

World Urban Trends

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I was asked to make this presentation at a meeting on urban mission at the denomination's world headquarters. I am repeatedly asked for copies of the slides, so I have arranged to have this published by the Center for Creative Ministry. -- Monte Sahlin

Urbanization and the Adventist Movement

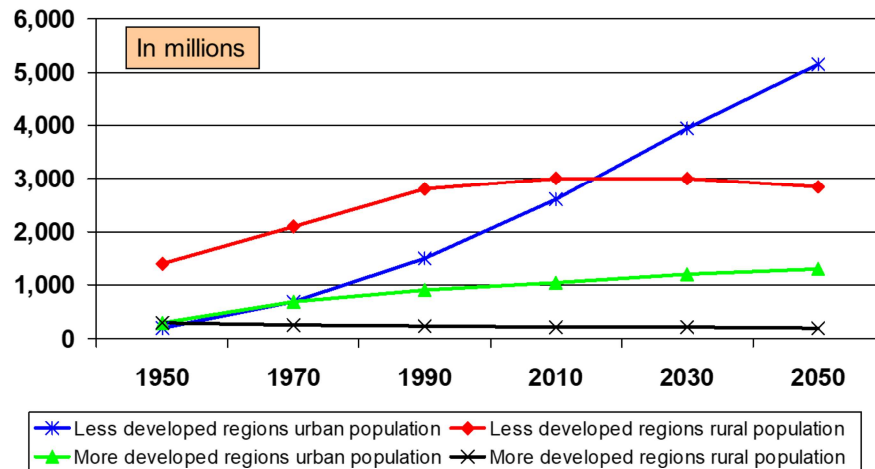
- In 1850 some 9.5 percent of the world's population was resident in cities.
- In 1900 it had grown to 16.5 percent of the world population.
 - In 1910, Ellen White: "The work in the cities is the essential work for this time." (Letter 46, 1910)
- In 1970 it had grown to 36.8 percent.
- In 2007 it became the majority, crossing the 50 percent line.
- In 2050 it will become a two-thirds majority at 67 percent of the world's population.

The urbanization of the globe is a process that has paralleled the development of the Remnant Church, the Adventist movement around the world. [Then read slide.]

EGW: "The message that I am bidden to bear to our people, Work the cities without delay [because it is] becoming more and more difficult. It is essential that new and varied talents unite in ... intelligent labor for the people. If the burden of these unworked cities rested upon the hearts of our people as it should, they would arouse to labor as they have not yet done." (Letter 168, 1909)

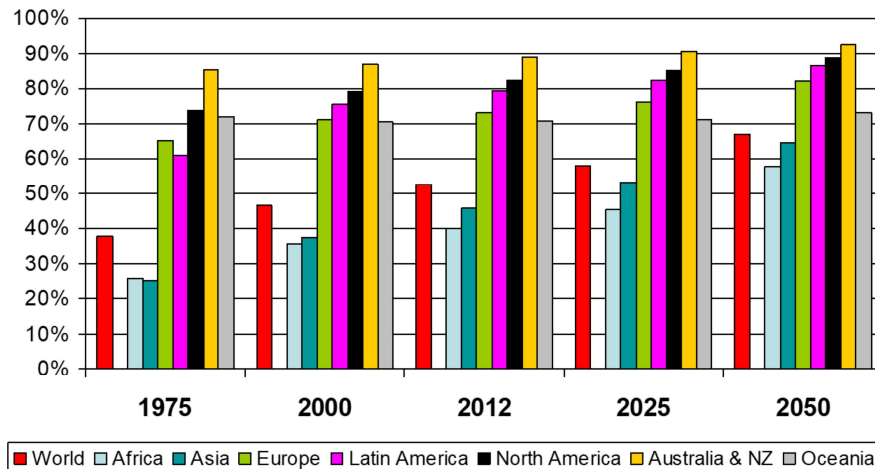
Just as Sister White predicted, the mission to the cities has become more difficult and the needs of the those living in the cities greater. I think you will see from the information that I will share with you in the next few minutes that the time as come!

Urban & Rural Populations 1950 to 2050



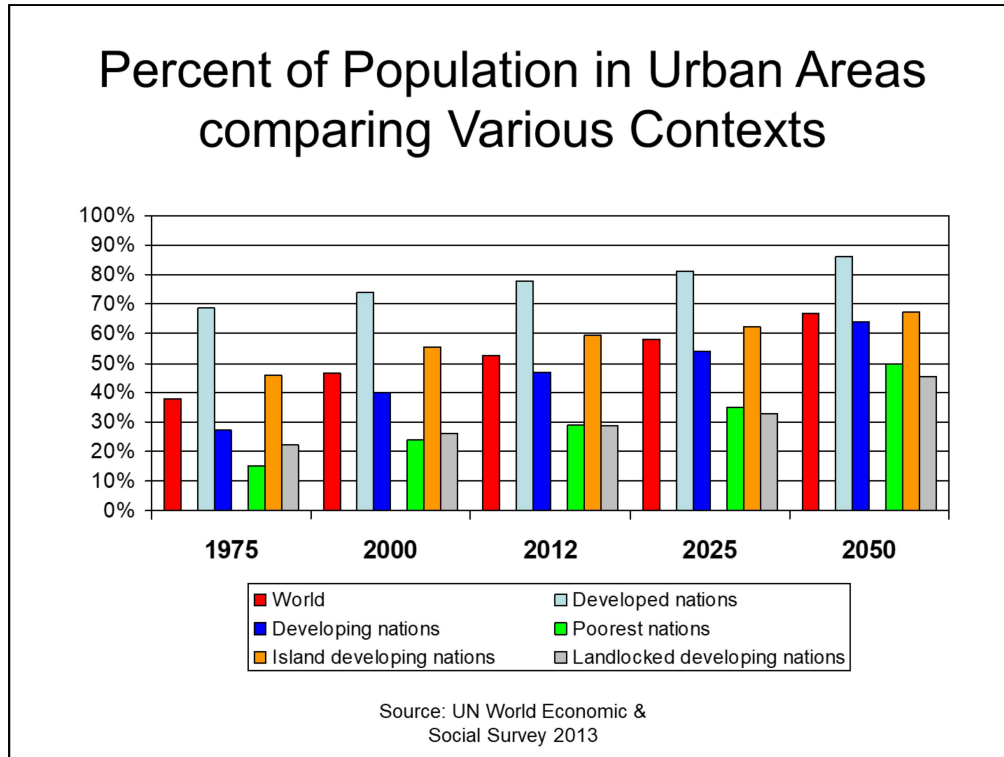
In 1950 the rural population of the globe was much larger than the urban population and the urban population of the developed nations and the developing nations was about the same. Today, the total urban population of the developing nations is three times that of the urban population of the developed nations. By 2050—about three decades from now—more than five billion people will live in the urban areas of the developing nations. The cities of the developed nations will continue to grow, but at a slower rate. The rural population will actually decline. Bottom line: by 2050 there will be two billion additional people in the cities of the developing world.

Percent of Population in Urban Areas comparing Regions of the World



Source: UN World Economic &
Social Survey 2013

The red columns show the overall growth in the percentage of the world's population that is located in urban areas. The light and dark blue columns show that Africa and Asia started with a much lower percentage of urban population, but are growing rapidly will soon have a majority urban population. The rest of the world was already urbanized in 1975 and has continued to increase, but at a slower rate. [Identify the segments by color and give them a little time to look at the graphic.]



Development and urbanization are correlated. The developed nations (light blue) were largely urbanized and continue to become more urbanized. The developing nations (dark blue) are becoming urbanized and will become majority urban in the next few years. The poorest nations (green) are the most rural and the landlocked developing nations (gray) are those most resistant to urbanization.

The island developing nations (orange) have a higher percentage of urban population than the other developing nations. They have also been the location for the best church growth rates for Adventists measured as a percentage of the population, what missiologists call “penetration” of the message. This may be an indicator that the process of urbanization can be helpful to the advancement of the mission of the church.

What Drives Urbanization?

- Work and business opportunities
- People seeking education
- Media sharing popular culture which has an urban flavor to it
- Young adults leaving traditional cultures
- Western ideas of personal freedom and democracy

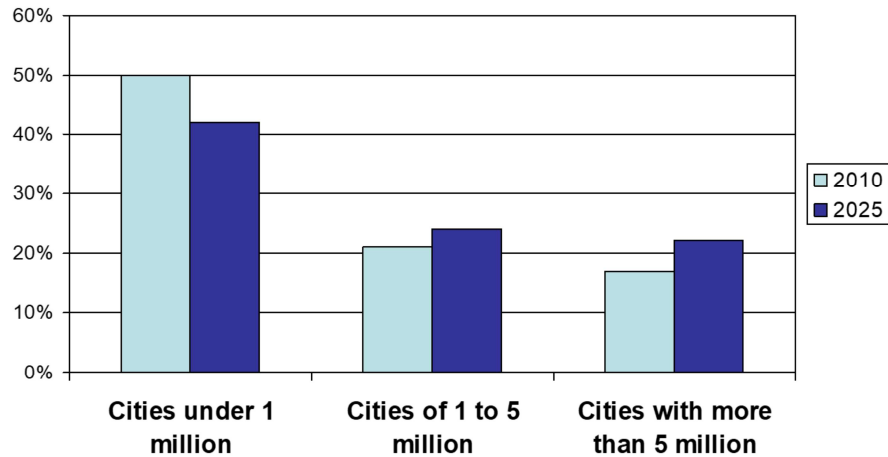
The massive migration of people from rural to urban areas in Africa and Asia follows a pattern established in Latin America a generation earlier, and in North America and Europe in generations prior to that. It begins simply with economic opportunities; people can find better jobs and opportunities to start small businesses that allow them to earn more money for less labor than in rural areas. Soon, people discover that advanced education is accessible in urban areas and this leads to professional occupations with even better pay.

In recent years the improved worldwide communication technology has also spread popular culture among young people around the world, and this popular culture has an urban flavor to it. Urbanization becomes popular among teens and young adults; it becomes part of their common aspirations. The traditional cultures that existed in villages and rural areas are being widely diluted by the improved communication technology and enabling young adults to turn their backs on these traditional cultures and become part of the a more global sensibility.

As western ideas about personal freedom and the value of the individual have spread throughout Africa and Asia, especially in recent years in the Middle East, this has encouraged more and more young people to seek more autonomy by moving to the cities. As they move away from the close ties with their families and village life, they have greater opportunity to define their own beliefs and values. All of this is part of the allure and the process of urbanization. "Go to the big city and make a success" is an idea that was widely disseminated in novels, plays, newspapers and music starting in the 1920s in North America and continues to spread in the southern hemisphere today.

With its emphasis on individual salvation, the Bible over against traditional religions and Christian education, the Adventist message has fit well within the thinking of the young adults flocking to the cities. In many places research has documented the way in which church growth has benefitted from urban migration.

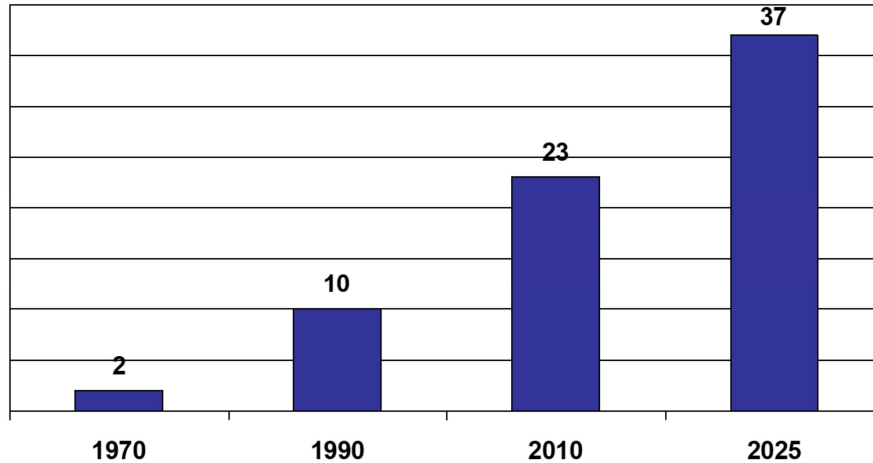
The Urban Population is Becoming More Concentrated



Source: UN World Economic & Social Survey 2013

Not only are people moving from rural areas into urban areas, but the urban population is moving to larger and larger cities. The impact of urbanization on the church is greater in the more concentrated urban areas, but the mission given to us by Jesus requires that we go where the people are so population movements must refocus the missionary activities of the church.

Urban Regions with More than 10 Million in Population



Source: United Nations DESA
Population Division

In 1970 there were only two urban areas with more than 10 million residents—Tokyo and New York City. By 1990 eight more had been added, including Mexico City, Sao Paulo (Brazil), Mumbai (India), Seoul (Korea) and Buenos Aires (Argentina).

Currently there are about 25 such major urban areas, with the addition of four cities in China, two more in India, Lagos (Nigeria), Cairo, Moscow, Manila, Dhaka, Istanbul, Paris and Los Angeles, among others.

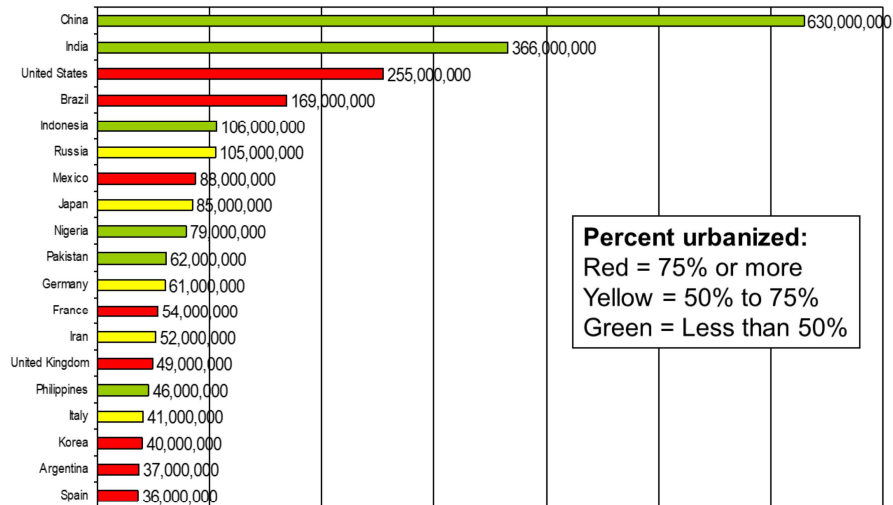
Cities Over 10 Million in 2025 In Rank Order by Population Size

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tokyo, Japan • Delhi, India • Shanghai, China • Mumbai, India • Mexico City • New York City • Sao Paulo, Brazil • Dhaka, Bangladesh • Beijing, China • Karachi, Pakistan • Lagos, Nigeria • Kolkata (Calcutta), India • Manila, Philippines • Los Angeles, USA • Shenzhen, China • Buenos Aires, Argentina • Istanbul, Turkey • Cairo, Egypt | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinshasa, DR Congo • Chongqing, China • Rio de Janeiro, Brazil • Bangalore, India • Jakarta, Indonesia • Chennai, India • Wuhan, China • Moscow, Russian Federation • Paris, France • Osaka-Kobe, Japan • Tianjin, China • Hyderabad, India • Lima, Peru • Chicago, USA • Bogota, Columbia • Bangkok, Thailand • Lahore, Pakistan • London, United Kingdom |
|---|---|

Source: World Urbanization
Prospects, page 7

There is an Adventist presence in all of these cities, but it is small and almost invisible in most of them. With perhaps a handful of exceptions, the cost of doing ministry in these cities is way beyond the capacity of the local Adventist membership to fund on their own. If we are to reach these cities, then support must be mobilized around the world. This should be your prayer list for the foreseeable future! [Give them some time to look at it.]

The Largest Urban Populations



The numbers displayed here are the total urban population in each country. We are looking at the largest urban populations on the globe. These 19 countries contain the majority of the urban dwellers on our planet.

The green are countries in which the majority of the population is still rural. (Those rural numbers are not shown.)

The yellow are those nations where the majority of the population is urban, but it is less than 75 percent.

The red are the most intensely urbanized nations where 75 percent or more of the population lives in cities.

Note that suburbs are included as part of the city or urban population. (The idea that suburbs are not cities is a uniquely American idea.)

The largest urban populations in the world are in China and India, both countries that are still primarily rural with large migrations under way into the cities. (Green) Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Philippines have a similar situation, as do many small countries in Africa and Asia.

The United States and Brazil are the two countries where there are the largest urban populations in the context of highly urbanized countries. (Red) Mexico, France, the UK, Korea, Argentina and Spain have similar situations, as do many other countries in Europe and the Americas.

Russia has the largest urban population in a setting where the majority of residents live in cities, but there is still a large rural population as well. (Yellow) Japan, Iran and Italy are in similar situations, as are a number of other countries around the world.

Three Missionary Contexts

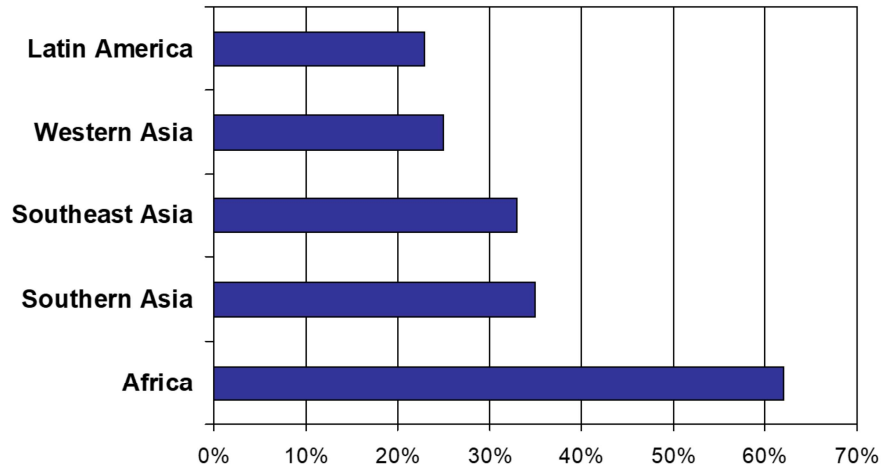
- **Rapid migration to the cities in a rural country:** Most significant opportunity for service, evangelism and church planting.
- **Highly urbanized country:** Most difficult situation for outreach and evangelism; experiments with new approaches needed.
- **Largely urbanized country with a significant rural population:** More stable situation where less focus is needed from the world church and conventional approaches are working.

Research by Bruce Moyer and more recently by Kleber Goncalves In Sao Paulo, Brazil, have demonstrated the possibilities in the first category.

Research by Miroslav Pujic and Peter Roennfeldt in Europe, North America and Australia have explored possibilities for movement in the second context.

The third context holds the smallest portion of the world's population and is the least urgent strategic concern, unless you happen to be working in one of these countries. The key issue is locating where there are unreached communities.

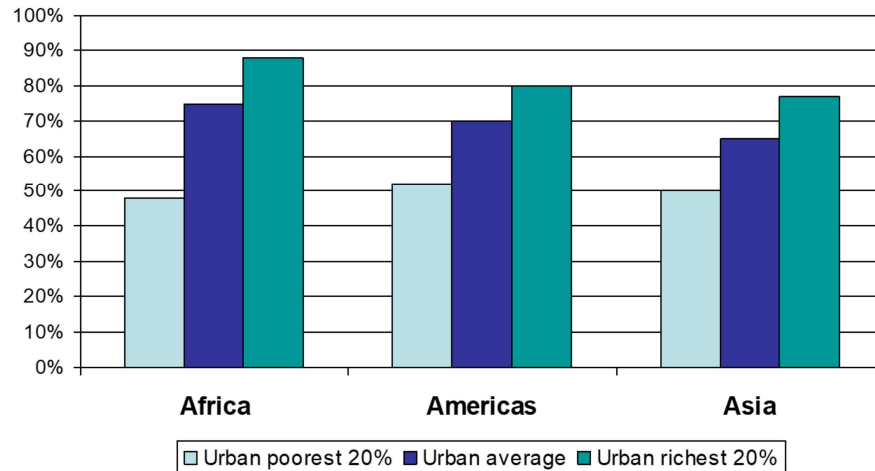
Percent of City Dwellers who Live in Slums



Source: United Nations

Urbanization results in unprecedented concentrations of human need. Cities have massive populations in poverty, with health needs and looking for education. Around the globe, a total of 828 million people live in urban slums. “There will be 3 billion slum dwellers by 2050 unless decisive actions are taken.” (UN World Economic & Social Survey, 2013)

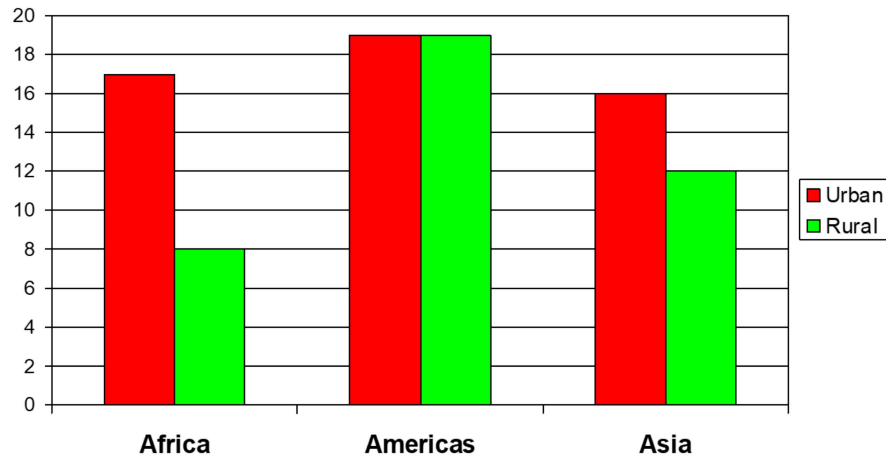
Urban Living Conditions Homes with Access to Piped Water



Source: World Health Organization

The majority of the poor in the urban areas of Africa and Asia must carry water or buy it from vendors. Nearly half of the poor in the Americas are in the same situation.

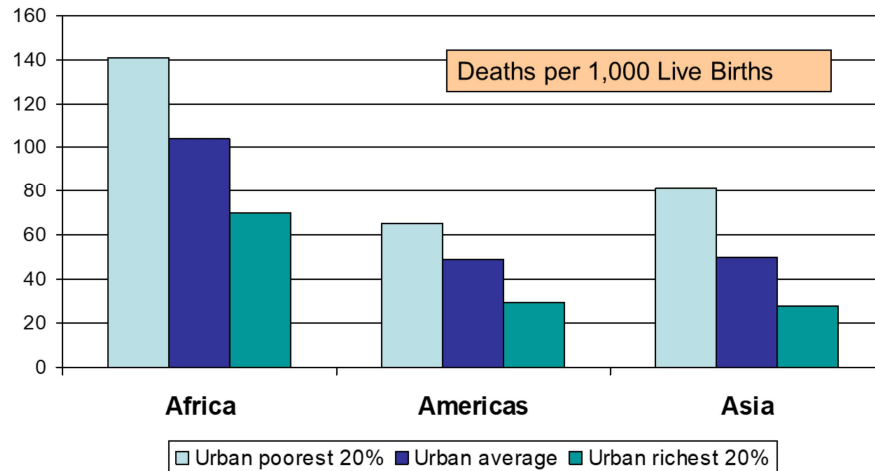
Malnutrition Index among Children Under Five Years of Age



Source: World Health Organization

In urban Africa, malnutrition among young children is more than twice as likely as in rural areas. In Asia, the gap is less, but malnutrition is still more likely in urban communities than in rural areas. In the Americas, there is no gap, but overall the incidence of malnutrition is somewhat higher.

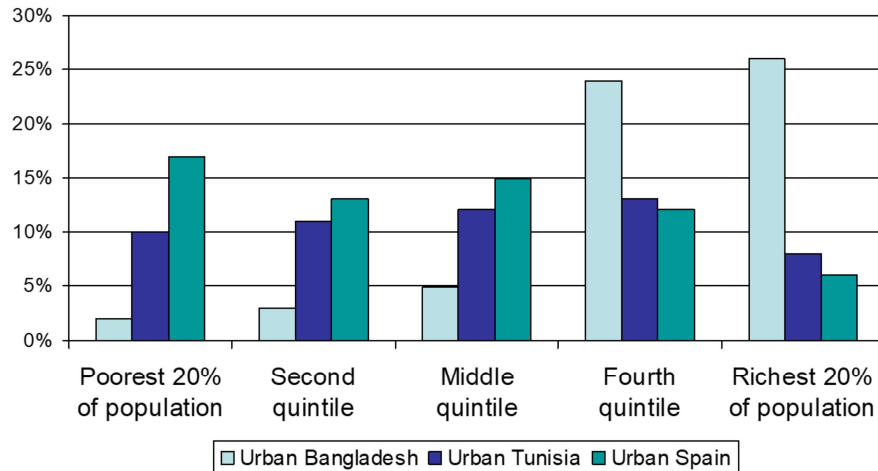
Urban Health Needs Death Rate of Children Under 5



Source: World Health Organization

Among the urban poor children are significantly more likely to die before they reach five years of age from disease, malnutrition and violence. This is just one indicator of the tremendous health needs among the urban populations. Only 11 percent of the world's population is protected by laws that restrict smoking, according to the World Health Organization.

Urban Health Needs Incidence of Diabetes



Source: World Health Organization

Health needs differ from city to city and are related to socio-economic status and cultural dietary factors. Here are examples from Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Adventist lifestyle education and health ministry can meet these needs, but the approach must be adapted according to the realities in each city. A “one size fits all” approach will not be the most helpful.

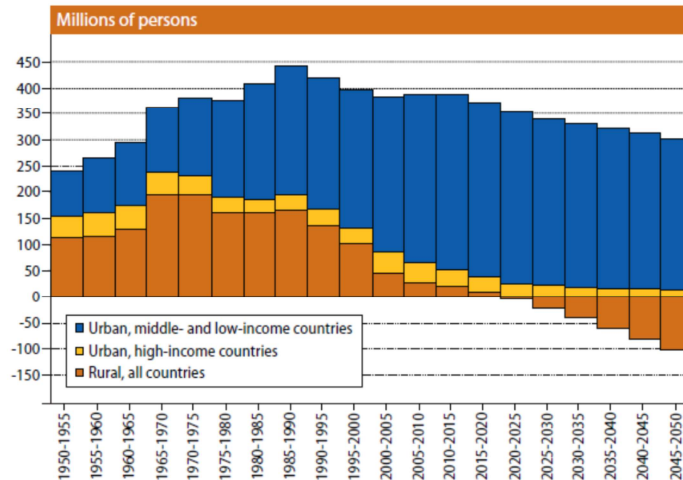
Major Human Needs in Cities

- Climate change
- Hunger and malnutrition
- Income inequality
- Rapid growth

The United Nations has identified the top needs in a survey of urban planning professionals around the world:

1. The major concern with climate change is related to the rising sea levels and the fact that most major cities are located on the coasts. The largest cities will lose land to the oceans over the next 50 years, according to UN studies.
2. Hunger and malnutrition are widespread among children and adults in the cities. Some of this is related to poverty and some of it to the poor eating habits of people under pressure of time, marketing messages from food manufacturers, etc.
3. The cities include large numbers of the very poor who can easily see the lifestyles of the most wealthy (through the media, etc.). There is glaring income inequality which creates social unrest.
4. Growth in many cities—especially those in developing nations—is explosive, chaotic and unplanned. This rapid growth add stress to all other aspects of city life.

Urban & Rural Population Changes 1950 to 2050



The increases in world population have moved to the urban areas since 1950. In 2020 it is anticipated that the rural population of the world will actually begin to decline in terms of total numbers and that this decline will accelerate through 2050 to the point that there will be about 20 million fewer people living in rural areas each year at that point and beyond.

Growth in the urban population located in high-income nations is also slowing down and will become negligible in many countries. In fact, it is already true in some countries that the increase in urban population is primarily driven by immigration. Adventist church growth in many cities in Europe and North America is almost entirely among immigrants. New York City, for example, no longer has any local churches where the majority of the members are native-born Americans of any ethnicity. Much the same situation exists in Boston and among Canadians in Montreal and Toronto. Almost the same situation has existed in London and other European cities for some time.

Immigration is a key element in reaching the cities, but it must include training and initiatives for Adventist immigrants from around the world to learn to effectively reach the native-born population in the cities where they settle ... or the Adventist mission "to every kindred, tongue and people group" will not be accomplished in these cities.

The Impact of Urbanization on Religion and Faith

- Pluralism
- Competition
- Secular values
- Invention of new religions
- Erosion of traditional institutions
- A “consumer” mentality among adherents
- The rise of the “nones”

Religions have long existed largely in isolation from each other. The migration to cities bring people of many religions together and provides opportunities for closer contact. This can create opportunities for witnessing and winning converts. It also increases the need for tolerance and respect in order to avoid conflict. It creates an open “marketplace of ideas” in which religions compete. Civil authorities want to maintain good relations among religions in order to avoid conflict and even violence, although politicians will appeal to religious prejudices in order to get elected or wield power.

The process of urbanization encourages the adoption of secular values due to economic expediency and the need for common understandings among large numbers of people from many different faiths. The freedom and openness also provides the opportunity for new religions to be invented. In the last decade a research journal has begun to be issued by an academic publisher for the first time that focuses entirely on the explosion of new religions around the world, primarily in the cities.

The urban context contributes to the erosion of traditional religious institutions. Clergy and elders do not have the authority that they had in rural villages. Urban time constraints from work and transit, and the availability of so many opportunities to put time into various things, cause people to attend religious meetings less often and be less tied to church, etc. Because of the economic context that drives cities and limits on time and other resources, a “consumer” mentality develops among adherents and there is pressure on leaders of local churches to advertize and provide attractive activities instead of focus entirely on religious goals.

Among new generations in Europe and North America the fastest-growing religious segment is the “nones” or those who say their religious affiliation is “none.” The vast majority of these young adults have a definite interest in spiritual things, report that they believe in God and pray, but they are not interested in organized religion. How do we pursue the mission of Christ in this context? It is both exciting and very challenging!

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