

Xuemei Bai, Peijun Shi & Yansui Liu - Society: Realizing China's Urban Dream



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China is urbanizing at an unprecedented rate. It is perhaps the greatest human-resettlement experiment in history. Between 1978 and 2012, the fraction of the nation's population dwelling in cities increased from 17.9% to 52.6%. If the current trend holds, China's urban population could top 1 billion people in the next two decades.

These are uncharted waters, but China has a plan. In March, the government released the National New-type Urbanization Plan, which sets targets for China's urban population fraction to rise by 1% a year to reach 60% by 2020.

The plan is comprehensive and ambitious. It covers almost every conceivable aspect of urbanization, from rural-urban migration and integration to the spatial distribution of and linkages between cities; sustainable development; institutional arrangements; and implementation. It sets numerical goals and as a guiding principle emphasizes a sustainable and people-centred approach, paying more attention to welfare and well-being — a significant and positive shift from the current economic focus on land development. It also aims to rectify existing problems associated with the rapid urbanization in the past three decades.

The right national strategy is necessary. But it is not sufficient. It is local practices that will make or break China's urbanization plan.

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<http://www.nature.com/news/society-realizing-china-s-urban-dream-1.15151>