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Course on Improving the Urban Habitat,
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Urban Conditions, Planning and Management
of Nairobi: The Official Approach to the
Poor

by

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his talks aim is to develop an understanding of the process of urbanization in developing countries with Nairobi as one case study. To understand the spatial arrangement of cities even the architect/planners of today cannot avoid the subject of urban sociology. With that in mind I will first give a general introduction to developing country urbanization and then go on to the case of Nairobi in particular.

Nairobi contains a number of conflicts characteristic of large developing country cities. It reflects the dependent economic structure. There are few community facilities available to the labour force. Its social divisions reflect the vast differences between the conditions of life for the different classes. Its physical divisions - i.e. the remarkable differences in densities and form of buildings - in a tangible manner reflect the political power relations. Nairobi is thus apparently a 'typical' result of developing country urbanization.

Such urbanization however, is not a process of a single type. Today this urbanization process can be characterized by at least three types, corresponding to the phases of imperialistic expansion.

(a) The 'completed' urbanization which had its roots in the first imperialistic expansion that led to an early and extensive urban growth - today with a degree of urbanization of approximately 80% and an annual urban growth rate of approximately 4% (Andes countries).

(b) The 'stagnant' urbanization, with its base in the colonization of the densely populated agrarian class societies which led to an urban development with the masses remaining in the countryside - today with a degree of urbanization of approximately 20% and an annual growth rate of approximately 4% (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.).

(c) The 'accelerating' urbanization. Post-war industrialization and a growing under development of the 'decolonized' nations leads to a late but exceptionally fast urban growth - today with a degree of urbanization of approximately 30% and an annual growth rate of approximately 8% (West and East Africa, parts of East Asia, etc.).