

De-urbanisation: A Way to achieve Balanced Economic Growth

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the challenges and opportunities of urbanisation and proper strategies for sustainable, inclusive, and equitable urban development. It seeks to address issues such as environmental degradation, social inequality, housing shortages, and overcrowding while considering the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders. Additionally, the study explores the potential benefits of de-urbanisation as a solution to mitigate the negative impacts of urbanisation. The findings and recommendations of this study have significant applicability in addressing the challenges of urbanisation and guiding policy decisions. The study highlights the need for a balanced distribution of population and resources between rural and urban areas to promote sustainable development. The government can utilise the study's insights to refine existing schemes and introduce new initiatives to discourage rural-to-urban migration. Policymakers can leverage the study's findings to shape urban planning strategies and create liveable, sustainable urban environments. By implementing a comprehensive approach that considers, both rural and urban perspectives, the government can foster equitable development and enhance the well-being of communities.

Keywords: Urbanisation, Rural Development, Sustainable Development, Balanced Economic Growth, Labour Migration.

Introduction

Urbanisation is often seen as both an opportunity and a challenge. On the one hand, it can bring about benefits such as increased economic growth, job opportunities, access to education and healthcare, and improved living standards. Urban areas are centres of innovation and creativity, providing a platform for social and cultural exchange (Sepe, 2014). However, urbanisation also presents challenges like environmental degradation, social inequality, housing shortages, and overcrowding. High pollution levels, traffic congestion, and waste generation in urban areas negatively impact public health and the environment. Moreover, urbanisation can exacerbate social and economic disparities, as not all residents have equal access to its benefits (Massey, 1996).

The impact of urbanisation depends on various factors, including the pace and scale of growth, urban planning and management, and the social and economic context. While urbanisation has its advantages, it is crucial to ensure that it is sustainable, inclusive, and equitable, considering the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders. However, the disadvantages of urbanisation have been nullifying its benefits. Challenges such as low-cost housing, public transport, a clean environment, and reduced traffic congestion persist for governments. Skewed economic development and the migration of people from rural to urban areas further contribute to un-sustainability (Turcu, 2013).

Infrastructure development, such as road widening and construction projects, may provide short-term relief from traffic congestion but can also stimulate migration and urbanisation. Although employment generation benefits the economy, the costs associated with urbanisation, such as pollution, slum areas, and overcrowded transportation outweigh the benefits. Merely improving housing, water supply, roads, and employment opportunities in urban centres is insufficient to solve the problem. Therefore, there is a need to deurbanise metropolitan cities by moving people to semi-urban or rural areas with better job opportunities (Bottai & Benassi, 2016).

For instance, the organisation of the Commonwealth Games in Delhi led to infrastructure development and increased migration, resulting in higher costs and congestion. If the games were held elsewhere, a newly developed and properly planned urban centre could be created at a lower budget. In India, the presence of State Capitals in heavily populated cities contributes to the Keynesian Economic Model phenomena. Moving State Capitals, including the national capital, to any underdeveloped areas would create new infrastructure, employment, and reverse migration. The cost of developing new centres could be raised by monetising government properties in the current capital cities. This step would ease the population burden from overpopulated cities and stimulate economic growth.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of social distancing, which is challenging in densely populated urban areas. Rural and less populated areas have been more successful in tackling the pandemic. To address this, exploring ways to deurbanise urban areas becomes crucial. In India, the most populated cities are Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad (near Gandhinagar), Chennai and Kolkata. These seven cities are considered to be highly developed urban centres as well as State Capitals including one National Capital. But the infrastructure of these cities is inadequate for its current population. To resolve this issue, shifting national and state capitals would partially deurbanise these centres. Relocating government offices to new areas would stimulate economic activities like education, healthcare, shopping, and transportation, creating job opportunities in the private sector. In the digital era, government offices can remain well connected even if situated in semi-urban areas through e-governance.

Suggesting shifting of State as well as National Capital may be rejected on the grounds of political issues but it may prove an effective way to relocate urban population to semi-urban or rural areas. Overall, de-urbanisation is necessary to address the challenges posed by urbanisation. It requires strategic planning, infrastructure development, and consideration of economic, social, and environmental factors. By creating sustainable, inclusive, and well-connected urban and rural centres, the negative impacts of urbanisation can be mitigated while maximising its benefits (Dempsey *et al.*, 2012).

Literature Review

According to Gibbs' Urban Evolution Model in 1963, also known as the first theory of urbanisation, the progression of urban development involves four distinct stages. The initial stage is characterised by rapid urban growth, fuelled by significant migration from rural to urban areas due to the appeal of urban lifestyles. In the second stage, referred to as "urban saturation," migration extends to suburban regions, although the primary cities continue to grow at a faster rate than the suburbs. The third stage, is known as "suburbanisation." Witnesses' suburban areas experience accelerated demographic growth compared to the main city. Finally, the state of "urban de-concentration" is marked by migration outflows from both the primary city and its suburbs, with movement towards the rural hinterland (Gibbs & Jack P, 1963).

The proposed framework of the second theory, as propounded by Klaasen and others, aims to delineate the four stages of urban development based on prevailing migration patterns and processes occurring in the main city, suburbs, and hinterland. The first stage is characterised by urbanisation witnessing rapid population growth in the main city and a concentration of people, jobs, production, and services, accompanied by migration outflows from surrounding rural communities. In the second stage, population outflows from the main city to the suburbs as individuals seek better living conditions and lower costs, surpassing the growth rate of the main city. However, there remains a close relationship between the suburban population and the main city as they continue to work and access most services there. Concurrently, the main city experiences population growth primarily through migration from the hinterland. The third stage is marked by a centrifugal movement from the main city and sometimes the suburbs towards smaller cities and rural settlements, resulting in absolute or relative population growth in the hinterland. This stage is referred to as de-urbanisation or counter-urbanisation. Finally, the fourth stage, known as re-urbanisation, signifies renewed demographic growth in the main city, attributed to gentrification and the revitalisation of the industrial areas. The main city's population begins to grow once again or, at the very least, declines more slowly compared to the population of the suburbs (Klaassen *et al.*, 1981).

The third theory known as differential urbanisation, initially proposed by Geyer and Kontuly in 1993, has emerged as a framework for discussions on suburbanisation over the past two decades. These models establish the stages of urban dynamics based on migration balances or overall population changes in three settlement categories: major cities, medium-sized cities, and small cities, along with other settlements. Theoretical constructs, supported by empirical research from various countries, indicate that urban development cycles exhibit similarities but differ in timing across cities of different sizes. This suggests that not only large cities but also medium-sized and small cities may undergo suburbanisation, albeit with some temporal lag (Geyer *et al.*, 1993). However, Ourednicek (2007) highlights that this quantitative approach may overlook the composition of migration flows, people's motivations, and regional peculiarities, giving rise to the need for additional considerations (Ourednicek, 2007).

Existing research on urbanisation predominantly adopts a geographical perspective, highlighting the tendency of people to migrate towards developed areas and emphasizing the passive nature of this process. These studies provide insights into the mechanisms of urbanisation. However, the present research shifts its focus towards the challenges associated with urbanisation, advocating for active policy interventions to facilitate the relocation of people from urban centres to rural and small cities. The objective is to alleviate the burden on highly concentrated urban areas and foster balanced economic development. The study underscores the importance of proactive measures to achieve sustainable urban growth and development.

Research Methodology

In this research study, a case study approach was employed to examine the challenges linked to urbanisation and to identify strategies that can foster balanced economic growth. The study focused on seven metro cities in India, namely Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru. These cities are known for offering significant employment and business prospects. However, they also face various issues such as hazardous pollution levels, high living costs, skyrocketing housing prices, traffic congestion, and an imbalance in work-life quality. Furthermore, the research examined government initiatives to evaluate their impact on economic development. The findings from this study shed light on the complexities of urbanisation and provide insights into potential measures to address these challenges and achieve more balanced and sustainable economic growth.

Observations

This research study highlights that the disproportionate population growth observed in urban centres can be attributed to government policies. The primary rationale stems

from the fact that all urban centres examined in this study serve as State Capitals, amplifying the spending power of government employees. Consequently, these cities function as pivotal hubs, fostering substantial economic opportunities for the wider populace. Moreover, these urban centres boast significant employment prospects. The prevailing unbalanced regional growth is influenced by urban bias, rural bias, and political bias. Government budget allocations for infrastructure facilities and the organisation of national/international events predominantly favour urban centres. Under the guise of rural development, the outskirts of urban areas are often prioritised, thereby overlooking the needs of rural hinterlands. Ultimately, political preferences tend to steer development initiatives toward urban centres, further exacerbating the urban-centric growth trend.

A roadmap to achieve de-urbanisation

Achieving sustainable development by shifting people from urban centres to rural areas requires careful planning, infrastructure development, and consideration of economic, social, and environmental factors. Here are some strategies that can contribute to this goal:

Job creation in rural areas: To incentivise the shift from urban to rural areas, it is crucial to create employment opportunities in rural regions. This can be done through the development of industries, tourism, and other sectors that can provide sustainable livelihoods. Government support and investment in rural infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and internet connectivity, are essential to attract businesses and entrepreneurs (Ashley & Maxwell, 2001).

Improved rural infrastructure: Enhancing the quality of infrastructure in rural areas is vital to make them attractive and liveable for urban migrants. This includes investing in transportation networks, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, water and sanitation systems, and other essential services. Access to these amenities will improve the quality of life and encourage people to relocate to rural areas (Buch *et al.*, 2014).

Affordable housing initiatives: Providing affordable housing options in rural areas is crucial to accommodate the influx of people from urban centres. This can be achieved through government-led initiatives, such as low-cost housing programmes or subsidies for housing construction. Collaborations with private developers and community-driven housing projects can also contribute to providing affordable and sustainable housing options (Hao *et al.*, 2013).

Access to basic services: Ensuring access to basic services, such as healthcare, education, and clean water, in rural areas is essential for sustainable development. Investing in the establishment and improvement of schools, healthcare centres, and

water supply systems will help create a conducive environment for urban migrants (Diep *et al.*, 2021).

Strengthening local governance: Empowering local governments and communities in rural areas is crucial for effective planning and management. Local authorities should be involved in decision-making processes and given the autonomy to address the specific needs and aspirations of their communities. This can lead to more sustainable development practices tailored to the local context (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015).

Promoting sustainable agriculture: Supporting sustainable agricultural practices in rural areas cannot only provide livelihood opportunities but also contribute to environmental conservation. Encouraging organic farming, agro-forestry, and promoting value chains can create economic opportunities while preserving natural resources and biodiversity (Gurung & Seeland, 2011).

Enhancing connectivity: Improving connectivity between rural and urban areas is vital for sustaining the shift and ensuring the well-being of individuals in rural regions. This includes developing transportation networks, establishing reliable and affordable public transportation systems, and enhancing digital connectivity. Access to markets, services, and communication channels will facilitate the integration of rural areas into regional and national economies (Von Braun, 2007).

Education and skill development: Investing in education and skill development programs in rural areas is essential to equip individuals with the necessary knowledge and abilities to thrive in new economic and social contexts. This can include vocational training, entrepreneurship programmes, and initiatives to enhance digital literacy (Castells & others, 1999).

Preserving cultural heritage and identity: Encouraging the preservation of cultural heritage and identity in rural areas can contribute to sustainable development. Cultural tourism, traditional crafts, and local festivals can generate income and attract visitors, while also fostering community pride and social cohesion (Agnoletti, 2014).

Awareness and mindset shift: Promoting awareness about the benefits of rural living and shifting societal attitudes towards rural areas is crucial. Highlighting the advantages of rural living, such as a healthier lifestyle, lower living costs, and stronger community bonds, can help overcome the perception that urban areas are superior (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980).

It is important to note that achieving sustainable development through rural migration requires a comprehensive and integrated approach, involving collaboration between governments, communities, businesses, and other stakeholders.

Plug-and-Play-in Infrastructure facility for residents

In early British India, the towns of India had seen a decline in population due to the development of ports and other trade and political policies. To attract residents from

major metro cities apart from developing new economic centres, it is important to focus on developing tier-III cities by providing essential amenities. These include:

Comprehensive education: Establishing educational institutions that offer education up to the post-graduation level ensures access to quality education for residents in tier-III cities. This would include schools, colleges, and Universities.

Superior healthcare: Developing top-notch healthcare facilities, including hospitals, clinics, and specialised medical centres, ensures access to high-quality healthcare services for the residents. This would involve equipping these facilities with modern medical equipment and qualified healthcare professionals.

Efficient transportation infrastructure: Establishing a well-connected transportation network within tier-III cities and efficient connectivity to major metro cities is crucial. This can involve the development of roads, public transportation systems, and potentially even airports or railway stations to facilitate easy travel and commuting. When railway lines were constructed in India under British rule, various new towns emerged and people migrated due to the availability of transportation and connectivity.

Reliable water supply: Ensuring a clean and reliable drinking water supply is essential for the well-being of residents. Implementing efficient water management systems and water treatment facilities can help provide clean drinking water to the population.

Attractive housing options: Creating attractive and comfortable housing options, including well-designed and spacious residences, can entice individuals from metro cities to consider relocating to tier-III cities. These housing options can incorporate modern amenities and infrastructure to provide a comfortable living environment.

By focusing on these factors, tier-III cities can become more appealing to individuals from major cities, encouraging population growth and fostering economic development in these regions.

Benefits of De-urbanisation

Developing infrastructural facilities solely in the suburban areas of metro cities can be counterproductive as it can further burden these already overcrowded cities. While suburban areas may provide some relief in terms of housing and amenities, concentrating too much development in these areas can lead to the formation of congested conglomerates that adversely affect the overall quality of life, such as heavy pollution as seen in the case of Delhi and its adjoining cities.

Instead, it is advisable to prioritise the development of hinterland areas or tier-III cities for establishing new economic centres, industries, universities, medical institutions, and hosting mega international events. By directing attention to these regions, several benefits can be realised:

Balanced Regional Development: Focusing on tier-III cities ensures a more equitable distribution of economic opportunities, resources, and infrastructure across different regions. This helps in reducing regional disparities and promoting overall development.

Reduced Congestion and Pollution: By diverting attention to tier-III cities, the burden on metro-cities can be alleviated, leading to reduced congestion, pollution, and strain on existing resources. This can significantly improve the quality of life in both metro cities and their surrounding regions.

Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities: Developing new economic centres and industries in tier-III cities can improve access to quality education and healthcare services for residents in these regions. This reduces the need for individuals to migrate to metro cities for these facilities.

Reliable Water Supply: Ensuring a clean and reliable drinking water supply is essential for the well-being of residents. Implementing efficient water management systems and water treatment facilities can help provide clean drinking water for the population.

Attractive Housing Options: Creating attractive and comfortable housing options, including well-designed and spacious residences, can entice individuals from metro cities to consider relocating to tier-III cities. These housing options can incorporate modern amenities and infrastructure to provide a comfortable living environment.

By focusing on these factors, tier-III cities can become more appealing to individuals from major cities, encouraging population growth and fostering economic development in these regions.

Conclusion

This research has identified the challenges posed by urban migration and has suggested various measures to address this issue. The primary objective is to discourage rural populations from migrating to urban areas while simultaneously promoting the relocation of urban populations to rural areas. This approach aims to achieve a balanced distribution of population and resources, reduce the strain on urban infrastructure, and promote sustainable development in both rural and urban areas.

In India, the densely populated cities that also serve as state capitals accommodate a significant number of government employees who receive regular services, acting as a catalyst for economic growth following the Keynesian model. Therefore, there is a suggestion to consider relocating these capitals to rural hinterlands. This strategic move is believed to foster development in these smaller regions based on the Keynesian theory of employment. Shifting the focus to remote areas, is expected to alleviate the

burden on heavily concentrated urban areas and promote balanced growth through the development of previously underdeveloped regions. In addition to discouraging rural-to-urban migration, the government should also recognise the need to relocate urban populations to rural areas. This approach helps alleviate the burden on urban infrastructure, reduces overcrowding, and promotes equitable development. These initiatives include strategies to decongest urban areas, improve infrastructure, and enhance the quality of life.

Encouraging urban residents to move to rural areas requires the creation of employment opportunities and the provision of essential services. Overall, the government's approach to mitigating urban migration should involve a two-pronged strategy; discouraging rural populations from migrating by improving living conditions and employment opportunities in rural areas, and incentivising urban populations to relocate to rural areas through improved infrastructure, amenities, and employment prospects. Besides these schemes, a phenomenal shift is required to deurbanise the highly populated cities. By achieving a more balanced distribution of population, we may achieve sustainable development and ensure the well-being of both rural and urban communities.

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