



FOREWORD

The Future of Asian & Pacific Cities

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Cities and urban centres act as accelerators for social and economic progress in the Asian and Pacific region. The economic dynamism of our cities provides livelihood and social mobility opportunities not found in rural areas. Throughout history, cities have been hubs of innovation as the concentration of people, resources and ideas enables transformations to occur at tremendous speed, generating economic activity and wealth. However, cities are also home to significant concentrations of the poor and marginalized, and they have significant impacts on the environment and people's well-being.

As indicated by its title, *The Future of Asian and Pacific Cities*, the report takes a fresh, forward-looking approach. It focuses strongly on the Asia-Pacific region's urban future – on key issues and drivers of trends that need to be upscaled and accelerated to shape more inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban development pathways. The report outlines how such urban development pathways can be in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

"A city should not just happen anymore. Every block, every building and neighbourhood requires careful planning. Cities can play a major role in supporting a more sustainable and inclusive future in our region. Yet, this depends on decisive action in cities and urban centres right across Asia and the Pacific — action which I hope this report can inform and support."

Five years into implementing this important international development framework, rapidly growing cities and towns are faced with a range of developmental choices that will shape their growth and long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability. Many of these are complex choices with differing short-term versus long-term costs and benefits. These choices are seldom determined by individual actors or agencies but emerge out of the complex interplay of decisions made by a range of actors across national and local governments, investors and entrepreneurs in the private sector, and a range of local community and civil society voices.

The report focuses on four essentials that cities must get right. Urban and territorial planning, strengthening resilience to future risks, supporting the effective interplay between people and technology, and financing tools, all of which are essential to deliver sustainable smart cities in our region. With three to five future policy pathways per chapter, the report offers ways to seize these opportunities and realize sustainable urban development by 2030. Regional cooperation and strong partnerships among all interested parties will be essential to

pool expertise, accelerate progress and deliver the integrated approach needed.

Many partners were brought together to produce this report, all galvanized by a common ambition to improve the sustainability of cities. These partners are uniquely positioned to assist cities to achieve their goals. I am grateful to the Asian Development Bank, the European Union, Singapore's Centre for Liveable Cities, The Rockefeller Foundation, the United Nations Development Programme and UN-Habitat, without which this ambitious joint publication on the future of sustainable cities in Asia and the Pacific would not have been possible.

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Maimunah Mohd Sharif

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)



Wandering through the streets of George Town in Malaysia's Penang Island today, one is impressed with the high quality of life, but this has not always been the case. When I first started working as an urban planner in the then George Town Municipal Council in the 1980s, the city was on a downward trajectory, faced with the challenges of an industrializing State. However, the last two decades have seen Penang Island transformed into a green, innovative, inclusive city that has a powerful vision of its own future.

My Penang experience, while unique in many ways, is also representative of the wider Asia-Pacific urban experience. My mayoral colleagues managed fast-growing urban economies and had first-hand experience in the transformation of their cities and towns into vibrant hubs of development. This experience has been truly exhilarating. Cities in Asia and the Pacific will need a lot more of this "can do spirit" if we want to meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the transformative commitments of the New Urban Agenda.

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The challenge of fast-growing economies is that one day we will need to learn to slow down and make development sustainable. *The Future of Asian and Pacific Cities* report provides possible pathways to sustainable urban development. The report could not come any sooner as this year marks the first time that the majority of the region's population is living in urban areas. That is more than 2.3 billion people.

The 2019 report differs from the earlier editions, published in 2015 and 2011, which benchmarked urban issues by broad and deep analysis of the state of urbanization in the region. The present report is an attempt to reimagine the urban future. It projects a picture of a future that is prosperous, resilient and inclusive. It analyses possibilities for sustainable development by asking what kind of policy options could help cities in the region localize and meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The New Urban Agenda makes clear that cities play a key role as accelerators and innovators in inclusive, sustainable transformation of developing economies and societies. However, the decisions to choose sustainable pathways need to be acted upon today.

This report guides the reader to four key interlinked drivers critical for accelerated structural change that needs to happen to move the region's cities towards sustainability. This includes the integration of urban and territorial planning, strengthening multilevel governance and capacities for building resilience, the application of people-centric smart city innovations, and practical long-term financing solutions.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to our partners on the journey of producing this report: first, ESCAP, as well as the Asian Development Bank, the European Union, Singapore's Centre for Liveable Cities, The Rockefeller Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme, which in true partnership made this report possible by both their financial and intellectual commitments to guiding the sustainable turn of urban development directions in Asia and the Pacific.

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