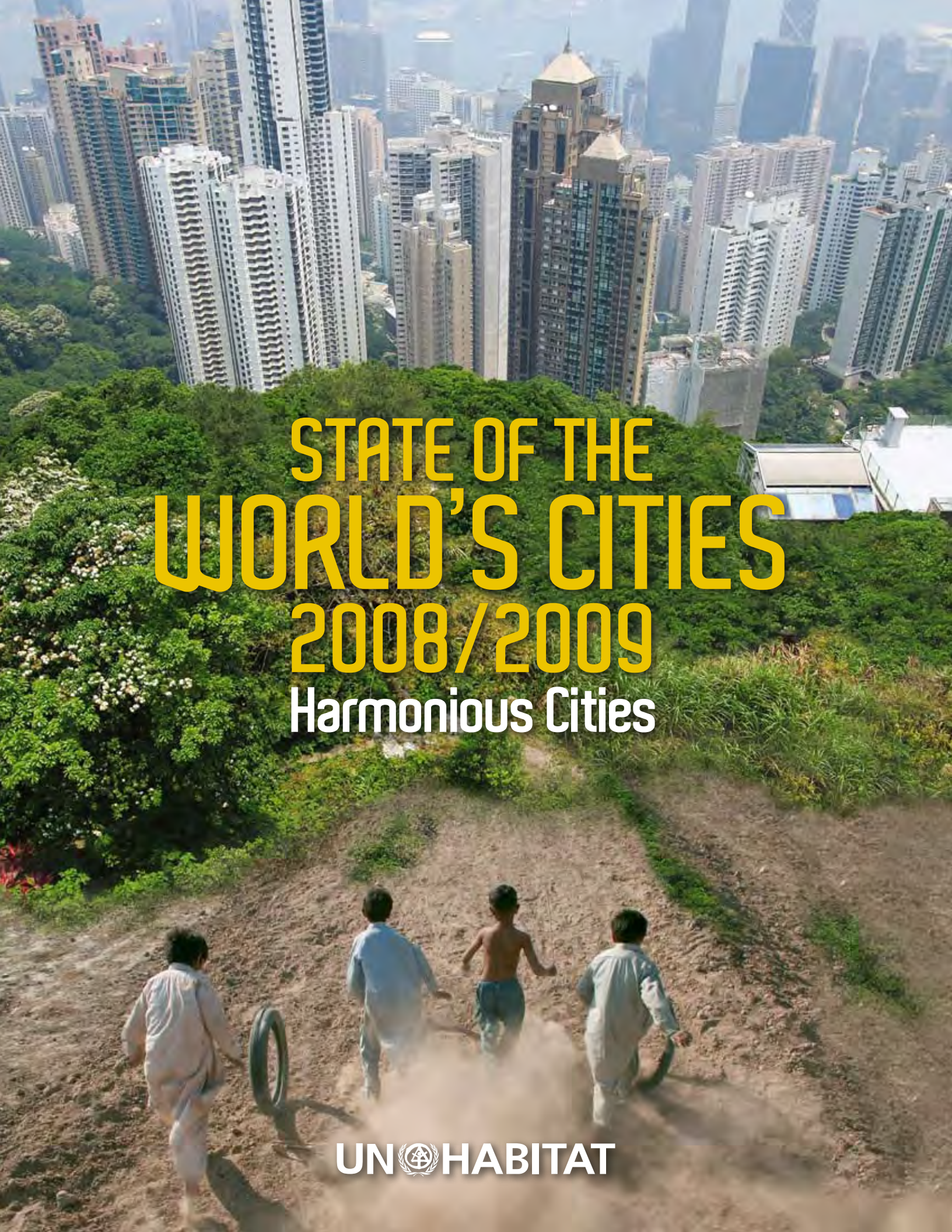

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Harmonious Cities

UN HABITAT

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Foreword

With more than half of the world's population now living in urban areas, this is the urban century. Harmonious urbanization, the theme of this fourth edition of the State of the World's Cities, has never been more important.

Cities embody some of society's most pressing challenges, from pollution and disease to unemployment and lack of adequate shelter. But cities are also venues where rapid, dramatic change is not just possible but expected. Thus they present real opportunities for increasing energy efficiency, reducing disparities in development and improving living conditions in general. National and local governments can promote harmonious urbanization by supporting pro-poor, inclusive and equitable urban development and by strengthening urban governance structures and processes. History demonstrates that integrated urban policy can be a solid path towards development.

Contrary to popular opinion, inequality and the unsustainable use of energy are not inevitable aspects of urban development, nor are they necessary for urbanization and economic growth to occur. Rather, as this report illustrates, cities can advance the prosperity of their inhabitants while achieving equitable social outcomes and fostering the sustainable use of resources. Today, many small, well-managed cities in both the developing and developed worlds are enjoying rapid growth, giving us a chance to stave off entrenched poverty and cultivate healthy environments in which people can thrive.

The data and analysis contained in this report are intended to improve our understanding of how cities function and what we, as a global community, can do to increase their liveability and unity. In that spirit, I commend this report to policymakers, mayors, citizens' groups and all those concerned with the welfare of our urbanizing world.

Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations

Introduction

Half of humanity now lives in cities, and within two decades, nearly 60 per cent of the world's people will be urban dwellers. Urban growth is most rapid in the developing world, where cities gain an average of 5 million residents every month. As cities grow in size and population, harmony among the spatial, social and environmental aspects of a city and between their inhabitants becomes of paramount importance. This harmony hinges on two key pillars: equity and sustainability.

The world has witnessed for the past year some of the social challenges associated with global warming and climate change. The rise in prices of fuel and food has provoked angry reactions worldwide and threatens to eradicate, in many instances, decades of social and economic advancement. This relatively new threat to harmonious urban development is nonetheless directly linked to poorly planned and managed urbanization. Urban sprawl, high dependence on motorized transport and urban lifestyles that generate excessive waste and consume large amounts of energy are some of the major contributors to the global increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

However, data analyzed by UN-HABITAT shows that not all cities contribute to global warming and climate change in the same way. While wealthier cities tend to produce more emissions than less wealthy cities, as higher incomes often translate into higher energy consumption, significant differences in emissions are also found between cities of similar wealth. Some cities in developed countries have, for example, been reducing their per capita energy consumption and emissions through better transport planning and energy conservation. At the same time, other cities in newly industrializing countries are increasing per capita emissions through the combined impact of motorization and increased energy consumption. The findings presented in this report clearly show that policies that promote energy-efficient public transport, that reduce urban sprawl and that encourage the use of environmentally-friendly sources of energy, can reduce a city's ecological footprint and carbon emissions significantly. In fact, cities provide a real opportunity to mitigate and reverse the impact of global climate change. Properly planned cities provide both the economies of scale and the population densities that have the potential to reduce per capita demand for resources such as energy and land.

The world is also confronting the challenge of increasing disparities between the rich and the poor. This edition of the State of the World's Cities shows that spatial and social disparities within cities and between cities and regions within the same country are growing as some areas benefit more than others from public services, infrastructure and other investments. Evidence presented in this report also shows

that when cities already have high levels of inequality, spatial and social disparities are likely to become more, and not less, pronounced with economic growth. High levels of urban inequality present a double jeopardy. They have a dampening effect on economic growth and contribute to a less favourable environment for investment.

But just as importantly, urban inequality has a direct impact on all aspects of human development, including health, nutrition, gender equality and education. In cities where spatial and social divisions are stark or extreme, lack of social mobility tends to reduce people's participation in the formal sector of the economy and their integration in society. This exacerbates insecurity and social unrest which, in turn, diverts public and private resources from social services and productive investments to expenditures for safety and security. Pro-poor social programmes, equitable distribution of public resources and balanced spatial and territorial development, particularly through investments in urban and inter-urban infrastructure and services, are among the most effective means for mitigating or reversing the negative consequences of urban inequality.

Many cities and countries are addressing these challenges and opportunities by adopting innovative approaches to urban planning and management that are inclusive, pro-poor and responsive to threats posed by environmental degradation and global warming. From China to Colombia, and everywhere in between, national and local governments are making critical choices that promote equity and sustainability in cities. These governments recognize that cities are not just part of the problem; they are, and must be, part of the solution. Many cities are also coming up with innovative institutional reforms to promote prosperity while minimizing inequity and unsustainable use of energy. Enlightened and committed political leadership combined with effective urban planning, governance and management that promote equity and sustainability are the critical components to the building of harmonious cities.

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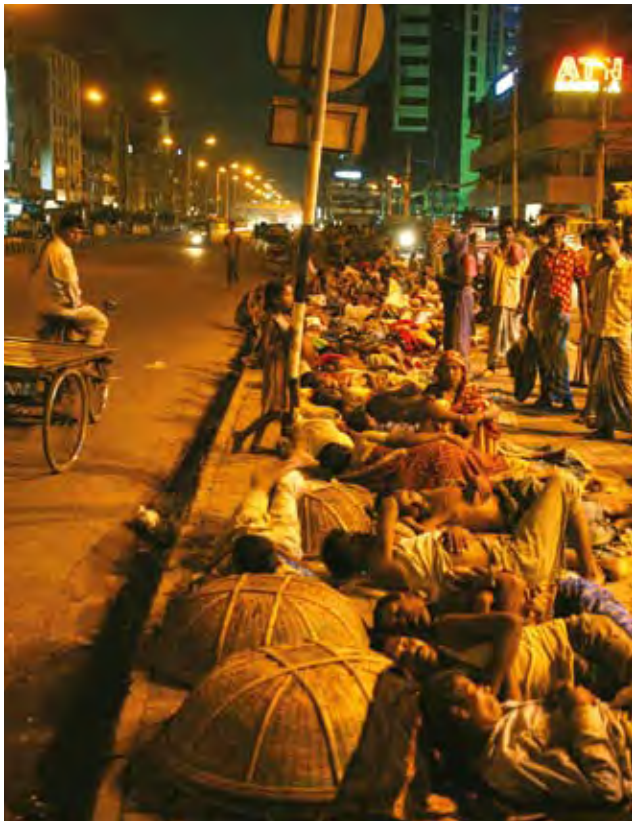

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