

Urbanisation is the movement of populations from rural areas to towns and cities. It tends to happen when a country's economy changes and new industries develop. In recent years, several countries in Africa and Asia have seen rapid urbanisation and around the world the pace of urbanisation is getting ever faster.

So why is this happening? There are push and pull factors that affect people's decisions to move to towns and cities. In many countries climate change is making farming in rural areas more difficult, leading to food and water shortages and a lack of shelter. These factors push people out of rural areas and towards towns and cities.

Job opportunities, higher standards of education and easy access to services like healthcare, pull people towards towns and cities, particularly young people in search of a different way of life. But rapid urbanisation is happening faster than governments can plan and prepare for. This puts pressure on urban infrastructure, the housing, schools and other services required by an increasing population.

Slums and shanty towns have grown up in many of the huge cities of the developing world - like Cape Town, Nairobi and Mumbai, - with no access to decent housing, fresh water or sanitation. Rapid urbanisation has also had an impact on rural areas. They've seen a decline in population, particularly of younger people.

In order to protect these rural areas, which are still vital for food production, environmental protection and as a source of sustainable energy production, governments need to plan for their future viability. According to United Nations statistics, more than half the world's population now lives in urban areas and it's predicted that this figure will grow to over two thirds by 2050.

Rapid urbanisation is a sign of the development of the economy in most countries, but governments need to manage urban growth to ensure that the positives outweigh the negatives.