Urbanization

At present, more than half the world's population lives in cities and urban settlements. Current trends indicate that population growth and urbanization are projected to add 2.5 billion people to the world's urban population by 2050, with almost 90% of this increase taking place in Africa and Asia.

Cities can serve as national drivers of economic growth and education, as well as locales for crushing poverty, inadequate infrastructure and health crises. Since 75% of the world's large cities are coastal, urban centers also face pronounced challenges from climate change and rising sea levels. The parallel phenomena of increasing urbanization, compounded by the current economic, environmental, and security stressors at the present levels of urbanization create unique and intertwined global development challenges.

While much of the development and humanitarian work that takes place in urban centers is driven by best practices for each sector (education, health, and climate) urban centers will likely require development practitioners to rethink and innovate for specifically urban approaches.

InterAction Recognizes

- **The extent to which we address economic and human development outcomes in cities will fundamentally affect the success of global development goals.** Cities are simultaneously concentrated centers of economic growth and innovation, but also poverty and vulnerability. By the middle of the 21st century, we expect over two thirds of the world's populations to be living in urban areas. Achieving the sustainable development goals as a whole will require clear efforts to address urban residents' access to education, housing, clean water and sanitation, health care and nutrition, and their opportunity for economic and political participation.

- **Refugee populations living in urban areas are increasingly diverse, with growing numbers of families, women, youth, and children.** Today, over half of the world's 19.5 million refugees and 80% of 34 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in towns or cities. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that over half the global refugee population is under the age of 18. While there is no accurate data on the numbers of refugee youth living in urban settings, it can be assumed to be a significant population.

- **Urban centers feel some of the most concentrated effects of environmental or climate changes, and are emerging as focal points for mitigating and responding to these challenges.** Intensifying weather events (e.g. heat waves or storms) can have compounding effects in densely populated areas. Faced with more extreme events, many cities are looking for new approaches to manage and reduce negative climate outcomes.

Upcoming Opportunities

- **The U.S.-China Climate Leaders Summit in Boston [May 2017]:** Major cities are playing an ever growing role in driving coordination around climate response. Boston will host the third annual climate summit in May 2017, convening mayors and city leaders from around the world. This provides a clear moment for a new administration to make new urban-specific climate commitments in funding and policy. It also offers a moment for members of congress to work with city leadership in their home districts to support globally sustainable cities.

- **The World Economic Forum on Africa [May 2017]**: Africa has the highest urbanization rate of any region, and

some 100 of the world's fastest growing cities can be found on the continent. As this growth continues, projections suggest that 50% of the continent's population will be classified as urban in the next 20 years. The World Economic Forum, hosted in South Africa, offers an occasion at which to consider how food security, health programming, and economic growth and poverty reduction programs are evolving in the face of this change.

- **Sustainable Development Goals events and milestones during the the UN general assembly [September 2017]:** In addition to urban centers playing a dominant role in Sustainable Development Goal 11, the sheer number of people living in urban and peri-urban areas suggests that UN events about the goals will have to feature urban-based work towards progress on all 17 goals.

- **World Habitat Day [October 2017]:** Some 880 million people are estimated to live in inadequate housing in cities, and the number of slum dwellers is projected to double by 2030. World Habitat Day represents a logical time to announce progress against existing commitments to sustainable housing, or to announce new programs to address this gap.

- **The first anniversary of the New Urban Agenda [October 2017]:** The purpose of the 2016 Habitat III conference was to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization, and to focus on the implementation of a New Urban Agenda, which builds on the Habitat Agenda of Istanbul in 1996. Coming out of this conference, the U.S. is expected to meet new policy commitments to build more sustainable and resilient urban environments.

- **The annual budget and program planning processes for assistance to countries receiving thousands of refugees [Ongoing].** These create logical moments to incorporate planning and resources for humanitarian assistance into existing urban development programs in countries likely to receive significant numbers of refugees. Unlike a camp, urban displaced populations are often scattered, making them difficult to identify. Youth in particular tend to be very mobile, with mobility being an important livelihood or security/housing strategy, and more reliant upon their own resilience and social networks. The inability to access data about, or provide information to vulnerable displaced persons can render them effectively invisible in urban settings, not only to protection and assistance organizations, but also to each other. Explicitly coordinating urban development programs with anticipated provision of humanitarian assistance for newly received refugees in neighboring cities would help to mitigate these challenges.

Additional Materials

- Habitat III Documents, 2016, http://bit.ly/2iBLOOJ

- The 2016 World Cities Report, http://bit.ly/22niuti

- The New Urban Agenda, 2016, http://bit.ly/2daUQSb

- USAID Urban Knowledge Sharing Platform, 2016, http://bit.ly/22niuti

- USAID Urban Policy, 2013, http://bit.ly/2jaZzoJ