



Talk Series on World Health day

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EU OFFICIALS REVIEW PROGRESS OF PROJECT



Esbey Tondup, executive director of LEDeG, giving the welcome speech.

Officials from European Union visited Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG) to review the progress of the Liveable Leh project which is supported by the European Union. Shouvik Datta, senior programme manager, and Nitika Wadhwa, finance manager, were in Leh from April 22 till 25 for the review meeting with staff of Liveable Leh project. Stanzin Tsephel, director, South Asia, BORDA, was also present during the meeting.

LEDeG is the implementing agency whereas BORDA is a funding partner.

During the three-day meeting, several points were discussed to ensure the smooth functioning of the project. Shouvik and Nikita also visited the faecal sludge treatment plant (FSTP) at Bomb Garh, all-weather public convenience at Zangsti and the one-way pedestrian-friendly Changspa Street.



LEDeG executive director welcomes Shouvik Datta, senior programme manager



The review meeting in progress

On the first day, Tenzin Motup, event manager of the project, gave a presentation on high-level progress of the project. Thereafter, Dachen Angmo, accountant, gave a presentation on finance/budget/expenditure of the project.

Shouvik and Nikita visited the FSTP, Zangsti toilet and Changspa Street to review the project work. Later, Nikita reviewed the accounts with Dachen. On the third day, Ruhci Mathur, Fariha Yousuf, Thinless Dorjay and Tashi

Lundup gave presentation on results and outcomes as per the log-frame.

Post-presentations, Shouvik, Nikita and Tsephel provided their feedback. They asked the staff to avoid any discrepancies and rework on the log-frame.

Shouvik, Nikita and Tsephel also met the LEDeG Committee Members in the evening.

LEDEG ORGANISES EXPERT TALK ON WORLD HEALTH DAY



Dr Motup Dorje, chief medical officer, addressing the audience during the Liveable Leh talk series

Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG) organised its eight talk of the Liveable Leh Talk Series at the Moravian Mission School auditorium hall in Leh on 8th April. The talk was organised to celebrate the World Health Day, which is held on 7th April every year, but the date was postponed for a day as the schools were closed on Sunday. The topic for the talk was 'Impact of rapid urbanisation in Leh on health.' Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Leh Dr Motup Dorje was the guest speaker for the occasion. The Liveable Leh talk series is a part of the Liveable Leh project, which is funded by the European Union and co-funded by BMZ.

The talk was attended by the vice-principal, teachers and students of Moravian Mission School Leh, students of Government Girls Higher Secondary School and Lamdon Model School. More than 60 participants took part in the event.

Eshey Tondup, executive director of LEDeG, welcomed the guest and the audience to the event. He informed the audience that the event was scheduled for 7th April- the day on which World Health Day is celebrated, but keeping in mind the closure of schools and other institutions on Sunday, the event was moved to Monday. Eshey said he wanted to ensure the participation of students in the event as children are the future of the planet. He said he also wanted to disseminate information about the importance of health to the masses through them.

Eshey shared that the World Health Organisation (WHO) held the First World Health Assembly in 1948 where they decided to celebrate 7 April of each year, with effect from 1950, as the World Health Day. The Day is celebrated to draw worldwide attention to a subject of major importance to global health each year. The executive director of LEDeG



Students of Moravian Mission School performing a skit during the event

said that he invited Dr Motup Dorje to speak about the relevance of health in today's times keeping the rampant urbanisation going on in Leh in mind.

He also threw light on the theme for this year's World Health Day- universal health coverage. He requested the students to listen attentively to the guest speaker, and understand and reflect on the knowledge being shared. He also encouraged the students to ask questions and clear their doubts.

He promised that LEDeG would continue to organise such events on relevant topics and issues pertaining to Leh town. He said that the event would be successful only if the information is shared with others.

Then, the students of Moravian Mission School performed a skit on rampant urbanisation in Leh town. They raised several issues such as changing lifestyle and eating habits of people, over-dependence on cars and changing values and morals.

Thereafter, Dr Motup Dorje shared his knowledge and views with the audience. He appreciated the efforts of students of Moravian Mission School and thanked them for informing the audience about urbanisation in an innovative way.

He iterated the importance of health coverage for all. He said that even though health is a basic right for everyone, million are still without health care. He, however, expressed satisfaction over the health care services for the people of Ladakh. Dr Motup said that everyone should take care of his health and people have the right to ask for basic health services.

But there are countries where people are deprived of health cover. Dr Motup said that health expenditures are pushing about 100 million people per year into extreme poverty. He said that out of the three healthcare- primary, secondary and tertiary, the primary health care is the most important. He



shared the focus of the government is to provide primary health care for all. The main objective of primary health care is to improve access and reduce inequity, increase the focus on health promotion and prevention, screening and early intervention.

He then talked about the impact of urbanisation on health. He said that air pollution has led to short-term and long-term diseases such as lung diseases, cancer and diabetes. Dr Motup said that even mental-health is affected due to rapid urbanisation. He said that the food habits of people have changed. Ladakhi people are no longer

consuming staple diet such as roasted barley and are instead over-dependent on processed food. Junk food has led to an increase in cases of diabetes and other cardiovascular diseases.

Dr Motup said that 60% of deaths today are caused due to non-communicable diseases. He said that Leh is facing a major challenge today due to the migration of people to Leh town as it results in the inadequacy of health services for the people. He expressed his helplessness over the lack of primary health care facilities.

He said that the cases of hypertension increased from 11,000 in 2014 to

28,000 in 2018. He said the majority of cases registered at the Sonam Nurboo Memorial hospital are that of strokes and diabetes.

He said that the government has come up with several health programmes at the national level, such as the National Health Mission, National Tobacco Control Programme, National Adolescent Health Programme and Ayushman Bharat Yojana. He said that urban health is not being given priority which is resulting in more health complications. He said that everybody has a role to play to promote better health for everyone.

THE CURSE OF URBAN SPRAWL: HOW CITIES GROW, AND WHY THIS HAS TO CHANGE

The total area covered by the world's cities is set to triple in the next 40 years – eating up farmland and threatening the planet's sustainability. Ahead of the latest Urban Age conference, Mark Swilling says it is time to stop the sprawl

I have just spent two days in Barcelona, one of the most densely populated urban settlements in the world. There are 103 road intersections per sq km – high compared to Brasilia's 41 or Shanghai's Pudong area, which has only 17. Yet despite these high densities, residents of Barcelona will tell you how profoundly liveable their city is.

Visitors are charmed by the pedestrianised streets that thread their way through a maze of buildings constructed over the centuries – between four and seven storeys high, on narrow streets leading to piazzas where people sit at cafe tables or under shady trees. Many residents walk or cycle to work, and public transport functions very well.

For the first time in human history, most of us live in urban settlements – from megacities of 10-20 million, of which there were 28 in 2014, to medium-sized cities of 1-5 million (417 in 2014), and smaller settlements (525 of between 500,000 and one million people in 2014). Looking ahead, the biggest growth will occur not in megacities but these small- and medium-sized cities.

Metropolises expand and contract. It is estimated that 40% of Europe's cities are shrinking (though this is a trend that

migration might help to reverse). Even in Africa, there are some countries where the percentage of the total population living in cities has declined at various times over the past two decades.

Overall, however, our current urban population of around 3.9 billion is expected to grow to around 6.34 billion by 2050, out of a total global population of at least 9.5 billion. If we continue to design and build as if the planet can provide unlimited resources, then this near-doubling of the urban population will mean a doubling of the natural resources required to build and operate our cities – which is not sustainable.

As cities grow, perhaps our most serious concern should be how they expand out into the surrounding countryside. Contrary to popular belief, over the past century urban settlements have not only expanded demographically, they have also sprawled outwards – covering some of the world's most valuable farmland in the process.

The result has been a steady de-densification of urban settlements, by about –2% per annum. Even where inner-city areas have densified over the past few decades (Copenhagen, for example), the citywide trend is still for an overall reduction in average densities.

In 2010, the total area covered by all the cement, asphalt, compacted clay, park areas and open spaces that comprise the footprint of the world's urban settlements was around 1 million sq km. In comparison, the total area of France is 643,000 sq km.

If the urban population and long-term de-densification trends continue, the area of the planet covered by urban settlements will increase to more than 3 million sq km by 2050. And since the most intensively cultivated farmland is typically located near where the bulk of the food is consumed, much of this additional 2 million sq km is currently our most productive farmland.

In short, continued urbanisation in its current form could threaten global food supplies at a time when food production is already not keeping up with population growth.

Understanding rapid urbanisation

A key determinant of rampant urban sprawl – especially in North America, where it is a particularly serious problem – has been the existence of cheap oil. When oil prices reached record highs in 2008 and exacerbated the global economic crisis, the people who travelled furthest tended to be the first to default on their mortgage payments.



The Eixample district in Barcelona, one of the most densely populated cities.



Shanghai in China, one of three countries where 37% of all future urban growth is expected to take

As their fuel expenses for travelling to work and school rocketed, so their capacity to afford urban sprawl drastically diminished. Visiting Detroit a few weeks ago, I found that of the city's 300,000 buildings, 70,000 currently stand empty – and mostly derelict.

From the 1960s onwards, the city built more and more ring roads to suburbanise the middle and

upper classes into the surrounding countryside – and in the process bankrupted Detroit's urban core, leaving it unable to manage the economic impact of the closure of its once-giant car factories.

Indeed, most of the extra 2.5 billion people who will be living in urban areas by 2050 will be in cities of the global south, in particular in Asia and Africa; 37% of all future urban growth

is expected to take place in only three countries: China, India and Nigeria.

Other than in China, rapid urbanisation in these developing countries has resulted in an explosion of informal urban settlements, or slums. In India, millions of slum-dwellers live within the core urban areas, creating the fairly unique Indian phenomenon of neighbourhoods where the urban poor and middle class live together.



Of Detroit's 300,000-odd buildings, an estimated 70,000 currently stand empty.



Although Seoul has a population of more than 10 million, it has avoided sprawling outwards.

By contrast, in African cities – where 62% of all urbanites are in slums – the majority of slum-dwellers live in expanding urban settlements on the peripheries of cities. With Africa's urban population (currently around 400 million people) expected to triple to 1.2 billion by 2050, this form of urbanisation will result in massive, sprawling, relatively low-density urban settlements across the continent.

But it's not happening like this everywhere. Take Ethiopia, an east African country of 99 million people with one of the fastest growing economies in the world. While 80% of the population is still rural, urbanisation is accelerating fast, placing huge pressures on the capital, Addis Ababa.

Government investments have turned this city into a massive building site. Endless cranes are silhouetted against the African sky as a huge number of relatively high-rise buildings emerge in the urban core.

At the same time, with funds and expertise provided by the Chinese, a light-rail system has been built that runs across the city – a remarkable feat in a city where 80% of the population lives in slums. This creates incentives for the middle class to live in high-density, multi-storey apartments that are starting to spring up around the stations – reducing the need to subsidise longer-distance, road-based travel by private car.

Coupled with the building of multi-storey, subsidised

housing for the urban poor (some located close to transit nodes), the result is that Addis Ababa is densifying, setting an example for what is possible in other cities facing similar challenges.

Johannesburg, the largest city in South Africa, provides a very different – but also promising – case study. Under apartheid, the urban poor were forcibly relocated into outer-city settlements – often located between five and 40km from the urban periphery. Many of these turned into slums as population numbers far exceeded what these settlements were designed to accommodate.

After democratisation in 1994, there was a major inward flow of people into the urban core that could not be accommodated, despite a massive housing construction programme. Land invasions took place in all South African cities, including on inner-city land.

Johannesburg’s metropolitan government realised it could not build an integrated city by moving millions of people around, because so many already lived in formal townships. Instead, it identified a set of strategically located urban development hotspots, and then invested in mass transit services to link them together.

The aim is to rapidly intensify job and residential densities in these development hotspots, thus increasing the number of people who can access publicly funded mass-transit services.

This will increase average densities over time, and integrate the city via transit rather than expensive residential relocations. This, coupled with strategies to upgrade informal settlements rather than building new houses on the peripheries, has

contributed significantly to enhancing densification, rather than encouraging the sprawl promoted by Johannesburg’s property developers and banks since 1994.

There is no doubt that sprawling, de-densifying cities are a major threat to the future sustainability of the planet. Neither the UN’s sustainable development goals nor the Paris agreement’s climate targets will be achieved if this challenge is not addressed – but it means going up against property developers who tend to prefer greenfield developments on the peripheries to the complexities of brownfield regeneration.

Towards liveable urban settlements

Across the world, it would be a mistake to focus solely on improving the average densities of cities. Los Angeles has a higher average density than New York, for example, yet LA is regarded as a dysfunctional urban form while NY is functional, because it comprises a network of high-density neighbourhoods interconnected by efficient and affordable mass transit systems.

Seoul is similar: a megacity that has avoided sprawl with this approach. When the mayor decided to dismantle the eight-lane highway that used to run through the centre of the city, he said: “Seoul is for people, not cars.”

An alternative road was not built – resulting in an increase in the number of people using mass transit which, in turn, made mass transit financially viable. Building more highways for cars, then introducing trains and buses in the hope that they will be financially viable, simply does not work (the greater Johannesburg region is learning

that lesson now).

China, meanwhile, has urbanised hundreds of millions of people over the past three decades. This has tended to be in high-rise, multi-storey buildings located in “superblocks” with wide, traffic-congested streets and few intersections per sq km. The result is relatively low densities in neighbourhoods with virtually no street or community life – in short, not the kind of urban area one would call liveable.

Compare this with the neighbourhoods you find in Barcelona, where buildings are five to eight storeys high, located on narrow streets with pavements, trees and small piazzas for social engagement, and all well connected to both motorised and non-motorised forms of transport.

This is what makes for liveable urban neighbourhoods. China has realised its mistake, adopting an urbanisation strategy that breaks away from sprawled-out superblocks in favour of a high-density neighbourhood approach, with narrower streets, a high number of intersections, and improved public transport.

While the population of the world’s cities will likely double in size between now and 2050, rising oil prices and carbon constraints make urban sprawl increasingly untenable. Eradicating it in favour of liveable, accessible, multi-centred, high-density cities should become a shared global commitment.

Mark Swilling is distinguished professor of sustainable development at Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Funded By:



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