Operational Definitions of Urban, Rural and Urban Agglomeration for Monitoring Human Settlements

By Markandey Rai
United Nations Human Settlements Programme
PO Box-30030
Nairobi, Kenya
Abstract

• The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) is responsible for monitoring the Target 11 of Goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) in addition to its mandate to monitor and report on the progress made in implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The paper will discuss the problems and difficulties in collecting data with common operational definition of urban/rural and urban agglomerations in various regions as well as reliability of information provided by reporting authorities. The various opinion on the issue of how to define the cities boundaries for future data collection and concept of built-up and densely populated area's role in it will also be discussed for future data collection.
Target 11 of goal 7 of the Millennium Development goals (MDG’s)

- **Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability**
- **Target 11: By 2020 to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers**
- **Indicator 31: Proportion of urban population with access to improved sanitation (UNICEF)**
- **Indicator 32: Proportion of households with secure tenure (UN-HABITAT)**
The overall objectives of the Expert Group Meeting were:

- The long term objective was to strengthen capacity of countries to collect, compile and analyze urban indicators, in order to do comparisons based on harmonized definitions and classifications at national and city level.

- The immediate objective was to discuss and come out with the operational definitions of urban and rural areas for collection of comparable indicators as well establishing the criteria for defining city boundaries of the Urban Agglomerations.
Urban and rural is defined based on some characteristics:

- Population size threshold
- Population density
- Contiguity of build-up area
- Political status
- Proportion of the labor force engaged in non-agricultural work
- Presence of particular services and activities
Urbanization Facts

- By 2007 about 50 percent of the world’s population will live in urban areas.
- By 2030, 60 percent will be urban.
- In 2000 urban population reached 2.9 billion.
- By 2030, it is expected to reach 5 billion.
- Almost all urban growth will be absorbed in developing regions.
Mega Cities Growth

- The number of cities with 5 million or more inhabitants is projected to rise from 46 in 2003 to 61 in 2015. Among these, the number of mega-cities (with 10 million inhabitants or more) will increase from 20 in 2003 to 22 in 2015. Most of these large cities are in developing countries, and by 2015, 45 out of 61 cities are expected to be from the less developed regions.

Large urban agglomerations are not necessarily experiencing fast population growth. Of the 20 mega-cities identified in 2003, almost half experienced population growth below 1.5 per cent between 1975 and 2000 and just 6 grew at rates above 3 percent: Dhaka in Bangladesh (6.2 per cent per year); Lagos in Nigeria (6.1); Delhi (4.1), Karachi (3.7) and Mumbai (Bombay) (3.1) in India; and Jakarta in Indonesia (3.3). During 2000-2015, 11 mega-cities are projected to experience population growth below 1.5 per cent and five will remain with population growth rates above 3 percent.
No common universal definition for urban/rural areas or population

- **Belarus**
  - Urban localities are human settlements that in accordance with legislation have the status of towns

- **Canada**
  - Urban areas include all greater metropolitan areas (even though they contain some rural areas) and smaller metropolitan areas. Urban areas have a minimum population concentration of 1000 people and a population density of at least 400 per square kilometer based on the previous census population counts

- **Dominic Republic**
  - Urban zones refer to areas in municipalities

- **Estonia**
  - Urban areas include towns and townships, while rural areas include villages

- **Libya**
  - Urban refers to every district of 50000 or more inhabitants

- **Mexico**
  - Urban refers to localities with population over 2500.
No common universal definition for urban/rural areas or population.

- **Sweden**
  - Locality is a group of buildings normally not more than 200 meters apart from each other and having at least 200 inhabitants. In Sweden localities are defined as urban and all areas outside the localities as rural.

- **Thailand**
  - Urban refers to municipal areas

- **Turkey**
  - Urban refers to settlements with population of 20001 and over.

- **United Kingdom**
  - Urban refers to built up area with a population of more than approximately one thousand (1000) based on population as at 19991

- **United Stated of America**
  - Census Bureau-defined Urbanized Areas (UAs) are defined to represent human settlements with over50, 000 people. A UA is defined by the Census bureau as an “area consisting of a central place (s) and adjacent urban fringe that together have a minimum residential population of at least 50,000 people and generally an overall population density of at least1,000 people per square mile of the land area”
Analysis of “urban” definition

- 105 countries based their urban data on *administrative* criteria, limiting it to the boundaries of state or provincial capitals, municipalities or other local jurisdictions; 83 use this as their sole method of distinguishing urban from rural.

- 100 countries define cities by *population size or population density*, with minimum concentrations ranging broadly, from 200 to 50,000 inhabitants; 57 use this as their sole urban criterion.

- 25 countries specify *economic* characteristics as significant, though not exclusive, in defining cities—typically, the proportion of the labour force employed in non-agricultural activities.

- 18 countries count the availability of *urban infrastructure* in their definitions, including the presence of paved streets, water supply systems, sewerage systems, or electric lighting.

- 25 countries provide *no definition* of “urban” at all.

- 6 countries regard their *entire population* as urban.
Definition of “Urban Agglomeration”

Urban Agglomeration comprises the city or town proper and also the suburban fringe or thickly settled territory lying outside, but adjacent to, its boundaries. A single urban agglomeration may comprise several cities or towns and their suburban fringes. The administrative city (city proper) as the area of a population centre located within municipal boundaries designated as such by the central government for management, legislative and administrative purposes. Metropolitan area is defined as a politically defined urban area set up for planning or administration purposes which may combine several jurisdictions (municipalities or cities).
Different forums for definition

• Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses
• Global Urban Observatory (GUO)
• Large Cities Statistics Project (LCSP)
• Expert Group Meeting in 2002 and
• Inter-agency group meetings on MDG’s
Agreement on City boundaries

- For comparative city statistics and indicators, it is important to have an agreement to have defined city boundary.
- For city level data, the standard area of reference should be the urban agglomeration.
- When the data for the agglomeration is not available then data for the metropolitan area should be provided with a note.
- The boundary of the urban agglomeration should be clearly defined with the help of local authorities.
Geographical Information System (GIS)

- Defining the boundaries of the urban agglomerations and for collecting data for the sample cities.
Nairobi city boundary
References

- World Urbanization Prospect 2001
- World Urbanization prospect 2003
- Ibid
- Ibid
- Ibid
- Ibid
- Ramachandran, A., “The Urban Challenge: A collection of lectures delivered by Dr. A Ramachandran”,
- Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Rev 1, New York 1998
- Ibid
Thankyou