the urban island heat effect, the greater the chances of harmful runoffs and compromising of stream and river quality, and greater the likely impairment of the "green lungs" of surrounding natural area.

expanding
living
standards

Complicating the footprint issue is that of expanding living standards. As incomes rise, people automatically demand increasing amounts of living space. The average size of a single-family American home rose from 983 square feet in the 1950s to 2,329 square feet in recent years (add to that the space to park and run the average family's autos in overwhelmingly suburban, spread out places). Shanghai's average dwelling size increased from roughly 4 square meters to 16 square meters from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s—growth ameliorated only in part by the city's heavy emphasis on high-rise structures.

The urban footprint and its implied (though not yet calculated) impact on global warming emerged as a particularly compelling finding of an early week at the Global Urban Summit focused on worldwide research needs. Stephen Sheppard reported on how he and his Williams College colleagues, employing Landsat satellite images of a sampling of 120 world cities (one set taken around 1990, another around 2001) were able to show global cities' dynamic form of growth—

how much they move to the urban periphery (“outspill”), or, alternatively, find space inside (“infill”).

Additionally the Landsat readings permitted intensity light readings indicating types of land use, pixel by pixel, down to very small areas. Then the Williams team matched its images with local census information from each city to estimate actual population and per capita income.

A major finding: New residents don’t cause a city to expand physically at quite the rate of population growth. But they still cause, on a worldwide average, seven times more outspill than infill (and in the East Asian cities measured, 15 times more outspill). The study also permitted a rough approximation of how rapidly population increase may force cities to infill or expand onto new territory. Sheppard described a “half and half urban preparation rule:” Take the average of a city region’s population growth and income growth, and one can conclude approximately how fast population growth will probably force a city to expand onto new territory. That means that São Paulo, at current trends of building mostly “out” rather than “up,” may well need 7.5 square miles, and Shanghai an even more startling 14 square miles of new development, every year.

infill or expand

The impacts of cities’ physical expansion—locally and in relation to global warming—do invite city-to-city learning on the role that good planning can play. A hands-off, let-development-go-anywhere approach leads to accelerated land consumption and increase carbon footprint through

sound plans
and policies

new roads, loss of natural landscape, and longer travel times.

Sound plans and policies, conversely, can recycle underused urban land or schedule better use of expansion areas to achieve much greater people-carrying capacity. Good planning can avoid some of the worst modern traffic jams by putting public transit first, making walking and biking convenient, channeling solar lighting into enclosed and underground living spaces, and preserving pockets of green critical to humans' physical and emotional health.

renewed,
effective city
planning

An immediate conclusion: The 21st century needs to be a century of renewed, effective city planning, the challenge described in Chapter 5, "Designing the Inclusive City."

It is clear, however, that methods of government finance also play a major role in the speed and nature of urban expansion. In countries in which central governments set land use rules and provide a major share of municipalities' funding, growth tends to focus heavily within existing city lines. This tends, in general, to be the European pattern; serious government-set growth limits have, in fact, led to concentrated, dense cities.

But in a system like that of the United States', in which most land controls are local, and municipalities are largely self-financed, the welcome mat is out for proposals by private industries or developers that will increase the local tax base. Since green fields on the edge of an area are cheaper to develop, that is where the lion's share of the new growth goes, resulting in sprawl.

service
townships

Now versions of the U.S. practice appear to be spreading. China has been allowing industrial parks, joint ventures, even the creation of new cities, not by central government decision but whenever a local Communist party chooses to make a deal with private investors. India, on a parallel track, is moving toward independently financed, suburban-style “service townships”—indeed the private sector is being allowed to create whole new gated towns for the country’s more affluent classes.

Post-apartheid Johannesburg, South Africa, not only suffers from huge housing and infrastructure deficits centered in its formerly all-black townships. Its high crime rates were a major factor in moving South Africa’s stock exchange out of the city and into a suburban enclave, Sandton—in the process changing the name from Johannesburg Securities exchange to the more anonymous corporate title “JSE Limited.” Urban Age reports the city “contends with glaring disparities in close physical proximity—gated and electrified suburban residential affluence stands within ten-minute driving distance of dense inner-city neighborhoods teeming with street life and informal commerce,” even while “suburban building projects, replete with pseudo-Tuscan moats and escapist Balinese themes, increase in velocity and geographic spread.”

Serious social issues arise: How, for example, will urban services be provided for the 80 percent of the population that lacks even a fraction of the wealth to buy into the new privately provided townships? Cities worldwide might ask, Do we wish

divisive “gated
community”

to emulate the socially divisive “gated community” phenomenon that has become so prominent in newly built U.S. areas in the last decades? What is our formula to avoid 21st-century socioeconomic apartheid?

socioeconomic
apartheid

The difficult bottom line is that the Global North and Global South have a common challenge: to convert more out-spill to infill. Growth areas across the globe need to guide the “once in a world” urban expansion now under way so that it consumes the least feasible amount of land and encroaches on fewer of the wetlands and estuaries and deltas that provide the cleansing kidneys, as it were, for human existence. This must be done in a way that triggers the least amount of new asphalt and concrete cover, stimulates shorter auto and truck travel, and relies more on public transportation, thus generating fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

infrastructure: critical, but all public?

Adequate roadways, railroads, public transit, seaports, airports, water and sewage treatment plants, electric grids, schools, and hospitals—21st-century cities face staggering challenges to create and maintain the basic physical infrastructure they need for safety, mobility, health, and advancement.

Consider first the Global South. Total yearly needs to build and maintain basic infrastructure in the developing world’s cities has been estimated at some \$200 billion. And small wonder: fresh water (as of 2000) was reportedly lacking for up to 150 million African slum dwellers, for 700 million in Asia’s

cities, and for as many as 120 million in Latin America. The comparable deficit figures for sanitation facilities suggest they are missing for up to 180 million slum dwellers in Africa, 800 million in Asia, 150 million in Latin America, according to “indicative” (unofficial) estimates compiled by David Satterthwaite and Gordon McGranahan for the Worldwatch Institute.

Only China, pushed by national pride and an ebullient, perhaps once-in-history economic growth rate, appears to be building infrastructure adequate for future generations, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) notes in its Infrastructure 2007 report. Even then, accompanying environmental safeguards have been widely criticized. India, also growing rapidly, is struggling to add infrastructure quickly enough, yet despite some advances, it appears hampered by corruption and bureaucratic delays.

The nations of the Global North, by contrast, have witnessed a marked slowdown in infrastructure building and upkeep in recent decades. The biggest laggard of all appears to be the United States, presumably riding on the wave of overconfidence and “assumed superiority” described in Chapter 7, “U.S. Transportation Challenge: Better Outcomes for Billions Spent.”

So how can cities help each other? Communicating oft-neglected priorities is a good start. One example: the major advantage of creating inventory lists of deficient and needed infrastructure, each project matched to an updated cost estimate. Keeping the big picture in focus discourages fast political runs for marginally useful projects. A second example, underscored in the ULI report: to suggest how vital it is to think and plan

infrastructure
adequate
for future
generations

communicating
oft-neglected
priorities

cross-city
counseling

metro-region-wide, analyzing the functional interrelationships of infrastructure elements (roads, public transit, land-use planning, and location of housing, schools, and offices all seen as an interconnected, regional whole). A third idea for cross-city counseling: Protect local government budgets by insisting on truly efficient land use. American laissez-faire suburban growth patterns have, for example, run up infrastructure costs exponentially. Why? No premium is ever charged for the dramatically higher per-mile or per-unit cost of providing water, sewer, electric, police, and other systems to strung-out settlements. Compact development in towns or cities involves substantially lower costs. If sprawling development had to pay its own way, there would unquestionably be less of it. Forewarned of sprawl's big cost premiums, growing cities around the world might be prompted to hold it in check.

compact
development

privatization

Privatization is the "hot" new infrastructure idea of recent years, initiated in Great Britain under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and spread to the United States, Canada, Australia, and India since. Either the private sector finances construction of infrastructure projects or purchases or leases existing government-financed infrastructure, charging tolls to recoup its investment. Private management is often sold as a way to get tighter management and higher performance of roadways (and more recently ports). Political leaders are drawn to privatization as a way to keep roads and other infrastructure operating or to build anew, without incurring taxpayer wrath for raising new taxes.

tolls

Tolls have one great virtue: the user pays directly for the public good he or she is using. But there is no “free lunch”—one way or another, the public ends up paying for the cost of infrastructure. There is also some danger that privatization offerings may lead to agreements that foreclose better alternatives (exclusive bus lanes rather than new tolled lanes along a highway, for example). Also it is rare that privately financed infrastructure will find the profit it seeks in serving low-income areas.

infrastructure projects

And, there are only so many infrastructure projects investors would find attractive in the first place. “Even investment bankers, who gorge on healthy fees from these transactions, warn that privatization ‘will not be a panacea,’” author Jonathan D. Miller notes in the ULI report. It is estimated that only 10 percent of U.S. roads could attract public–private partnership type deals; basic street grids, for example, will likely never qualify.

public–private partnerships

Such reservations do not mean, however, that public–private partnerships will not expand; the U.K. model suggests that in one form or another, they are likely to be proposed for water supply and sewers, for schools and hospitals.

Privatization presents one rich opportunity for exchange of counsel by cities and their allies around the world. Individuals with extensive experience in financial houses of such cities as New York, London, and Hong Kong could offer pro bono counsel to cities, especially those of the Global South, that are considering privatization deals, often for the first time. Knowing the field, the investment veterans would be able to help the

avoid serious
beginners'
errors

cities avoid serious beginners' errors, briefing them on criteria to consider before deciding to make a deal and, if the deal is decided on, how to structure it so that the city gets the best possible terms.

exchange ideas

Concurrently, whether the issue is privatization or just helping other cities persuade their national government to assist in financing their immense infrastructure needs, the need and opportunity is clear. It is to exchange ideas with cities that have more extensive experience dealing with investors, banks and institutions; it is the chance to get counsel from civil service veterans and other volunteer advisers who really grasp the infrastructure issues that cities in developing nations face, and how to overcome them.

spaces for people in a motorized world

More than 1 billion motorized devices travel the roads of the world. There were more than 600 million automobiles—24 percent in the United States alone—at last count in 2002, though the global count now is surely far higher with rapidly rising car sales from Eastern Europe to India to China. (Some 1,000 additional cars take to the streets of Beijing daily. A \$2,500 personal auto is being marketed in India to meet fast-rising middle-class demand.) The worldwide totals for mopeds and motorcycles, as well as for trucks, buses, and vans, each topped 200 million in 2002, and are all on the rise today. The speed of change is illustrated in cities such as Hanoi, transformed from rickshaw culture to racing motor bikes in just the last decade.

No doubt exists: We live in an age of motors. The personal convenience, added economic activity, and quality of life they deliver are vital and prized across the continents. Few humans would now choose to “de-invent” motorized vehicles.

modern auto
culture

But modern auto culture has not been kind to cities. Autos’ impact in the Global North, especially after World War II, went far to shatter the historic strength of urban centers—their close geographic concentrations of people, attractions and economic activity, and a shared public realm. Suburban outspill (and in the United States sterile single-purpose zoning) created vast new areas of auto-accessible-only residences, shopping malls and business parks. Public transportation often atrophied as the lion’s share of public investment went into motorways serving the rising tide of cars and trucks. The motors-first trend was most pronounced in the United States, more restrained in Europe, and moderate in geographically closely packed Japan.

public
transportation

Recent years have seen some counter movements. Strong efforts at urban revitalization—restoring traditional city centers, strengthening cultural facilities, and building neighborhoods at a more compact, human scale—have strengthened many of the world’s historic cities in recent years. Fast-rising gas prices have discouraged automobile use. Car-free zones have been established and “congestion pricing” introduced (first in Singapore, later in London and Stockholm) to keep center cities more mobile. The New Urbanist town design model and shifting consumer preferences have led to more land-conserving developments in many parts of the United States. Brookings

car-free zones

Institution fellow Christopher Leinberger argues in a recent book (*The Option of Urbanism*) that the “one size fits all” formula of “drivable suburbanism,” dominant for the past 60 years, is fading in popularity and sustainability. In its place, he suggests, a new “walkable urbanism,” focused in reviving cities and new transit-connected suburban towns, is emerging.

But the global auto push has remained powerful: Witness the Chinese government’s declaration of car production as a pillar industry. Explosively growing Shanghai doubled its car use between 1995 and 2004 even as it publicly sought to repress bicycle use. The vast expansion of international trade has led to motorways clogged with truck traffic to and from ports.

One oft-cited consequence: Sheer urban congestion has become so serious that traffic in many world cities often moves at the speed of horse-drawn carriages. Or, in many cases, at even slower speeds—with alarming environmental consequences. Jakarta is faced with geometrically expanding vehicular use—so drastic and with such severe daily traffic jams that a former governor has warned that the city’s roadways may come to a complete standstill in 2014. Jakarta’s mass transportation grand design includes widespread busways, a subway, and a monorail. But still the city administration has announced plans for six inner-city turnpikes to create more spaces for cars and trucks, a step critics contend will worsen both the congestion and already severe air pollution. In the United States the legendary gridlock around the hypergrowth region of Atlanta, Georgia, has become so extreme that

expanding
vehicular use

businesses have begun to shun the area. Some 1.7 million drivers clog that area's roadways at rush hour; the answer has been to add freeway capacity, by one proposal favored by the Georgia Transportation Department, up to 23 lanes at one stretch in suburban Cobb County.

tame auto use

Can cities move more aggressively to tame auto use and reclaim more of the public realm for pedestrians and bicycle users? Given the automobile's high popularity among economically rising classes, it is a difficult challenge, made all the tougher by the tens of billions of dollars that globally active automobile companies pour into advertising glamorizing the comfort and speed of their products.

bike-for-hire
stations

But counter efforts are beginning. Handy bike-for-hire stations are proving instant hits in crowded inner cities. The Paris "velib" bike rental program—the name combines "velo" (bicycle) and "liberte" (freedom)—registered an astounding 2 million trips in the first 40 days after its 2007 opening. With almost identical systems sprouting up from Barcelona to Vienna, Oslo to Washington, D.C., with interest expressed in London, Rome, Moscow, and Beijing, the bike rental push seems likely to spread across all continents.

And some urban leaders have begun major efforts to tame the autos' total dominance. Most prominent among them in recent years was Enrique Peñalosa, mayor of Bogotá, Columbia, from 1998 to 2000. When he took office, Peñalosa quickly vetoed a pending proposal to construct seven elevated highways over the city. Instead he made an absolute priority

of creating walkable spaces: pedestrian streets, sidewalks, greenways, bicycle paths, metropolitan-scale and neighborhood parks, and citywide car-free days. He forced removal of autos on sidewalks which, as he explains, “car-owning upper classes had illegally appropriated for parking.”

Building on the highly successful citywide bus system of Curitiba, Brazil, Peñalosa pressed to create a “TransMilenio” system of buses on exclusive right-of-way in the center of major streets, with special entry platforms and wide-opening doors that permit 100 passengers out of a bus and 100 to enter within a few seconds. The highly efficient system (financed in part by a city-earmarked national gas-tax increase that Bogota encouraged) carries 1.4 million passengers a day. (The exclusive busway model is proving increasingly popular in Global South cities that can’t afford rail systems; a peripatetic Peñalosa is credited with helping to popularize the busway system in such cities as Jakarta, Beijing, Delhi, Cape Town, Lima, and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.)

“A city can be friendly to people or it can be friendly to cars, but it can’t be both,” Peñalosa insists. He notes that for some 5,500 years, cities were built chiefly for pedestrians—and with shared streets. The upper classes could retreat to country houses or other exclusive locations; the poor, without alternatives, had only humble homes to retreat to. But all classes had to use the street; it was the place that all met as equals. Because, in Peñalosa’s view, quality pedestrian spaces not only show respect for the poor but “create quality of life,

create social integration, create happiness because we all need to walk, to be with people, to see people.”

But, he argues, the automobile went far to destroy the equalizing effect of public space as it filled boulevards and streets with dangerously fast-moving traffic, crowding out sidewalks, filling vast spaces with parking, subjugating the cities’ own people to its voracious space demands. And those demands, he asserts, “are making today’s developing cities sadly into a second-rate copy of developed cities” in which “governments are often spending huge amounts of money on road infrastructure to benefit cars, money that could be going to schools, parks, hospitals.” The pattern is even evident, he suggests, in very poor African cities that lack even basic running water, sewers, or sidewalks.

second-
rate copy of
developed
cities

Yet there are better models available. As Ricky Burdett and Philipp Rode note in the Urban Age’s 2008 book, *The Endless City*, the record of reviving aging public transit systems in New York City and London, Shanghai’s rapid development of a vast underground network, and Bogota’s bus and cycle network “all show how city governments have prioritized public transport not simply as an end in itself but as a form of social justice, providing millions of people with access to jobs and amenities.”

The alarming fact, they note, is that the idea of the “compact, mixed-use, well-connected, complex and democratic city ... runs counter to what is happening on the ground in the vast majority of urban areas.” Rather, they observe, Western-developed models of single-function zones, elevated

Peace Corps and Beyond

Reel back to the 1960s and the United States' contact with the developing world — outside of congressional foreign aid grants — was in its infancy. The Peace Corps, born in the Kennedy presidency, had begun to send out idealistic youth to developing nations across the world. Some American youth were learning foreign cultures through such programs as the Experiment in International Living. A handful of NGOs were providing a degree of assistance, especially in low-income rural areas around the world. Levels of idealism, especially in the Peace Corps, were extraordinarily high.

Today the picture is vastly more complex. The Peace Corps lives on, though its ranks are roughly 8,000, a far cry from the 100,000 President Kennedy had hoped to see in a decade. Yet the opportunities remain rich. The World Bank in 2007 reported that of the world's 1.5 billion youth ages 12 to 24, an unprecedented 1.3 billion live in developing countries. This "youth bulge" may not expand much further in absolute numbers because it will reach a plateau as global fertility rates decline. But today's opportunities for young Americans to travel and work through the Global South, engaging directly with other young people in their home cities, are immense. One immediate connecting point: technology. It has been said that among youth in particular, "text messaging now rules the world." The step to Internet and cell phone use and their dramatic learning and development opportunities is not difficult.

Some of the most difficult challenges are in the Global South nations with the world's most rapidly rising populations. Total population is projected to triple or more between 2005 and 2050 in such nations as Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Niger, and Uganda. Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ethiopia will also see large absolute increases.

Yet the range of Americans' present-day global involvement is not trivial. One example: World Learning, currently headed by Carol Bellamy, former investment banker, New York City Council president, director of the Peace Corps and executive director of UNICEF. World Learning focuses on "the human face" of such challenges as poverty, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation, and ethnic conflict through a range of training and exchange programs touching more than 75 nations each year.

Exciting new forms of outreach are developing. One example: the Acumen Fund, a project incubated at the Rockefeller Foundation by program officer Jacqueline Novogratz, a Stanford Business School graduate who noted in her early career (working with an international unit of Chase Bank) that millions in loans were going to the wealthy with scarcely any benefit to the desperately poor. But in Rwanda, where she met a group of poor women struggling with a church-subsidized, money-losing bakery, she experimented with a new business approach that turned the bakery profitable, boosting the women's incomes, within six months. "I saw the power that markets can have to bring people out of poverty, the discipline that running a business provides, and the pride that results from ownership." Now, through the Acumen Fund that she created — she terms it a "philanthropic venture capital fund" — Novogratz works to help start (and counsel) health care, housing, and water enterprises by and for the poor in India, Tanzania, Pakistan, and other nations. Major philanthropies, from Rockefeller and Cisco to Google and Gates, have all lent a hand.

More new, high-profile U.S. involvement with critical global issues has emerged in recent years with the Clinton Global Initiative. Its annual meetings in New York draw some 1,000 world leaders: current and former heads of state (led of course by former President Bill Clinton himself), prominent business executives, scholars, and NGO representatives. Major commitments for worldwide outreach in such areas as education, energy and climate change, global health, and alleviating poverty have emerged.

The Ashoka program, begun in 1980 by American Bill Drayton, has recognized and provided start-up funding for more than 1,700 social entrepreneurs — individuals in 60 countries devising system-changing solutions to some of the most urgent social challenges of the times. The social entrepreneurs become lifelong members of Ashoka's global fellowship.

A single example of an Ashoka fellow may be worth noting. Sanjay Bapat of India created a virtual meeting ground for citizen groups, poor communities, corporations, funding agencies, and interested global citizens, communicating through his Web site, IndianNGOs.com. The goal: an Internet-age tool to help India's citizen-sector groups learn from

one another and form partnerships. While most information-exchange Web sites are supported by funding agencies or run by volunteers, IndianNGOs.com charges fees, modest ones for small start-up groups, larger ones from corporate members to keep the enterprise strong.

Now there are also a number of internationally focused U.S.-based charities inspired by the success of the French-born, 1999 Nobel Peace Prize–winning Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières). Engineers Without Borders USA, formed in 2000, has grown to 8,000 volunteer members in more than 200 chapters in which professional engineers and their students work together. In 2007 they were engaged in 250 projects — water, sanitation, energy, and housing — in 43 countries.

The engineers' first step is always meetings with local residents. It is critical, says Bernard Amadei, the group's founder, to devise systems the residents understand and can fix, and which will help them create local businesses and job creation. The big challenge, Amadei told a Lehrer News Hour correspondent, is to ensure "that whatever technology or solution we bring over is appropriate to the community, is respectful of the community, respectful of the culture, respectful of the people, does not divide people, creates more unity, more peace in a community."

motorways, and gated communities are commonly being “dumped . . . on the fragile conditions of the exploding cities of the Global South.”

roadway safety: new-century cause

often cars kill

Beyond questions of money and land use, a motorized world raises a massive safety problem: how often cars kill. The problem is severe in the developed world (more than 42,000 fatalities in the United States annually, for example). But cars and trucks are especially lethal in developing countries as they accelerate on roadways filled with pedestrians, cyclists, jitneys, and sometimes farm animals and hand-drawn wagons (and on some continents even camels and elephants). The worldwide fatality rate inflicted by vehicles is 1.2 million, plus 50 million serious injuries (by World Health Organization estimates). Highway deaths, WHO projects, may well pass death tolls from HIV/AIDS in the next two decades.

Dr. Mark Rosenberg, founder and former director of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and a panelist at the Summit sessions, has made a life cause of fighting the vehicular death toll.

Vision Zero

The world needs, he argues, to emulate Sweden's spectacular progress in recent years, “Vision Zero,” a goal of no more deaths from highway accidents. Sweden has driven its roadway death loss down to 440 in a year, the lowest figure since World War II. How? Tough seat-belt and helmet laws as obvious first

steps. But the Swedes also started remaking their roads. They replaced red lights at intersections (which encourage drivers to accelerate dangerously to “beat the light”) with traffic circles. They installed four-foot-high barriers of lightweight but tough mylar down the center of roadways to prevent head-on collisions, and as side barriers at critical locations. On local streets, narrowed roadways and speed bumps, plus raised pedestrian crosswalks, limit speeds to a generally nonlethal 20 miles an hour. Britain, New Zealand, and the Netherlands are also registering major success with safety redesign and tough roadway rules.

success with
safety redesign

If the world could eradicate smallpox, Rosenberg argues, it is reasonable to make zero traffic deaths a next global public health target. He reports substantial international action since the U.N. General Assembly first debated the issue in 2004. A U.N. Road Safety Collaboration was brought together by WHO. The World Bank is mobilizing resources to help developing countries in particular. George Robertson of Britain, a former Secretary-General of NATO, chairs a new Commission on Global Road Safety. There will be a 2009 U.N. Ministerial Conference on road safety, a first-ever meeting of cabinet-level officials from both developing and developed countries to set a global strategy.

zero traffic
deaths

But, Rosenberg notes, if the world’s cities established direct links, comparing notes on how to implement safety measures, overcome opposition, and make their streets dramatically safer, they “could make a tremendous difference in taming

comparing
notes

this entirely predictable worldwide epidemic of needless roadway deaths, saving thousands or tens of thousands of lives.”

more humane
roads and
public spaces

In one respect the movement to create safer, more humane roads and public spaces for the world’s people has never been riper. The urbanized areas of places such as India, China, Vietnam, and African countries must expand dramatically and rapidly to accommodate their added hundreds of millions of people. With an intense worldwide dialogue among cities on best development practices, the century’s new cityscapes might be made dramatically safer. And cities could plan early and well for clear physical separation between lanes of vehicular traffic, bicycles, and pedestrians.

“Complete
Streets”
movement

In fact, there is a U.S. organization with that very mission: the “Complete Streets” movement, an alliance of organizations of bicyclists, senior citizens, landscape architects, and smart-growth advocates. Complete Streets “are about a right-of-way for everyone out there traveling, walking, or biking,” says Barbara McCann, the movement coordinator. All users of all ages and abilities, she asserts, need to be able to move safely along and across a complete street. Indeed, she adds, “safety is a huge reason.”

In response six states and some 50 localities have adopted Complete Streets policies requiring that transportation planners include bicycling and walking facilities in all their urban-area projects. Chicago, for example, is moving to narrower traffic lanes, median “refuges,” and curb extensions for pedestrians, as well as converting four-lane roadways into three

lanes with marked bike lanes. Advocates say the improvements are great, but that potential cyclists are so fearful of traveling within a hair's breadth of fast cars and big trucks that bike lanes offering physical separation—a higher curbed strip or even the small vertical separation posts as Paris is trying—are mandatory. Few women, seniors, children, or more cautious men, they argue, will use bike paths without those protections.

street crimes

What about protecting walkers and cyclists from muggings or other street crimes? It can be a problem. But experience shows: the more walkers and cyclists “out there,” the less the crime incidence. And basic law enforcement is always a necessity. Plus, the public payoffs from increased walking and cycling can be significant: more efficiently used roads and public space, a decrease in personal obesity owing to lack of physical exercise (a massive public health problem in itself), and reduction of the greenhouse gas emissions and global climate impact of personal cars. Fighting obesity and carbon emissions in a single approach, argues Jonathan Patz, president of the International Association for Ecology and Health, “may present the greatest public health opportunity that we’ve had in a century.”

fighting obesity
and carbon
emissions

share the
public realm

But the opportunity is arguably wider: building civil society in which peoples from all walks of life can share the public realm with safety, dignity, and respect. Peñalosa argues that as new communities are built (or older ones retrofitted), the moment is ripe to lay out long (20-mile or longer), 50-foot-wide exclusive pedestrian and bike roadways through new neighborhoods and city sections. Ideally these new green strips

new green
strips

would link residential areas, parks, waterfronts, shopping areas, schools, and libraries. Older citizens could walk safely to a cafe and parents could take babies out for fresh air in their carriages. Such roadways, argues Peñalosa, “could completely transform a neighborhood’s life and even significantly increase property values. Yet the cost of creating them in newly urbanizing areas would be minimal.”

going green: water and energy

The green aspiration list for the century seems daunting, at first glance unachievable. Saner transport systems, parks, high energy–efficiency building standards, wind- and solar-power generation, cleanup of power plants and factories whose emissions spell illness and death for hundreds of thousands of humans each year—all, and many more, are the list.

Yet constant reminders are necessary: Climate change is a full-blown global emergency. Among its many imperatives, says Terry Tamminen, former chief policy adviser to California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger: Stemming “our wasteful use of electricity and our stubborn refusal to generate power with something cleaner and more sustainable than flaming chunks of coal.”

Cities, which by virtue of their intense economic activity are the chief generators of pollution on the planet, need to be the lead agents of reform. And not just in a vacuum, addressing issues within their borders, but by working with the rural regions around them.

The welcome news is that a host of creative, green, adaptive strategies have been invented around the world and could be boosted significantly by increased, direct city-to-city communications.

Consider water and sanitation issues. A good part of the learning needs to occur in Global South cities in which huge populations still lack either adequate fresh water supply or systems to dispose safely of human waste. Big, highly engineered water and sewer systems are often unaffordable or impractical in rapid, unplanned development around the peripheries of Global South cities. Local activists could benefit from advice from peers in other cities on how to organize to demand attention and get responsive service from city water and sewer agencies that are often more likely to serve the more affluent and disregard “informal settlements.”

And across the Global South models of self-organization by slum dwellers need to be expanded radically. One example: “condominial” water supply systems, initially developed in Brazil, in which the public water agency is persuaded to provide water pipes to an organized group of households, which then take the responsibility for installing the pipes to individual homes or yards. The result is a huge advance for peoples’ standard of living over communal or public standpipes. And it reflects the ideal of mixed “macro” and “micro” public utility systems—citywide on one side, localized on the other. On the waste water side, observers for years have been intrigued by the cooperative model for installing sewer pipes for a neighborhood,

highly
engineered
water and
sewer systems

waste water

developed by the Orangi Pilot Project, in Karachi, Pakistan (see Chapter 2, “Water, Sanitation, and Shelter: A Fresh Look at Finance”).

learning new
models

But in an age of climate change, learning new models may be important for privileged communities as well. The Global North has become accustomed to massive, highly centralized systems of water and waste water service. Many residents have minimal, if any, knowledge of how those systems function. Yet such single systems could prove enormously vulnerable in an era of radical weather change—either drought-imperiling single-source water systems or massive floods drowning out waste water treatment facilities. In adapting to climate change, redundant, smaller and flexible technologies may prove a critical backup. Indeed, in Bangladesh (annually clobbered by typhoons) and Calcutta (now Kolkata), India, local, cooperative minisystems have shown they can recover from heavy storms more than easily inundated macro water utility systems.

adapting to
climate change

infrastructure
deficits

“Leapfrogging” of Global North infrastructure systems may be practical in some fast-growing Global South cities that face big infrastructure deficits—cities such as Lagos, for example, in which the majority of the city has no sewer service. The Western development model, established in a few years at the end of the 19th century when there was little concern about the limitation of natural resources or the ultimate size of cities, was (and remains) essentially linear: water, energy, foodstuffs, and other solids enter the city, get consumed once, and then

are discharged as waste. The alternative is a more circular system in which the output of water or waste or energy is recycled, so that sewer water, for example, can be used to cultivate fish and plants, or solid wastes recycled to create methane gas, without the massive costs of centralized systems.

It is not difficult to imagine how models like these, described, depicted graphically, and analyzed for costs and benefits on Internet sites across the world, could make major contributions to 21st-century sustainability across all continents.

protect against
shortages

Energy issues—steps that cities can take to protect against shortages, high prices, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions—are especially compelling. On the one hand, there are still hundreds of millions of city dwellers who lack electricity or other conventional heat sources. Often they are obliged to burn kerosene, charcoal, wood scraps, or dung for cooking or warmth (processes that cause indoor air pollution that triggers a massive annual death toll). On the other hand, 150 years of rising electricity demand has left cities across the continents dependent on major fossil-fuel burning, pollution generating power plants and transmission systems, most built with now outmoded technology and subject to blackouts or other sudden failures.

solar
orientation
and power

Yet a plethora of more efficient, less polluting, and less dangerous power sources are being developed around the world. Solar orientation and power, new power from wind or geothermal sources, green roofs and walls, reflective paints, natural daylighting, efficient lighting—the list of potential technologies and approaches continues to lengthen. And

reliable indoor light for families that have never known it is in sight: in India, for example, distribution has begun of a new type of solar-powered lamp that uses LEDs (light-emitting diodes). The lamps are reportedly four times more efficient than an incandescent bulb.

“model”
energy cities

Many “model” energy cities, exhibiting new technologies or other radical saving plans, have emerged around the world, among them Barcelona, Melbourne, Chicago, Cape Town, Copenhagen, and Daegu, South Korea. Some 65 cities took part in a two-day Local Government Climate Session in connection with the worldwide climate change conference in Bali in 2007. U.N. Environment Program director Achim declared, “As champions of the climate cause and centers for innovation, efficiency, investment, and productivity, cities are posed to play an increasingly prominent role in the international climate change debate. It is in cities that climate and sustainability solutions for more than half of the humanity will be found.”

And surely there is global potential in rethinking basic energy distribution systems. In the United States, asserts Richard Munson of the Northeast–Midwest Congressional Coalition, “the average generating plant was built in 1964 with 1950s technology. Two-thirds of the fuel we burn is wasted.”

distributed
energy

A major solution the critics recommend: distributed energy. The idea is to supplement overloaded and polluting major power stations by local generation of power in small power plants. The installations are typically constructed to serve individual hospitals, campuses, apartment houses, factories,

or entire neighborhoods. They have an efficiency level double or better than that of regional power plants, because they practice cogeneration, producing electricity and steam simultaneously. Many have run, up to now, on increasingly scarce and expensive natural gas. But they're ideally suited for several emerging energy technologies: fuel cells, wind turbines, rooftop solar electric devices, and microgenerators.

Distributed generation, analysts Janet Sawin and Kristen Hughes report for the Worldwatch Institute, not only improves reliability, it also reduces vulnerability to accident or sabotage. Because the installations are modular and fairly easily installed, they are well-suited to fast-developing cities as migration pushes power demand up rapidly. "And distributed systems," it is noted, "provide local control and ownership of energy resources, encouraging community level economic development." Distributed generation is not, however, a total alternative. As David Morris, director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, notes, local power plants can be set up so they can both draw power from and contribute power to larger electric grids: "a two-way electricity system" that is "distributed, decentralized, and democratic."

local control
and ownership

Indeed, it is precisely the new "leapfrogging" and collaborative models of serving cities, rarely mentioned by the big power companies and international engineering and construction firms, that is a natural for a debate engaging citizen activists and entrepreneurial city officials through informal global city exchanges.

collaborative
models

greener still: metro food

The globalization and industrialization of food, with vast nation-to-nation shipments of such basic commodities as rice and wheat, raise major concerns about the security and cost of critical food supplies for city populations. The alarming escalation of global food prices in the spring of 2008 highlighted the problem, one potentially even more serious as the spatial footprint of the world's city regions expands, consuming lands once devoted to agriculture. Major environmental issues are raised as well, with the diversion of many farmlands to bio-fuel production and the environmental dangers of rapid conversion of carbon-conserving tropical forests to crop production.

The issue is hardly one that cities can ignore. With rapid urbanization, where will they turn for adequate food supplies? How secure will their supply chains be? Should a premium be placed on food grown within cities or their immediate hinterlands?

escalating food
needs

The escalating food needs of such expanding megacities as Jakarta, Bangkok, Karachi, Mumbai, and Shanghai already pose serious challenges, dependent as those metropolises are on 1) increasingly distant rural areas, many of which face their own water- and climate-sustainability issues, and 2) massive fleets of literally tens of thousands of trucks—diesel powered with serious emissions, sensitive to rapid increases in global energy pricing—to bring in sufficient food supplies for millions of people.

A prime U.S. advocate of an explicit metropolitan agriculture policy is Representative Earl Blumenauer of Oregon, a plenary speaker at the Global Urban Summit. Blumenauer argues that federal agriculture subsidies flowing to large commodity crop operators should be shifted “to build sustainable agriculture, create a farmers’ market in every community, help farmers protect our land and water, preserve our viewsheds, foster land banks, and control erosion.”

A metro focus fits history: In a pattern familiar across the world, most U.S. cities were founded not simply as centers of commerce but because areas of fertile fields, often in lush river valleys, had flat lands relatively easy to build on (and in easy range of food supplies). Especially following World War II, however, large portions of North American urban fringe land once devoted to farming were converted to suburban development. Modern transport made it relatively easy to ship in—by truck, rail, or ships—foods from distant locations.

The direct producer-to-customer ties in farmers’ markets strengthen cohesion and civic capital for people who share a geographically expansive metro region but may otherwise never meet. Local food is a metaphor for the entire region’s economic interdependence. Studies indicate conversations occur as many as ten times more often at farmers’ markets than at regular grocery chains, a not insignificant psychological boost in an increasingly impersonalized world. Civil society and food? The 21st-century connection, Global North and Global South, may turn out to be not just a challenge, but an answer.

urban health: looking “upstream” and facing up to the drug issue

A 21st-century global health agenda will be tough to devise because, as we note in Chapter 4, “Urban Health: Learning from Systems that Work,” any purely “medical model” is grossly inadequate to deal with the dire conditions of sanitation, poor water, pollutants, floods, and droughts that threaten many parts of the Global South. If these basic conditions generating human suffering and disease can’t be brought under control, medications, clinics, and doctors’ diagnoses will be of limited help.

public health
issues

But the need to focus on basic public health issues and all the “upstream” factors that contribute to health are hardly constrained to the Global South. In the United States, with health care soaring to 16 percent of GNP and projected to keep on rising, there is serious question about the sanity of the entire system. It is widely estimated that an extraordinary amount of health care dollars—by some estimates 90 percent—go to expensive hospital diagnosis, treatment, and surgical procedures. Yet clear evidence exists that the chronic diseases of the times—heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and many types of cancer—are largely preventable by smart diet, regular exercise, moderation in alcohol consumption, and not smoking.

Some of those same issues, with globalization, are now starting to affect the Global South. Dr. Julio Frenk, former Secretary for Health of Mexico and plenary speaker for the Summit week focused on health, noted the presence of triple

triple threats

threats: such historic diseases as malaria, modern communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS, and in today's cities a startling array of conditions ranging from malnutrition to obesity, air pollutants to mental illness.

Yet even if public health answers to most of those challenges could be developed, and widely applied, Frenk agreed that another deep and global challenge would remain: addiction to legally prohibited drugs. The issue is not only the serious physical harm to individuals of addiction to mind-altering drugs, but as some Global Urban Summit participants noted, the broad impact the drug trade has had on the cities of the world.

the drug trade

Imagine, for example, living in everyday fear of dying in crossfire between drug dealers and police or between rival gangs. That is the situation Summit participant Janice Perlman described in the three favelas of Rio de Janeiro she analyzed from 1968 to 1969 and then revisited, with many of the same families, in 2001 to 2003. The fear of military government demolishing homes had been replaced by fear of the lethal violence perpetrated either by the drug gangs or bribed police. Residents told Perlman that seeking retribution from the courts is futile, indeed that identifying the dealers is a death sentence. Result: shrinking personal freedom, fear of using public space, social capital decimated.

drug gangs or
bribed police

But that situation, while extreme, is echoed in depressed inner-city neighborhoods across U.S. cities where the trade in illicit drugs (often sold to suburbanites driving by for their "hit") has flourished. Narcotics dealers and their runners

struggle violently to gain and keep control of their lucrative markets. Death by gunfire is common. Bystanders are frequently killed. Threats of retaliation create a code of silence so that police cannot solve murders. Civic life is strangled. The parallel to the favela situation is almost painfully perfect.

illicit drugs

The U.S. Government has pursued a policy of total prohibition and criminalization of both dealers and users, domestically as well as in its foreign relations, over the past four decades. Yet the United Nations estimates the value of the global market in illicit drugs at \$400 billion, or 6 percent of global trade. The extraordinary profits, Ethan Nadelmann writes in *Foreign Policy*, “enrich criminals, terrorists, violent political insurgents, and corrupt politicians and governments.”

become major
pressure points

Bearing the brunt of today’s drug wars, the cities may have to take up the cause and become major pressure points on their national governments for change. They have the biggest stake: They are the primary killing fields of the drug wars; it is their police and legal systems that prohibition corrupts. Strong voices of civil society, especially the medical community and social service groups, organized city by city, will likely be needed to give elected leaders political cover and mobilize national and global coalitions for sweeping reform.

women of an urban world: asset, challenge for cities

The welfare of women—their health, rights, education, opportunity—is critical to world cities. And the connection

is straightforward: stable neighborhoods and a talented work force are prerequisites to cities' economic competitiveness. And neither can be fully realized unless women are valued.

unless women
are valued

There remain major threats to women's welfare, however, greater or lesser in varying societies but reflected worldwide and recounted in some detail during the Global Urban Summit sessions. There are low-wealth cities, in struggling parts of Africa, for example, in which girls are lucky to even enter school. (Of the 115 million 6- to 12-year-old children not in school in the developing world, UNESCO and UNICEF estimate three-fifths are girls.) Girls often lack basic supplies and books, or are denied required school uniforms in favor of boys. Some schools do not even have separate latrines for girls, a subject of daily humiliation and even worse during the days of the month when girls have their menstrual periods. And if there are family needs—ailing parents, for example—girls are often pulled out of school, even at quite young ages, to perform household chores.

girls often lack
basic supplies

Yet there is solid evidence that the more years girls can be kept in schools, the greater the chance they will refrain from early sex and will use contraception. The later they wait to have their first child, the smaller and more economically secure their families are likely to be. And greater self-confidence and lower birthrates for young women translate into less overall population growth, and a relief of severe pressures on local governments. Plus, studies have shown that smaller families are substantially likelier to move out of poverty than large ones.

greater self-
confidence

multiple
disadvantages

But girls across many continents face multiple disadvantages. There is often lack of preventive care for girls or instruction in building self-esteem, learning to respect and be defensive about their bodies, and how best to avoid rape or other male-inflicted violence. These girls suffer from the lack of counsel on avoiding sexually transmitted disease; the absence of help on such lifestyle issues as the importance of exercise and avoiding becoming overweight (with obesity a growing problem even in cities of less developed countries); and limited access to basic health services, including childhood vaccinations, prenatal and postnatal care, and coaching for motherhood.

relationship-
building and
community-
building skills

Virtually all these negative conditions are within the power of cities to address. Across the world, women are demonstrating their capacities and talents in businesses, academic settings, and in political life. In the Global South they not only provide the relationship-building and community-building skills critical in all communities, but in settings of extraordinarily rapid change in which chaotic social conditions easily develop. In slum settings they are typically the leading edge in forming residents' groups willing to pool modest resources to obtain varieties of financing for housing, water, or sanitation service (as noted in Chapter 2, "Water, Sanitation, and Shelter: A Fresh Look at Finance").

Recent decades have seen a meteoric rise of women in the Global North, and some Global South nations, in higher education, corporate life, and government. Astoundingly (at least from the viewpoint of earlier generations) women now constitute the majority of students in U.S. colleges and universities, and are approaching half of new entrants in most professions.

There is now scarcely any dispute that women are adding significantly to the quality, innovations, and positive growth rates of their economies and society.

positive
growth rates

Places around the globe that still accede to attitudes rooted in male superiority—that a woman’s primary role is for sex, bearing children, and fetching water, for example, or that girl children are less desirable than boys—are choking the collective future potentials of their cities and regions. The cures that cities can apply, while sometimes expensive, are not complex: adequate neighborhood services, including water, sanitation, parks, police presence to prevent attacks on women, decent schools, basic legal equality, and provision of basic health care and childcare services that serve women and families effectively. Active city-to-city how-to exchanges on these topics, globally but especially in the Global South, could help to hasten the paradigm change.

adequate
neighborhood
services

city-to-
city how-to
exchanges

mayors and beyond: the critical new-century network

The case for learning and exchanges—city to city across nations, continents, and the globe—is hard to dispute. Many world cities today have populations far exceeding those of nation states just a few decades ago. The variety of hard-to-resolve issues they face is extraordinarily broad. Knowledge of solutions, approaches, and experiences from other cities and continents could well make a critical difference in facing the toughest issues of the century.

Two recent mayors of Athens, a quintessential city-state and seedbed of modern democracy, have made the case eloquently in recent years.

One was Dora Bakoyannis, the first woman mayor of Athens in its 3,500-year history. Elected in 2002, she faced the megamanagement challenge of bringing off the 2004 Olympic Games on schedule. Confounding outsiders' prediction of failed deadlines and security breaches, she succeeded, leaving a legacy of a new metro subway system, a completely nonpolluting bus fleet, 80 acres of new parks—and a newly confident Athens.

“The leaders in the future of environmental protection will be the world’s great cities,” Bakoyannis told us in 2005. Why? Because, she replied, citizens find it much easier to influence local government than national on the new century’s green issues. Dimitris Avramopoulos, Bakoyannis’ predecessor, asserted it was necessary for 21st century cities to reflect “new global reality” by talking directly with one another other, past nation-states and their entrenched bureaucracies, seeking shared solutions to shared problems: unemployment, crime, drugs, illegal migration, and degradation of the environment.

In the Athenians’ spirit, 2,000 mayors, city councilors, and regional leaders from around the globe who attended the second World Congress of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in October 2007, in Jeju, Korea, showed no shyness in their official declaration. Prepare for climate change, the group said, by increasing urban density. Use clean and renewable energy. Expand public transport systems. Reform the practice of overwhelming national government fiscal control

influence local
government

World Congress
of United Cities

that disadvantages cities, even while they bear the brunt of fast-rising slum populations. Safeguard cultural diversity and affirm the full rights of women; build “inclusive cities for an inclusive world.” “We call on nation-states and armed groups,” the UCLG declaration read, “to cease considering cities as military objectives—‘cities are not targets.’”

Sister Cities International was an early leader in developing international exchanges. In the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, it began an Islamic Peace and Friendship initiative, fighting upstream but resolutely against prevailing waves of hostility and misunderstanding. On another track, it started a “Network for Sustainable Development” to help citizens exchange ideas on such topics as global warming, air quality, clean water, renewable energy, affordable housing, and town redevelopment. Organizations such as ICLEI (Local Governments for Local Environmental Initiatives), City Mayors, and the Global Forum are all among the global networks of officials now active.

citizens
exchange ideas

The emerging paradigm appears to be celebrating mayors’ contacts on one side, but also bringing direct civil society—business, professionals, youth, environmental, and slum dwellers’ groups—into the active exchanges, supplementing official mayor-to-mayor exchanges with expert-to-expert, activist-to-activist exchanges on topics ranging from housing and health to water and energy. That point was made explicitly in the Summit’s Global South sessions, and it was reflected in the mix of people present: participants ranging from high-

mayors’
contacts

active
exchanges

level U.N. officials and government policy leaders to scholars, as well as business leaders and even slum dwellers, all bringing their diverse viewpoints to the table and searching out directions all find constructive.

electrifying the global network

Can the cities of the world rise to the grand hopes of the Rockefeller Foundation Global Urban Summit—to be the 21st century’s dynamic centers of human equity and opportunity, eradicators of human poverty, proving grounds of environmental sustainability?

Immense population increase, global climate change, perils from pandemics to the turbulence of international economics all cloud the prospects.

But connectedness—mutually derived agendas for reform, efficiency, developing collaborative human capacities—should offer rich opportunities. Just as cities themselves first brought mankind together, incubated the world’s most exciting skills, cultural breakthroughs, and dynamic economies, today’s networking of world cities and their peoples—the idea of the global urban commons developed at the Summit—provides extraordinary opportunity for these times.

Face-to-face meetings remain powerful learning tools. Yet practically, electronic communications will be the dominant medium of the times. Nothing like it has ever been seen in world history: the Internet’s direct messaging and capacity to post compelling visual and text bulletins, leaping barriers of space in mere seconds. And it is not just people of similar position

mutually
derived
agendas

electronic
communications

The Top Urban Global Networks

Organizing cities from around the world is no easy task. But energetic officials have been at the task ever since the formation of the International Union of Local Authorities, in 1913.

By the 1990s a range of other organizations had emerged and officials sensed the need to form an umbrella organization that could, as a top function, represent the world's cities to the United Nations. The result, after some years of difficult negotiations, was founding the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), in 2004. It includes the International Union of Local Authorities, the World Federation of United Cities, United Towns Organization, and Metropolis (the World Organization of Major Metropolises). With eight vice presidents representing all world regions, UCLG identifies itself as "the main local-government partner of the United Nations" and proponent of decentralization, a "quiet democratic revolution," as UCLG describes it, enhancing local versus nationally centralized governments' authority. The group's membership encompasses half the world's population through its 1,000 city members and 60 organizations of cities from 127 U.N. member states.

City Mayors (London-based) is an international network of professionals helping city mayors develop innovative approaches to such areas as housing, transport, and education. Its Web site gets some 2.5 million "hits" a year.

The Global Forum (Rome-based), with 140 cities and some 100 other public- and private-sector partners, points to mayors as "the new diplomats of our world" but also seeks to act as a network of city leaders and young citizens trying to strike a balance between local autonomy and sharing benefits of globalization.

Based in Washington, D.C., the Cities Alliance, a global coalition of cities and their development partners, is committed to scaling up successful approaches to poverty reduction, enabling cities of all sizes to obtain more international support, and helping local authorities plan and prepare for future urban growth.

For international advocacy on a wide range of sustainability issues, the lead organization is the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), an affiliate of UCLG. Its interests include climate, water, biodiversity, renewable energy, and disaster-risk and participatory governance; it reports some 700 member

governments worldwide. Among other activities, it has worked with more than 170 U.S. governments on steps to cut back their greenhouse-gas emissions and improve environmental stability.

Sister Cities International is the United States' premier citizen-to-citizen exchange organization, formed at the inspiration of President Dwight Eisenhower in 1956. Currently 800 American communities are engaged in 2,200 sister-city relationships, focused on cultural contacts and exchange visits. Participants range from high school students to members of chambers of commerce, with partners in 134 nations around the globe.

A new international network, BeGlobal.net, scheduled to go public in 2008, is a social network modeled on the popular Internet site Facebook, but "with a purpose," in the words of founder Tim Honey, former leader of Sister Cities International. Its purpose? To identify and link "global cities," not by the familiar definition of their "command and control" weight as business centers but rather, regardless of size, their assets in every field from arts and culture and business to scientific research, tourism, peace organizations, and community-service groups. BeGlobal will give special attention to international links or activities.

The nonprofit information site GuideStar.org reports that there are 13,000 internationally focused nonprofits in the United States; the BeGlobal idea is that many are exemplars of global commitment and engagement on pressing issues ranging from global warming to building a sense of global citizenship. Many Peace Corps retirees, for example, have remained internationally engaged, including doctors who volunteer time for overseas missions. "The old Internet," Honey asserts, "was a series of portals; social networking goes further by letting people connect and stay connected, city to city and across continents."

Noteworthy in all the existing and emerging global networks are possibilities of interchange that go beyond familiar "North–North" or "North-to-South" patterns to allow burgeoning "South–South" ties and learning as the developing world's cities and their civil societies employ modern, highly affordable communications—especially the Internet—to link their own cultures and fast-evolving urban institutions

or specialty who can communicate across seas and continents with a flick of a computer key. The “mix and match” potentials of officials, academics, business, citizen groups, and activists have hardly any limit.

thousands of
world networks

Not all of this is automatic; some coaching on how to make contacts or find relevant new Web sites may be necessary (and that assumes all groups have broadband access, not yet a foregone conclusion). But information is power; resourceful players will learn the electronic ropes. The medium is too powerful (and refreshingly uncontrolled) to be contained.

idea translators

Dramatic new Internet-based information systems on cities’ operations are beginning to appear. Citizen appetite for direct inputs are sure to rise, matched in many cities to numbers of adventuresome bureaucrats communicating with each other and with the citizenry outside of official channels. Inevitably, citizen complaints, sometimes uncomfortably vivid, will make some of the exchanges a challenge for officials. The combination of growing contacts—including world mayors, Internet-empowered citizen groups, and government workers and their allies exchanging information and insights—represents one of the most promising of all 21st-century urban frontiers.

we become
one world

The positive news is that the groundwork for the global urban commons has been laid, ranging from intense and increasing academic analysis to mutual learning among mayors, from idea exchange by activist NGOs to idea exchange among the poorest of the world’s peoples. Literally thousands of world networks, by profession, interest, official role, or shared cause now exist. What an exciting century!

lasting impact

Yet as participants in international exchanges all know, challenges of language, culture, perception, even national pride, can often blur the learning that occurs. Champions—idea translators—are required for even the most brilliant academic research. The same need exists on the database front. Even cleverly kept and cross-referenced on computers, data accomplish little just as stored words; they require product advocates, trusted intermediaries to monitor the idea flow and provide a “high-tech, high-touch” interface to keep promoting the information and then guide interested parties in the best ways to use it. This is a function that large, bureaucratic institutions perform poorly.

The irony is that even as we become one world electronically and by profession and interest, it is not standardized tactics but rather a “letting many flowers bloom” approach—sponsoring new and inventive partnerships, jumping silo barriers of professions prizing both intellect and passion among the networked communicators of the times—that may yield the broadest and most lasting impact. The openness of cultures, peoples, ideas of the Rockefeller Foundation Global Urban Summit symbolized this type of exchange—not as an end in itself, but as a beginning.