URBAN TRANSFORMATION*

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Introduction:

By 2030, according to the projections of the United Nations (UN) Population Divisions (1), each of the major regions of the developing world will hold more urban than rural dwellers, by 2050, fully two third of their inhabitants are likely to live in urban areas. The world's population as a whole is expected to undergo substantial further growth over the period, almost all of which is expected to take place in the cities & towns of poor countries.

Centrality of Urban Demographic Transformation:

The urban demographic transformation influences & is influenced by four allied trends in economic development worldwide:

i. Globalization which binds cities to each other through international networks.
ii. The decentralization of governments of poor countries, which is placing greater responsibilities on local & municipal governments (2).
iii. Evolving international development strategies to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals which explicitly recognize urban as well as rural poverty (3).
iv. Urban implications of global climate change, which is likely to put large coastal city population at risk from flooding, storm surges & other extreme weather events (4,5).

Urban Population Transition - Ancient Period vs. Modern Period:

During the period 2000-2024, the World's total population is projected to grow by 1.76 billion persons, with some 86% of this growth is expected to take place in the cities & towns of developing countries (Fig.1A). These near-term prospects stand in sharp contrast to what was experienced from 1950 to 1974, an era when rural growth still exceeded urban.

Among the major regions of developing countries, Asia now holds the largest number of urban dwellers & will continue to do so (Fig.1B). By 2025, Africa will have probably overtaken Latin America in terms of urban totals, moving into second place among the regions.

In the 1950s, 1960s & well into the 1970s, regional urban growth rates (Fig.1C) approximated 4% per annum, although declines were already making an appearance in Latin America. Had the growth rate of this early era been sustained, the urban populations of the three regions would have doubled roughly every 17 years. By the year 2000, however, urban growth rates had fallen considerably in each of the three major regions. As Fig.1C indicates, further declines in growth rate are forecast for the 1st few decades of the 21st century, with urban Latin America projected to approach a state of zero growth.

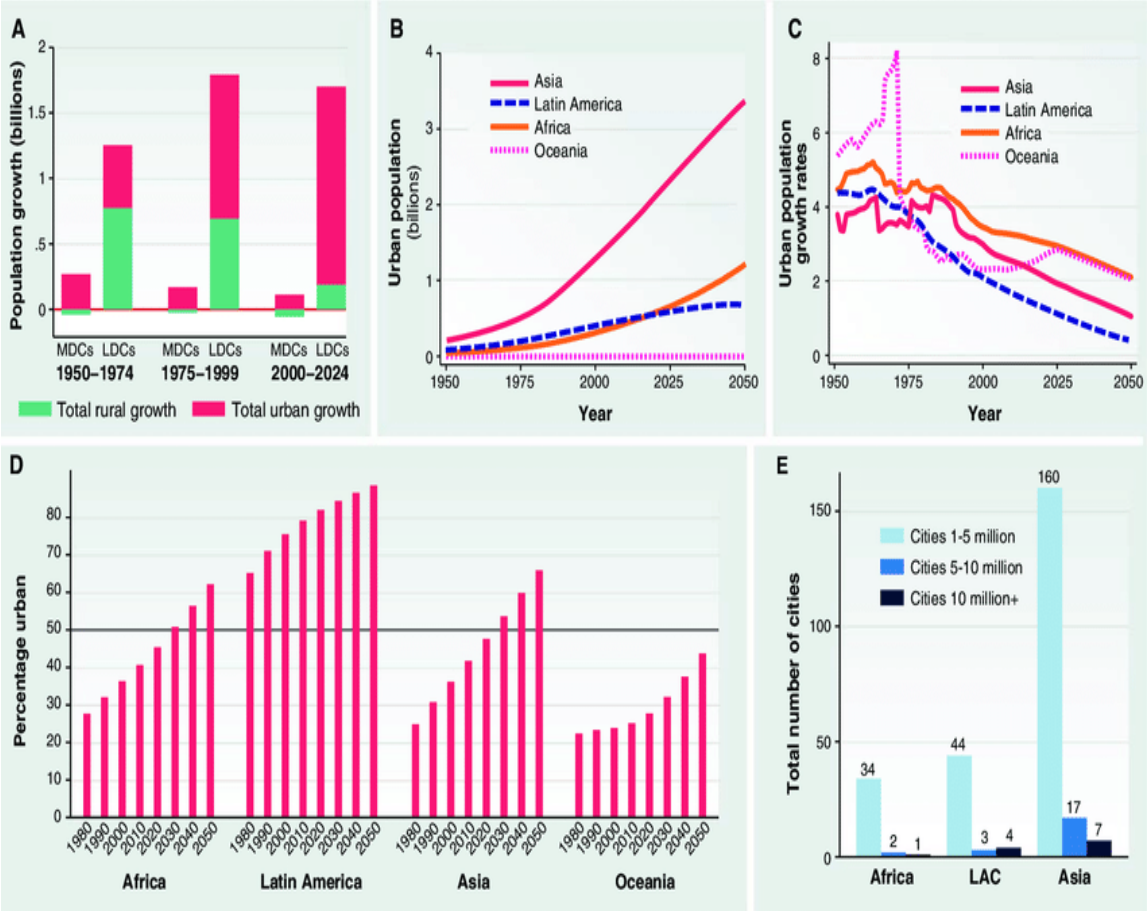

Fig.1.

(A) Urban population growth in more-developed countries (MDCs) & less-developed countries (LDCs), 1950-2024.

(B) Total urban population by region in developing countries.

(C) Growth rates of total population by region in developing countries.

(D) Increasing percentage urban in developing countries.

(E) Number of cities of 1 million residents or more in developing countries in 2000 by region.

Much as with population growth rates overall in developing countries, the urban growth rates in force before 2000 are substantially higher than the rates that were seen during comparable historical periods in the West, with the difference being due to

- lower urban mortality in present day populations
- stubbornly high urban fertility in some cases

  &
- an built-in momentum in urban growth that stems from the distinctive age & sex structures bequeathed by in-migration of young adults & past population growth (2).

Megacities vs. Small Cities:

Hundreds of large cities have been emerged, especially in Asia & Latin America, which each have several cities above 10 million in population. Most urban residents in the developing world live in huge urban agglomerations. In fact, of all urban residents, in cities of 1,00,000 & above, in the developing world, only about 12% live in megacities, i.e. about 1 in 8 urban residents (Fig.2A).

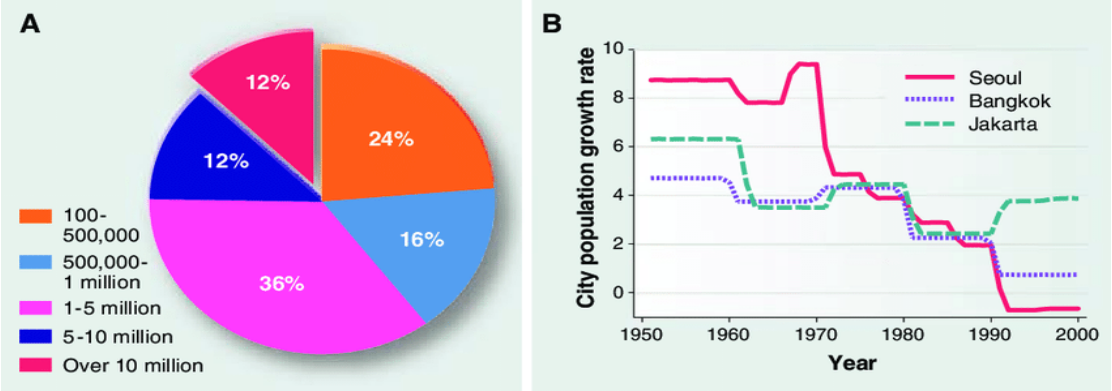

Fig.2.
(A) Distribution of urban population by city size in developing countries in 2000.
(B) City growth rates for Seoul, Bangkok & Jakarta, 1950-2000.

Smaller cities are generally less well provided with basic services than large cities, such as improved sanitation & adequate supplies of drinking water (2). Rates of fertility and infant & child mortality in small cities can be little different from the rates prevailing in the countryside. Their municipal governments seldom possess the range of expertise & managerial talent found in the governments of large cities.

The empirical record suggests that, various social & spatial feedback mechanisms cause large cities to exhibit declining rates of population growth as illustrated by the cases of Jakarta, Seoul & Bangkok (Fig.2B). In offering explanations,

- urban economists emphasize how increase in city size drive up rents & the many costs of congestion, discouraging prospective migrants & encouraging business relocation.
- urban geographers stress the difficulties of locating & measuring the growth of large cities, noting that, faster population growth at an urban periphery, which may not necessarily be recorded in growth rate statistics, often accompanies slower growth in the city center.
- another plausible explanation that receives far too little attention is that city growth rates are driven down over time by declines in urban fertility rates.

Conclusion:

The greatest need on the demographic front is to ensure that the censuses regularly fielded by developing countries are analyzed at the level of small geographic units & the results placed in the hands of local & municipal governments that will need to make use of such data to effectively plan for the pace & spatial distribution of future growth. Remote sensing methods can serve as a valuable supplementary tool, if not in estimating population as such, then in monitoring the spatial spread of city populations in the intercensal periods.

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