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Topic 2: Combating Urban Air Pollution by Reducing Automobile Dependence
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According to the World Health Organization (WHO), nine out of ten people worldwide are exposed to unsafe levels of air pollutants that exceed air quality guidelines.[1] Air pollution causes one in nine deaths worldwide, accelerates climate change, and significantly damages economies.[2] The transportation industry is responsible for approximately one-quarter of global carbon emissions.[3] In urban areas, automobiles are one of the major human-caused sources of pollution.[4]

However, in order to reduce pollution from automobiles, the international community must first understand why people in urban communities are so dependent on automobiles. In many cities, residents rely on private vehicles, because of a lack of public transportation, a poorly designed infrastructure for walking, or the convenience of driving one's own car. [5]

UNEP is actively assisting projects in 50 countries to promote electric car usage as part of the Global Fuel Economy Initiative.[6] Electric vehicles have the potential to significantly lower carbon emissions originating from the transportation sector, especially if the electricity used to charge them comes from low-carbon sources. According to the International Energy Agency, if just 20 percent of all road transport vehicles switch to electric by 2030, we can prevent global warming from exceeding 2°C. [7]

In addition to the emissions caused by driving, disposed cars cause major pollution in poorer countries. Many used vehicles are exported from wealthy countries to developing

[1] https://www.unep.org/en/news-and-stories/story/air-pollution-know-your-enemy
[2] Ibid.
[3] https://www.unep.org/en/sustainable-transport-and-air-pollution
[4] https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10653-018-0203-z
[5] https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Car_dependent_Society/T3DeCwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=The+Car-dependent+Society:+A+European+Perspective&printsec=frontcover
[6] https://www.unep.org/en/what-we-do/transport/electric-mobility/electric-light-duty-vehicles
[7] Ibid.

countries that have minimal pollution regulations, where these cars continue polluting the atmosphere for decades.[8]

Expanding public transportation is a possible solution to these issues and will cut emissions in the long term. However, it is important to consider the environmental repercussions of building such large-scale transportation projects. These projects impact wildlife habitats, release large amounts of carbon from cleared trees and vegetation, and can contaminate water supplies.[9]

This is a complicated and multifaceted problem, but it is important to begin addressing such a public health and environmental issue. Even though we may not be able to solve it immediately, together we can begin to build a long term plan to save our world.

Some questions to consider when doing your research:

1. What is public transportation like in your country?
    a. Can your residents depend on it for their daily needs?
    b. Is it available in low-income areas?
    c. Is it affordable and safe for all residents?
2. How dependent are your citizens on private vehicles?
    a. How many residents own a car and how many commute by car daily?
    b. Are your cities designed so that workplaces, schools, and other daily needs can be easily accessed without a private vehicle
3. Has your country previously supported or opposed any UNEP initiatives related to air pollution and transport? If so, which?
4. What responsibility do wealthier countries have for the environmental impact of exporting used vehicles to developing countries?

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8 https://www.unep.org/en/news-and-stories/press-release/new-un-report-details-environmental-impacts-export-used-vehicles

9 https://www.unep.org/en/news-and-stories/press-release/global-study-weighs-environmental-risks-and-economic-benefits-major

5. Should the international community establish stricter regulations on the export of older, high-emission vehicles?
    a. How can this be enforced?

Some guiding sources:

https://www.unep.org/en

https://wedocs.unep.org/items/c3860caa-7c37-4c6f-92c9-5c269d883760

https://www.unep.org/en/news-and-stories/press-release/global-study-weighs-environmental-risks-and-economic-benefits-major

https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Car_dependent_Society/T3DeCwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=The+Car-dependent+Society:+A+European+Perspective&printsec=frontcover

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If you have any questions or thoughts, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at slinden@mail.yu.edu. I am looking forward to meeting all of you and having an amazing conference!

Sincerely,

Sabrina Linden

Chair, United Nations Environment Programme

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