

Megacities and Global Change in East, Southeast and South Asia

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Summary

Megacities have particular significance in the world-wide process of urbanisation: In the year 2015, more than 600 million people will be living in about 60 megacities worldwide (i.e. metropolises with more than 5 million people). Under the dynamics of global change they affect global change just as profoundly as global change can affect megacities. Often, megacities are perceived mainly as burdened by disadvantages, origins and motors of multiple problems as well as agents and victims of risks. Such a view does, however, neglect – at least potential – benefits, chances and advantages of mega-urban developments. In East, Southeast and South Asia, radical spatial, demographic, social and political structural changes in (mega-)urban areas took place, associated with the economic rise of the whole region since the mid-1980s, which show remarkable differences. Furthermore, the issue of systematic risk minimisation and risk prevention and the question of growing importance of informality within megaurban areas are touched.

Keywords: urbanisation, megacities, global change

1 Megacities: Key elements of worldwide urbanisation

For the first time in the history of man, more than half of the world's population will live in cities in the year 2007 (UN 2002: 1). Worldwide, the proportion of the population as a whole living in cities rose from 29.8% (1950) to 37.9% (1975) to 47.2% (2000), and it will probably increase to 57.2% in 2010 or 60.2% in 2030 (UN 2002: 4). In the industrialised countries 73% of the population was living in cities by 1990 (ca. 877 million), while in developing countries the corresponding figure was only 37%, although in absolute figures it was 1,357 million. It is assumed that the rate of urbanisation in industrialised countries will only increase slightly to 78%, i.e. 1,087 million people, while in developing countries the increase will be enormous, although it may vary from state to state. With an estimated 57% of the total population, probably more than 3,845 million people will live in cities here in 2025 (HABITAT 2001).