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MEGACITIES

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MOTION:

"MEGACITIES ARE BAD FOR THE DEVELOPING WORLD"

CONTENTS

KEY TERMS

Garden City

Megacity

Urban sprawl

Urban Upgrading

A 'megacity' is typically defined as an urban area with over 10 million inhabitants. In 1950, the New York metropolitan area was the only city to meet this criterion. Today, an estimated 1 in 5 people live in one of 27 megacities around the globe – the largest being Tokyo with a population of 36 million [Ref: Slate]. The UN expects this number to have reached 37 by 2025 with the majority of growth coming from an ascendant developing world, particularly Asia [Ref: United Nations]. The general move towards urban living – with a projected 60% of the world's population living in cities by 2030 [Ref: Forbes] – has led some commentators to worry that the future's megacities will look vastly different to New York, Tokyo or London, resembling Mumbai or São Paulo with their vast slums and associated social, health and environmental problems [Ref: Moscow Times]. Others however suggest that the challenges presented by megacities can be overcome with architectural and technical ingenuity, the economic dynamism of city life and the promise of a better standard of living for all. In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is developing the hundred billion dollar King Abdullah Economic City, which although not a mega city in terms of size of population, is an indicator of the trend towards larger urban developments [Ref: BBC News]. In essence, megacities are either dynamic hotbeds of productivity or corrupt and frightening expanses of urban blight.

Cities of slums

In 1971, around 1 in 6 Mumbai residents lived in slums. Today, the slum population stands at around 1 in 2 (8.7 million slum-dwellers in a population of 18.5 million) [Ref: Times of India]. This is not unique to Mumbai; many megacities in Asia, Africa and South America have vast populations living in slums with little or no government provision for essential infrastructure like sanitation, electricity, safe transport links and education. In the eyes of some researchers, the widespread belief in "gigantism for its own sake" [Ref: Forbes] is unnecessarily forcing millions to live in unpleasant conditions that cause and exacerbate common health problems like high rates of disease, lower than average life expectancies, epidemics and even pandemics of communicable diseases [Ref: NEJM]. Why, they ask, should emerging megacities tragically repeat the worst mistakes of mass urbanisation that once occurred in the West? While even the most ardent of advocates for megacities recognise that sprawling, unplanned developments may look chaotic to a planner's eye, hopeful observers argue that the challenge of large, concentrated urban populations will not lead to poverty, but to innovative solutions. These commentators often celebrate the 'DIY spirit' of slums that are "improved steadily and gradually by their residents" [Ref: Prospect]. They suggest that complex and constantly changing megacities demonstrate daily how improvements to the living conditions of slum-dwellers are not only possible but inevitable. Many look to China where the number of urban slum-dwellers fell by 25% from 2000-2008 [Ref: spiked] and where planning and investment is allowing the country to build the world's largest megacity in the Pearl River Delta – not as a single sprawl, but as a cluster of separate, inter-connected urban hubs [Ref: Atlantic].

Some research has also raised doubts over the evidence that living in a smaller city will necessarily improve one's quality of life [Ref: Vox].

Lure of the city

For these advocates poverty in the developing world's megacities is not the fault of geographical factors like size and scale but are the result of endemic political corruption and decades of poor planning. While conditions in the slums may admittedly be terrible they are often better than the areas migrant workers left behind offering a first step in the climb out of poverty [Ref: Economic Times]. As American economist, Edward Glaeser, suggests, there are both social and economic advantages to city life: "slums don't make people poor, they attract poor people who want to be rich", he says [Ref: Forbes]. The economic sense of megacities – offering the prospect of more jobs, better wages, cheap access to labour-saving 'mod-cons' that once were the preserve of the rich – has further contributed to their appeal. Accordingly, the United Nations are clear on the developmental benefits of city living finding that education, healthcare and other services can be easily distributed amongst those in dense areas [Ref: United Nations]. For these reasons recent protests in Turkey, Brazil, Africa and across the Middle East have been described as particularly urban movements reflecting the aspirations of a new, well educated and growing middle class [Ref: Financial Times]. However, as critics of megacities point out, political representation in the developing world often struggles to keep up with the size, transformation and population growth of modern metropolises [Ref: Business Daily] producing more potentially explosive inter-city tensions than solidarities [Ref: Foreign Policy]. Megacities in the developing

world are undoubtedly more unstable and certainly more unpredictable that their counterparts in the Western world. In return for the promise of a better life, can the concentration of power in sprawling cities do anything but politically exclude and economically impoverish the countryside that surrounds them [Ref: Global Asia]? Research by the McKinsey Global Institute suggests that bloated urban behemoths may become a drag on emerging economies [Ref: Economist] while investment flows towards more secure and manageable medium-sized cities [Ref: Daily Nation]. If they are right, the future of megacities might look more like a poverty trap absorbing the aspirations of the poor while mostly benefitting the rich [Ref: New Statesman].

MEGACITIES:
"Megacities are bad for the deveoping world"

DEBATING MATTERS
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ESSENTIAL READING

NOTES

The Rise of the Megacity
David Pilling *Slate* 5 November 2011

Restricting the growth of cities will improve quality of life
Economist January 2011

FOR

Megacities face Mega Problems
Moscow Times 26 June 2012

City Limits
Economist 13 August 2011

The problem with megacities
Joel Kotkin Forbes 4 April 2011

Urbanization – An emerging humanitarian disaster
Ronak B. Patel and Thomas F. Burke N*ew England Journal of Medicine* 20 August 2009

AGAINST

The century of the city will change the way we do politics
John Rossant *Financial Times* 24 June 2013

Slums are hubs of hope, progress and dignity
Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar *Economic Times* 31 March 2013

Liberated from the "idiocy of rural life"
Patrick Hayes *spiked* 31 January 2012

New Land Of Opportunity
Edward Glaeser *Forbes* 20 April 2011

IN DEPTH

How the rise of the megacity is changing the way we live
Paul Webster and Jason Burke *Guardian* 21 January 2012

Megacities: Scars on the Earth, or Keys to Growth?
NPR 12 December 2011

Behold the countryside: the urban/rural divide
Tay Kheng Soon *Global Asia* 2008

Why Kenya should act fast to address social inequalities in growing slums
Kennedy Odede *Business Daily* 5 August 2013

Failed city? Karachi's violent spiral
Foreign Policy 9 April 2013

'Africa Is a Great Country'
Jens Assur *Foreign Policy* April 2013

Megacities: soulless sprawl or shining future?
Carl Björkman *World Economic Forum* 23 January 2013

Too big to flood? Megacities face a future of major storm risks
Bruce Stutz *Guardian* 17 December 2012

'One Mega-City, Many Systems': The Evolution of Hong Kong
Parag Khanna & Thomas Sevcik *Atlantic* 21 June 2012

Slumlands — filthy secret of the modern mega-city
Paul Mason *New Statesman* 8 August 2011

Are the world's megacities too big?
Klaus Desmet & Esteban Rossi-Hansber *Vox* 12 March 2011

How Slums Can Save the Planet
Stewart Brand *Prospect* 27 January 2010

MegaCities
National Geographic Channel

India's pop-up mega city
Financial Times

'Cities on the Edge: Megacities'
Andrew Marr *BBC (via YouTube)*

AUDIO/VISUAL

MegaCities
National Geographic Channel

'Cities on the Edge: Megacities'
Andrew Marr *BBC (via YouTube)*

ORGANISATIONS

Megacity Taskforce

United Nations Population Division

Saudi Arabia's new desert megacity
BBC News 20 March 2015

The whole of Eastern Africa is in a flux
Daily Nation 9 August 2013

IMF, World Bank report says urbanisation can lead to slums and crime
Ghana Business News 1 May 2013

Smog is altering childhood in China's cities
NDTV 23 April 2013

Model for megacities? Mexico City cleans up its air
Christian Science Monitor 22 April 2013

Indonesia's natural disaster risks, costs rise
IRIN 17 April 2013

Failures, tears, complaints, trail Lagos multi-billion Naira slums upgrade
Premium Times 14 April 2013

Surat beats metros with sharp drop in number of slum-dwellers
Indian Express 10 April 2013

Plastic waste time bomb ticking for India
Times of India 4 April 2013

East Asian Megacities' Acid Rain Downpours Call for Regulations
Medical Daily 3 April 2013

Rio gang-rape spotlights problem faced by developing-world cities
Christian Science Monitor 2 April 2013

Carbon Copy: Why China's Air-Pollution Problem Isn't Unique
Atlantic 21 March 2013

Lagos 'Mega City' policy renders thousands homeless in Badia
Premium Times 28 February 2013

Amnesty: 3 out of every 4 people live in a slum
SW Radio Africa December 2012

From flying toilets to fertiliser, slum sanitation in Nairobi is changing
Guardian 19 November 2012

China's city dwellers to breathe unhealthy air 'for another 20-30 years'
Guardian 3 January 2012

Megacity Singapore under spotlight
BBC News 21 June 2011

Lagos aims to be Africa's model megacity
BBC News 22 January 2010

ADVICE FOR DEBATING MATTERS

FOR STUDENTS

READ EVERYTHING .....
In the Topic Guide and in the news - not just your side of the argument either.

STATISTICS ARE GOOD BUT.....
Your opponents will have their own too. They'll support your points but they aren't a substitute for them.

BE BOLD
Get straight to the point but don't rush into things: make sure you aren't falling back on earlier assertions because interpreting a debate too narrowly might show a lack of understanding or confidence.

DON'T BACK DOWN
Try to take your case to its logical conclusion before trying to seem 'balanced' - your ability to challenge fundamental principles will be rewarded - even if you personally disagree with your arguments.

DON'T PANIC
Never assume you've lost because every question is an opportunity to explain what you know. Don't try to answer every question but don't avoid the tough ones either.

FOR JUDGES

Judges are asked to consider whether students have been brave enough to address the difficult questions asked of them. Clever semantics might demonstrate an acrobatic mind but are also likely to hinder a serious discussion by changing the terms and parameters of the debate itself.

Whilst a team might demonstrate considerable knowledge and familiarity with the topic, evading difficult issues and failing to address the main substance of the debate misses the point of the competition. Judges are therefore encouraged to consider how far students have gone in defending their side of the motion, to what extent students have taken up the more challenging parts of the debate and how far the teams were able to respond to and challenge their opponents.

As one judge remarked *'These are not debates won simply by the rather technical rules of schools competitive debating. The challenge is to dig in to the real issues.'* This assessment seems to grasp the point and is worth bearing in mind when sitting on a judging panel.

FOR TEACHERS

Hoping to start a debating club? Looking for ways to give your debaters more experience? Debaitng Matters have have a wide range of resources to help develop a culture of debate in your school and many more Topic Guides like this one to bring out the best in your students. For these and details of how to enter a team for the Debating Matters Competition visit our website, **www.debatingmatters.com**

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"A COMPLEX WORLD REQUIRES THE CAPACITY TO MARSHALL CHALLENGING IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS"

LORD BOATENG, FORMER BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER TO SOUTH AFRICA