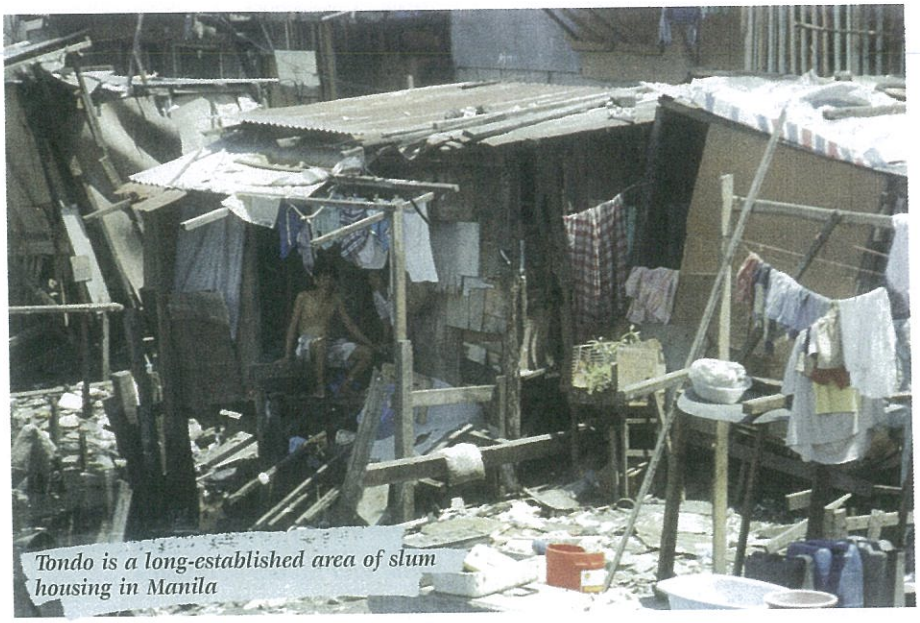
Megacities, migr

The percentage of the population living in cities is growing, particularly in less economically developed countries. This article considers the causes of urbanisation in the global context. It then describes and explains urbanisation and its impact using a case study of Manila in the Philippines. It is relevant to a number of A-level topics including rural and urban settlement, population and managing cities.

Michael Ashby



Tondo is a long-established area of slum housing in Manila

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the world's urban population became greater than the world's rural population for the first time in 2008. Less economically developed countries (LEDCs) account for much of this urbanisation. Urban populations are growing rapidly in total numbers in Asian LEDCs but in percentage terms growth is fastest in Africa (see Figures 1 and 2).

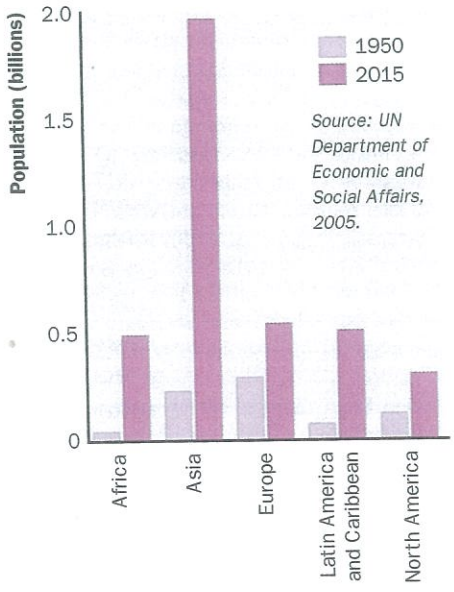
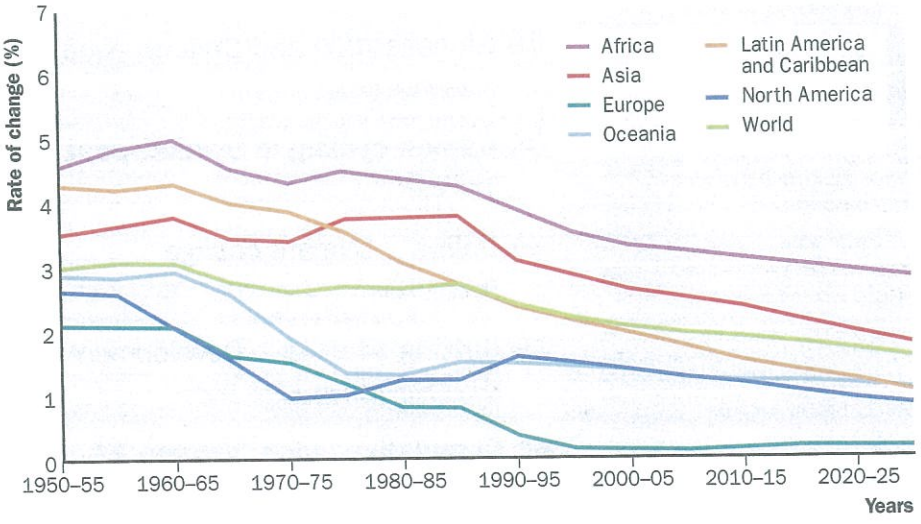


Figure 1 *Regional urban populations, 1950 and 2015 (projected)*

Professor Sir Peter Hall of the Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning at University College London projects that in 2015 there will be 358 cities of at least 1 million people, 153 of them in Asia. There will be 27 **megacities** (at least 10 million population), 18 of which will be in Asia. Some LEDCs have **primate cities** – one city which vastly exceeds the size of all the others and has a higher rate of economic growth. Examples are Mexico City in Mexico, Bangkok in Thailand, Accra in Ghana and Manila in the Philippines.

Causes of urbanisation

The largest cause of rapid urbanisation in LEDCs is rural–urban migration. Potential migrants make decisions on where to live based on push and pull factors (Inset 1). Poor economic conditions in the countryside; environmental degradation caused by drought, storms and floods; displacement through large-scale rural development and resettlement schemes; lack of adequate resources and unequal land distribution all contribute to migrants leaving a rural area.



Source: UN

Figure 2 *Urban growth rates*

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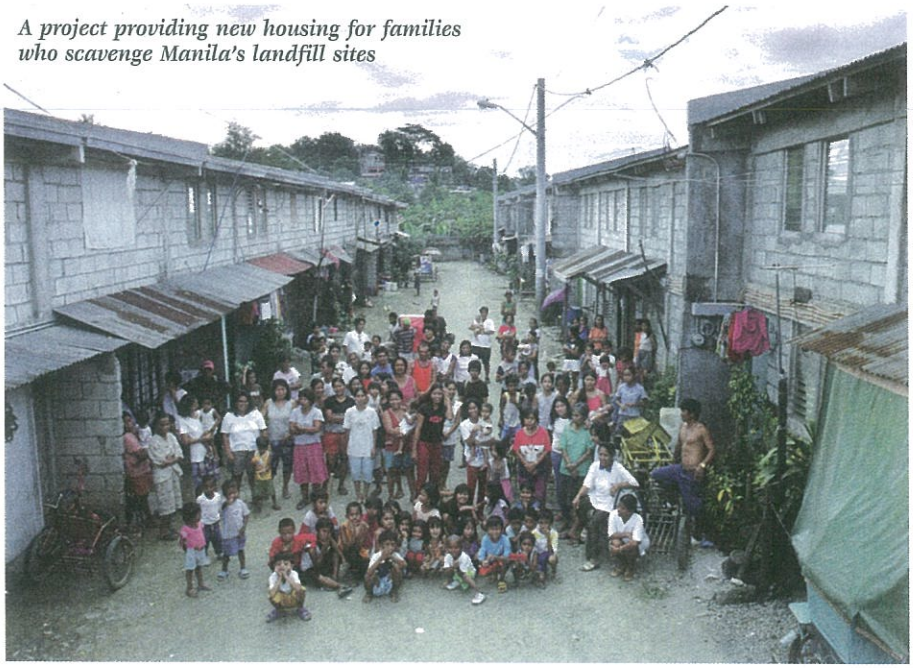


A project providing new housing for families who scavenge Manila's landfill sites

Pull factors include the perception that the city holds greater wealth and income, better employment opportunities, improved access to services such as schools and hospitals, and a more exciting daily life.

As many rural–urban migrants are of fertile age, another major cause of urban growth is the rate of natural increase in the urban population (birth rate minus death rate).

Urbanisation in the Philippines

The Philippines population, currently 88.7 million, is growing at 1.8% annually (National Statistics Office and World Bank). In 1990, 48% of the population lived in urban areas and the Housing and Urban Development Council forecasts that this will rise to 62% in 2010. Filipinos have a strong tradition of migration, both internal and international, in search of better opportunities.

The greater Manila urban area is known as Metropolitan Manila (Figures 3 and 4) and this is the largest destination for internal migrants. It now has a population of over 12 million. Migrants tend to move to areas of the city where someone from their home area already lives and can help them integrate into city living. Metropolitan Manila includes the city of Manila, other cities such as Quezon City and 13 adjacent cities and municipalities.

The impact of urbanisation

Like many LEDC megacities, Metropolitan Manila has grown despite inadequate planning, infrastructure and services. However, the increasing population has led to a number of problems. Some of these are common to all major world cities but others are only found on a large scale in LEDC cities.

The demand for land in the city has increased as the population has grown. However, land values are high and there are problems involving tenure and the legalities of land transactions, especially those relating to unused land. Housing is a key issue, and 51.6% of informal (slum) housing in the Philippines is in Manila. *Time* magazine estimates that 2 million people live in Manila's slums (Inset 2). One long established low-income housing area is Tondo. Some parts of Tondo have been improved over the decades, and houses there now have electricity, piped water and television. Wealthier residents of Manila live in more spacious and salubrious areas such as Roxas Boulevard on the shoreline of Manila Bay.

Migration has affected the general environment in Metropolitan Manila:

- The heavy concentration of population has resulted in urban sprawl, continuous denudation of the adjacent forest areas, mounting piles of solid waste, degradation in slum areas, and air and water pollution.
- Sources of air pollution include vehicles, power plants and factories, refuse burning, road dust and open cooking.
- Urbanisation has put pressure on services and 45% of residents have no access to piped water.

inset 1

Causes of rural–urban migration

Declining rural fortunes

- Rural population pressure exerts impacts on soil, water and forests by over-cultivation, over-grazing and over-cutting, leading to desertification, soil erosion, salinisation and general environmental degradation.
- Smallholdings may be split on inheritance leading to smaller plots, for example. *minifundios* in Brazil are often less than 1 hectare. Some family members migrate to cities or farm fragile marginal areas
- Many rural people in LEDCs are landless.
- Rural development schemes designed to slow rural–urban migration, along with crop export schemes, may result in further environmental pressure as an unsustainable level of population remains in the rural area.
- Large-scale development projects such as dams and hydroelectric power schemes displace 1–2 million people per year by flooding worldwide.

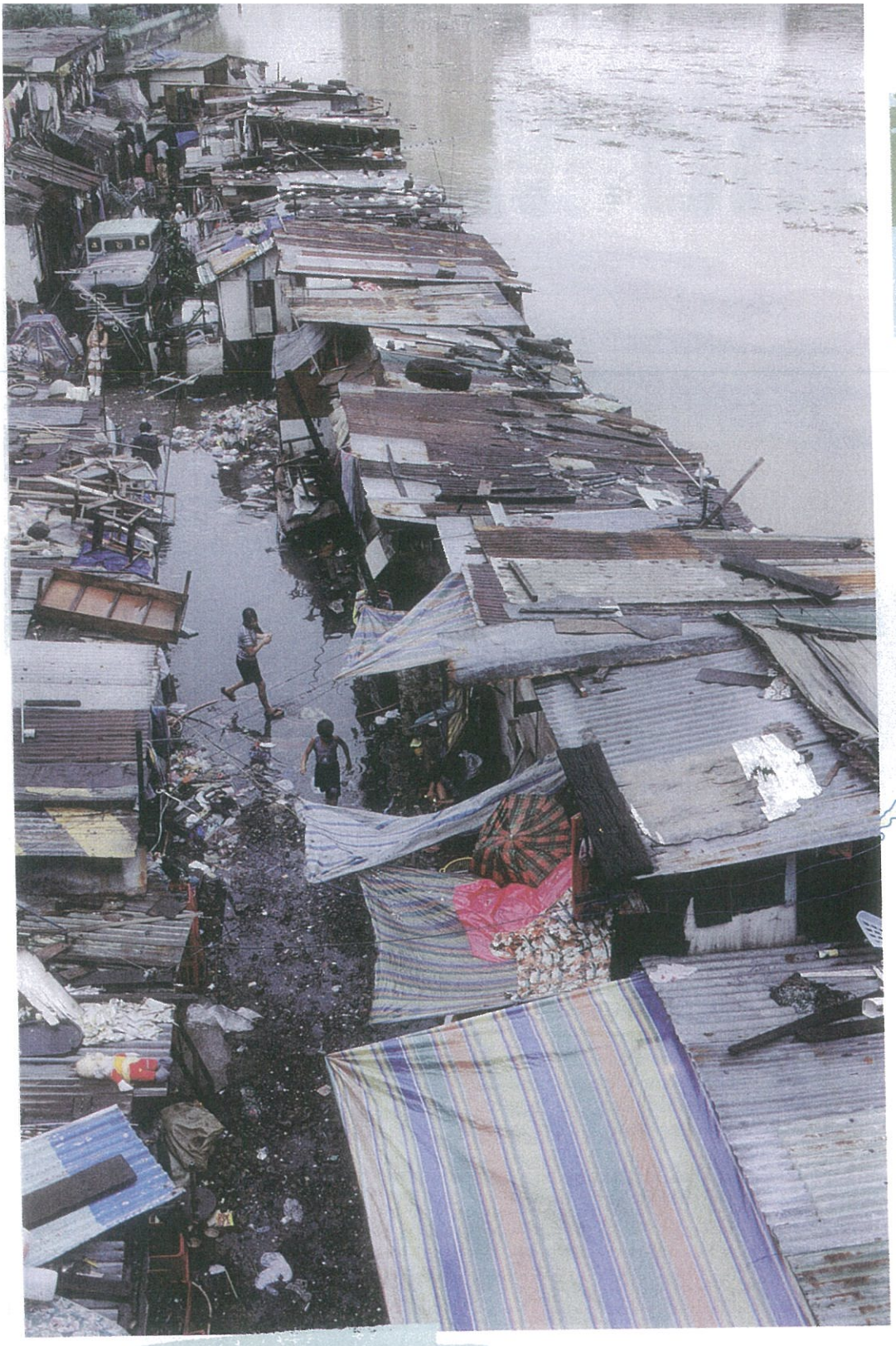
The attraction of urban areas

- Cities create more wealth than rural areas, and infrastructure (roads, power, water supplies), education and healthcare are more readily available.
- Urban areas generate up to 80% of gross national product in LEDCs.
- There is a positive correlation between urbanisation and GNP per capita.
- The resource base of cities is capable of supporting a higher population and density than rural areas.

inset 2

What is a slum?

According to UN-Habitat a slum is 'any housing with at least one feature of overcrowding, informality or inadequate sanitation...exclusion and unhealthy conditions'.



Shacks on the edge of the Pasig River

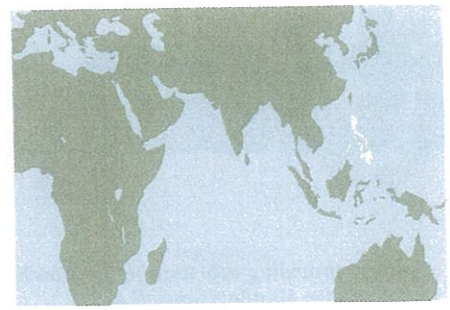


***Figure 3** Map showing the location of Manila*

Inset 3
Millennium Development Goals

Goal 7 is 'Ensure environmental sustainability'. This includes:

- Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.
- Achieve significant improvement in the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

- The self-help housing areas along the Pasig River have added their waste to the industrial pollution of the river. Where urban drainage does exist it is often blocked by solid waste, thus increasing flood risk.
- Pavements, if any, are often obstructed, discouraging pedestrians and increasing traffic congestion.

With a large population of working age and an adult literacy rate of 92.6%, the Philippines has had much foreign direct investment (FDI), particularly from the USA (the colonial power before independence in 1946). The business district of Makati has many foreign banks and brokerages and the presence of foreign companies helps to reduce the high levels of unemployment and underemployment (people working below their skill level). However, as Manila has the worst traffic congestion in Asia after Bangkok, much of the more recent investment has been outside Manila, in places such as the Mactan Export Processing Zone on Cebu Island in the centre of the Philippines.

Solutions

The National Housing Authority has acquired and developed large areas of land to build homes for families displaced from dangerous areas and from sites earmarked for government infrastructure projects. Housing construction has been on a self-help basis – residents build the houses themselves and they then own them. In

Children playing in polluted water

many areas, such as Tondo, residents work together in their communities, sometimes with the help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Catholic Church, in improving amenities, services and housing.

The national government of the Philippines is committed to following the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. These have a broad remit but the goals that relate to housing (Inset 3) may add further impetus to solving the pressing housing problem. Some public sector workers are provided with housing, for example in the Teachers Village in Quezon City, but housing demand outstrips supply.

The Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act were introduced by Congress to try and reduce air and water pollution. The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 aimed to introduce a systematic, comprehensive and ecological solid waste management programme. However, the problems of funding and the need to strengthen enforcement with incentives and penalties remain. Manila's Light Rail Transit (LRT) system was built in 1984 with the aim of reducing traffic congestion and pollution. This, together with the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) system, carries 920,000 passengers a day.

The Asian Development Bank (linked to the World Bank) has funded a project which aims to enhance water quality in the Pasig River, improve environmental conditions and river management and promote urban regeneration and renewal in the vicinity.

Like many other LEDC megacities Manila's urban problems are exacerbated by rapid population growth and the lack of finance to deal with the needs of this population.

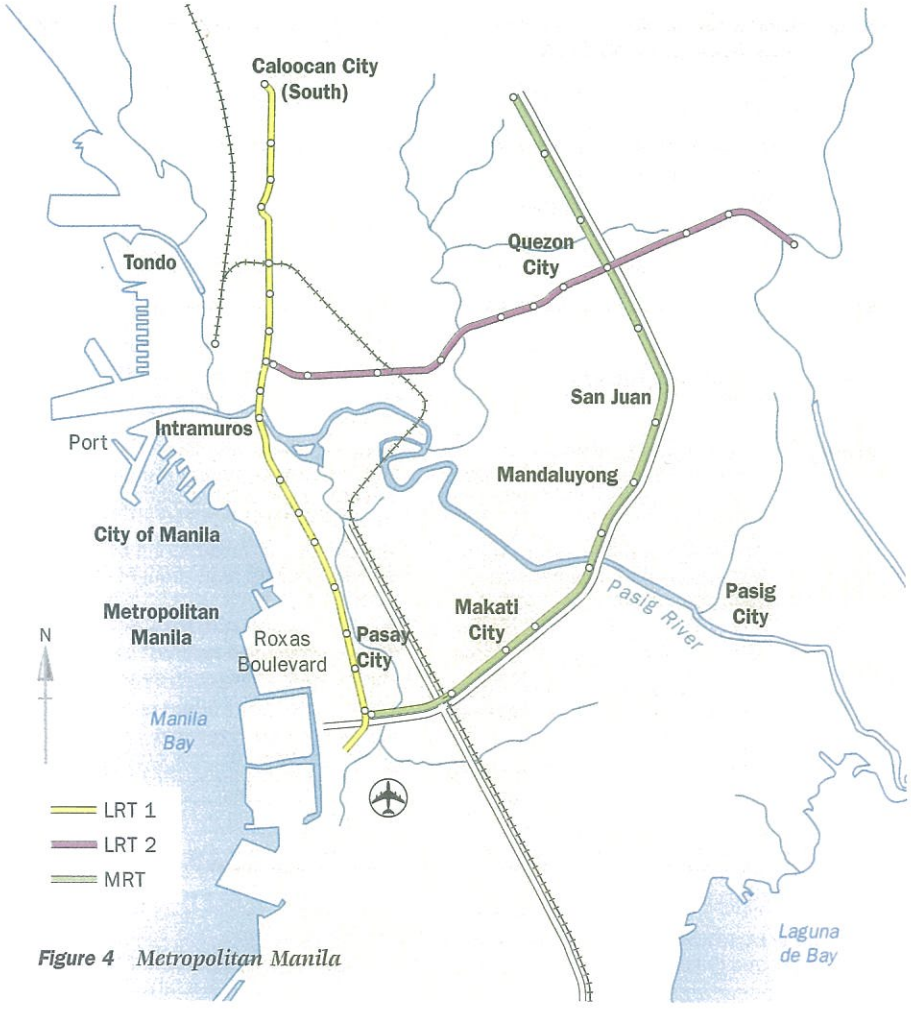


Figure 4 Metropolitan Manila

Points for discussion

(1) To what extent do the problems in LEDC megacities compare with those in MEDC cities?

(2) How would you prioritise the urban problems and solutions faced by cities such as Manila?

(3) Use the internet to research the 20 largest world cities by population in 1950 and today. How have the lists changed?

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Key points

- LEDCs account for much of the urban growth in the world.
- Urban growth is fuelled by both rural–urban migration and natural increase.
- Manila has grown into a large agglomeration with inadequate planning, infrastructure, services, housing and employment.
- The environment in the Manila region has been affected by air and water pollution coupled with urban sprawl into the countryside.