

International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Research (IJIMR)

ISSN 2456-4567

A Study to Find Out the Relationship Between Urbanization and Rural Development in Geographical Perspective

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Abstract

Urbanization means the growth of the number and size of the towns and the spreading of quality of life in towns. Naturally the growth and development is different in several parts of the world. On the other hand the urbanization is not only effect to towns. It has also an effect on rural region. Several attendant phenomenons belong to the urbanization (economic development, rural development, infrastructural development etc.). Primary target is to demonstrate the connection between urbanization and rural development. Urbanization is closely connected to regional development. There is no only one viable (universal) regional development trend. Sustainable development is one of the most important types of them. Lots of sign shows that certain parts of urbanization process could not be part of sustainable development. Success of sustainable development in urbanization process depends on the relationship between towns and their rural territory.

Keywords: 1.urbanization, 2. Regional development, 3.rural development, 4.urban-explosion, 5.quality of life, 6.sustainable development

Introduction

Urbanization is close connection with rural development. Regional development includes connection and development of the whole country, different regions of the country and each settlement from the natural resources, population, production, and infrastructural condition points of view. In this concept regional partnership is also crucial. According to other authors the regional development shows other important criteria. According to geographers every region is special; therefore regional development has no global interpretation and there is no down-to-earth universal regional development direction. Consequently we can only speak about alternative trends.

Development and growth are not the same. Development means changing with values while growth shows changing of the rates. Important fact, that growth is not necessary accompanied with development. Additionally there are a lot of values in development, which are influenced by recent economical, political, ideological relations. For example in case of developing countries we can often experience fast economical

growth (new airport-building project, shopping centre investment etc.) while the important part of the society is out of these development. This is the growth without development.

Sustainable development is one type of the development. As a general rule the basis of the sustainable development, that the satisfaction of the recent economical and social needs do not restrict satisfaction of future needs. This is a fundamental principle. It is known that growth-orientated economical and social processes restrict the emergence of this principle. On several points it is incompatible with sustainable development. Urbanization is one part of this problem. Nowadays most of the population (6.2 million people) lives in towns (3.2 million people) (Enyedi, 2006). Proportion of the population of rural urban areas is changed. Consequently, this situation created several social, environmental and economical conflicts. Urbanization direction will not be maintained neither in developed nor in developing countries. Urbanization is a special periodical development. Periods are not divided from each other distinctly. Transitions and overlaps are also natural during this process.

Urbanization has been the dominant demographic trend, not only in the Asia-Pacific region, but also in the entire world, during the last half century. With the high pace of social and economic development in Asia and the resulting growth of city and town population, lack of infrastructure, congested traffic, environmental degradation and a housing shortage became the major issues faced by cities and towns in their sustainable development.

Data source

The study is based on secondary data. Secondary data have been collected from various Government source, Census of India, Statistical Hand book, Different gazetteer, different books, journals, news papers, internet etc.

Objectives

Recently the study on rural urban development in view of its geo-strategic significance has considerably drawn the attention of the government, the planners and policy makers. The rural urban area due to its disparities with numerous socio-political and economic factors is trailing behind in the process of economic development and urbanization.

The objectives of the present study are enumerated as follows:

- To know the distinguishing factor between rural urban areas.
- To know the process of urbanization.
- To know the factors behind urbanization.
- To find out the causes of rural-urban disparities.
- To suggest some strategies for sustainable development

Distinguishing between urban and rural areas

Determining the disparities between urban and rural areas is, however, more difficult than it might seem, since it is difficult to define what is urban and what is rural. Governments in Asia and the Pacific use different definitions for urban areas and do not define rural areas, treating them as the undefined residual. An area is designated as “urban” when it reaches a certain population size (for example, 5,000

inhabitants) or when its population density reaches a certain level (for example, 1,000 per square kilometre). Small changes in criteria can have a considerable impact on the urbanization level of a country. This was the case in China, where the urban population more than doubled between 1982 and 1989 because of a change in definition (ESCAP 1992: 20). The level at which a settlement is called “urban” is quite arbitrary, and this makes it difficult to make comparisons between countries. There is a trend across Asia and the Pacific to designate more areas as “urban” in order to grant them a level of administrative authority that makes it easier to govern a given area. This is a reaction to the increase in economic activity in rural areas, resulting in negative externalities and greater demand for infrastructure and regulations. Rather than defining rural and urban in geographical or demographic terms, it may be better to look at the character of the rural and urban society and economy. Economists define an area as urban when the economy is characterized by non-extractive occupations, for example, industry, commerce, that benefit particularly from a high population density and the accompanying infrastructure. Sociologically, “urban” may typify wider, but less personal social relations and a lifestyle characterized by individualism, anonymity and a segmentation of life. However, improved transport and the relative reduction in transport costs have made it easier to commute between an urban area and its surrounding rural areas or to migrate temporarily from rural to urban areas. As a result, an increasing number of people find temporary or permanent urban employment in the urban areas, while living or at least being registered to live in a rural area.

With the arrival of many rural migrants, cities are incorporating rural components, such as rural lifestyles, urban agriculture, in the urban society and economy. Rural areas are, on the other hand, culturally urbanizing with the spread of education, the penetration of the mass media and the permanent or temporary return of rural migrants who bring home elements of an urban culture. The situation is further complicated with urban economic activities moving into the metropolitan rural areas. As land becomes more expensive in the urban areas and environmental regulations become more demanding, companies move their manufacturing plants out of the city and into the rural areas. For instance, factories of multinational corporations are to be found in the middle of the rice fields some 100 kilometres outside Bangkok. As long as the factory is not too far away from the highway, the inputs for the production process can be trucked in and finished products can be transported to the port or the airport. Since the factory is in the middle of the rice fields, the company may have to build a dormitory for its workers or use buses to bring the workers to the factory.

Urbanization – an ongoing process

Over the past half century, a great rural-to-urban population shift has occurred and the process of urbanization (the concentration of people and activities into areas classified as urban) is set to continue well into the 21st century. Major demographic evidence has indicated that already the Asia-Pacific region is well advanced in the transition from predominantly rural to predominantly urban societies. Although population growth rates have slowed down in many countries for the past decade, 62 percent of the world's population will live in urban areas by the year 2020, while the Asia-Pacific Region will contain about 49 per cent of that urban population and will have contained a level of urbanization of 55 percent. An additional 1.2 billion people will be living in the urban centres of the Asia-Pacific region by 2020.

It is projected that some of the big countries of the region like China, Indonesia and Pakistan where current urbanization levels are below 50 per cent, will cross this figure by the next quarter of the century.

In 1990, seven of the world's fourteen megacities were located in the region, by 1996 the number of megacities in the region rose to nine and it is predicted that there would be eleven - twelve megacities in the region by early 2002. There is a strong positive link between national levels of rural development and urbanization levels, while cities spearhead their countries' economic development, transforming society through extraordinary growth in the productivity of labour and promising to liberate the masses from poverty, hunger, disease and premature death. However, the implications of rapid urban growth include increasing unemployment, lack of urban services, overburdening of existing infrastructure and lack of access to land, finance and adequate shelter, increasing violent crime and sexually transmitted diseases, and environmental degradation. Even as national output is rising, a decline in the quality of life for a majority of population that offsets the benefit of national economic growth is often witnessed. Urbanization thus imposes significant burden to sustainable development.

Causal factors behind urbanization

1. General

The major reasons for increasing urban population are rural to urban migration, including international migration to a lesser extent, and the re-classification or expansion of existing city boundaries to include populations that were hitherto classified as being resident outside the city limits. These are estimated to contribute about 60 per cent of the region's urban growth, while natural increase counts for some 40 per cent.

2. Rural -urban migration

Primary driving forces of rural-urban migration include the opportunities and services offered in urban areas — especially jobs and education, while in some cases, conflict, land degradation and exhaustion of natural resources in rural areas are also important. The patterns of rural-urban migration may be city-specific, reflecting, among other things, changes in the city's economic base, labour market and age structure. They also reflect social, economic and political changes within the region and nation and are influenced by economic factors in the surrounding and distant rural areas, such as landowning structure, agricultural practices and crop prices, and overall rural productivity. Most evidence suggests that increasing the income and level of education of rural populations accelerates migration and this phenomenon, coupled with the greater access to urban areas, has led to an inevitable increase in rural populations seeking employment opportunities in urban areas.

3. Links to globalization

The steady increase in the level of urbanization reflects the fact that the size of the world's economy has grown many times and has also changed from one dominated by relatively closed national economies or trading blocs to one where most countries have more open economies and where production and the services it needs, including financial services, are increasingly integrated internationally. These trends appear to be strengthening, reinforced especially by the freer and faster flows of information and knowledge under the impact of new information technologies. Technology has increased the already dominant economic role and importance of urban areas worldwide, indicating the growing importance of cities in the global economy.

4. Mismanagement

It is often pointed out that many urban environmental problems are the result of poor management, poor planning and absence of coherent urban policies rather than of urbanization itself. The problem of urbanization has significantly been exacerbated by inappropriate incentive systems, such as the “growth-first” strategy adopted by the Governments of many countries in the region, especially in developing countries. In order to attract investment, industrial promotion policies are designed to offer privileges and incentive packages, including low-taxes tax regulations and subsidized infrastructure, with target to urban areas. Industrial growth, combined with inadequate infrastructure, inappropriate pricing of resources and services, and inadequate institutional mechanism to ensure environmental protection, further accelerates environmental degradation in urban areas. The ‘land market’ factors that accounted for exacerbating urbanization problems include inappropriate regulation, lack of tenure security, inadequate infrastructure capacity inadequate information, inadequate pricing and taxation, and weak institutions and poorly coordinated actors in the land market. All these factors necessitate significant improvements in overall urban governance to effectively reduce and bypass the urbanization problems.

Policy responses and tools to manage urbanization

A variety of options in terms of policy responses and tools to cope effectively with the urbanization transition has been proposed and discussed for several decades. These options may be categorized in the following four strategic steps.

- A. National planning to control urbanization to manageable levels
- B. Regional / Urban planning to guide urbanization to manageable situation
- C. Intra-urban management to cope with urbanization problems
- D. Participation, Partnership and Governance

A) national planning to control urbanization to manageable levels

In an attempt to ensure better management of urbanization, Governments have had adopted macroeconomic policies that are designed to mitigate magnitude of urbanization to manageable levels, or to keep people in rural areas. As a primary tool, a National Physical(Spatial) Development Plan could be established to address the mid- and long-term national direction on distribution of population; utilization of land; development of new land, water and energy; provision of infrastructure, housing and transportation that favor decentralized economic development. Such planning approach, especially when coordinated with the overall economic policy as well as relevant sectoral development programmers covering, in particular, industrial and agricultural productivity, would be effective in establishing an orderly and consistent utilization of land on a national basis and providing the opportunity for urbanization issues to be addressed in the coherent way in the context of overall national development.

B) Regional and urban land use planning to guide urbanization

Following the provisions set by the national development plan, land-use planning and management tools at regional (sub-national, provincial) and urban local levels have long been expected to play a crucial role

in avoiding and mitigating the adverse impacts of rapid, unplanned urbanization. Regional planning tools for the purpose include the planned development of intermediate urban centers, promotion of polycentric regional network of urban centres, and economic development of smaller towns and cities in less concentrated areas in rural provinces. At the city level, local governments have been encouraged to carry out an integrated land-use planning to comprehensively address adverse impacts of urbanization, including environmental problems. Zoning techniques, which may be applied to implement the master plan and to guide urban development to spatially appropriate areas, include designation of sensitive land resources and areas, establishment of buffer zones, management of hazard-prone lands, protection of cultural resources, conservation of open spaces and urban green, management of prime agricultural land, guiding and discouraging of excessive urban sprawl. Regulatory instruments such as land and household registration / information systems, property tax systems, land tenure systems, and building and land development permits are all important basic tools that can be strengthened for effectively implementing spatial planning and zoning techniques.

Compact development techniques such as 'smart growth' movement and sustainable city initiatives have been advocated to combat urban sprawl, promoting the build-up within an already urbanized area, redeveloping on cleaned-up contaminated sites or 'brownfields', and cluster development on reduced-size lots. As a reaction to the shortcomings of traditional planning approaches, and more recently to address the needs of sustainable development, various countries have adopted new processes and approaches to urban planning. Action planning is a 'learning by doing' approach to resolve urbanization problems in a short term perspective, with minimum data collection and planning procedures. Local community participation in decision-making is deemed a key to success. Strategic planning is also a participatory approach to integrated urban development to achieve growth management and remedial actions at both the city-wide and community scales. The output of the process is not just a physical development plan but a set of inter-related strategies for city development covering land, infrastructure, finance and institutions. There are a number of technical tools which are now becoming widely used as part of effective urban planning approaches. Amongst others, Geographical information systems (GIS) are gaining increasing importance as a tool for decision-making in planning. The essence of GIS is to link together different data sets and present them clearly and concisely in a variety of ways. GIS can also aid short-staffed local governments in better managing rapid urban growth. Land market assessments provides accurate and up-to date information on land prices, supply of serviced land, present and future land projects, housing typologies, and other aspects of the housing and land market, and thus is used to support government planning and decision making, the evaluation of government policies and actions, private sector investment and development decisions and structuring of land based taxation systems. There are also a number of improved zoning techniques, such as mixed zoning, floating zoning, conditional or contract zoning and phased zoning. Both rational decision-making regarding overall policies and implementing specific programmes to effectively address urbanization requires a sense of comparative risks. Environmental and socio-economic impact assessment and risk ranking are useful planning tools for this purpose. In addition to traditional zoning procedures, new techniques such as strategic environmental assessment are being adopted, as a means of integrating potential environmental considerations at the early stages of strategic policy formulation.

C) Intra-urban management to cope with urbanization problems

Despite all the policy responses to better manage the urbanization, as outlined in a) and b) above, the chances to prevent the urbanization transition would still be slim from practical point of view. Then, the challenge to many city managers still remains as to project and build the necessary infrastructure and services (housing, public transport; and sewage, water supply, and waste disposal systems) outpacing the wave of rural-urban migrants suffocate the existing urban agglomerations.

Investment requirements of urban infrastructure in Asia and the Pacific are massive and impose enormous demands on fiscal resources. As a number of financial options has been proposed and experimented in the region, the range of such options is certainly expanding with the region-wide trend of providing local governments with greater discretion in the levying of taxes, fees and service charges, and of increased reliance on the private sector. Provision of infrastructure should not be seen merely as a reactive response to ongoing urbanization, often a curative measure to deteriorating urban environment. It could rather be used as a guide to future urban build-up in more positive way, to guide it to spatially more appropriate areas. Among other infrastructure sectors, urban transport system could play a crucial role in this context. Technical options include advance planning, stepwise/strategic introduction of mass transit system, and aggressive use of congestion pricing. Because of the importance of specific local circumstances and political realities, there is no viable approach to solving urban environmental problems that can be applied in every city. A basic step is to develop a local environmental agenda to assess the local situation regarding environmental issues so that this information can be integrated in urban planning. The process involves routinely incorporating environmental information and data, standards and policy targets, techniques and monitoring in strategic urban development plans. Spatial, cross-media, inter-temporal factors must all be taken into consideration. Successful urban environmental management may include the following sectoral elements; increases in resource efficiency, reductions in waste generation, improving urban infrastructure for water supply, the management and conservation of water resources in urban areas by improved waste water treatment and through legislation, setting up of recycling schemes, development of more effective waste collection systems, strict legislation for the treatment of hazardous waste, waste collection through public-private partnership, adoption of energy technologies by industry and households, and restoration of brown fields.

D) Participation, partnership and governance

Through experience, it has been learned that no amount of finance, technology or expertise can secure environmentally sustainable urban development – or protect the environment – if the fundamentals of governance are not participatory, democratic and pluralistic. Many developing countries have developed extensive regulations on pollution, most of which are not applied effectively because of the lack of proper institutions, legal systems, political will and competent governance. Unfortunately, particularly where economic and social change is rapid, established political and administrative institutions have proved highly resistant to change. Improving the urban governance, in particular, through increasing transparency and accountability of policy formulation and decision making processes, is a key to success implementing any urban management policies and plans. Participation of all stakeholders who are benefiting from relevant decisions and actions should be ensured at all levels of planning activities, in combination with greater access to relevant information and enhancement of public awareness of urbanization issues. Efforts to improve urban governance essentially involve activities promoting participatory processes; developing effective partnerships with and among all actors of civil society, particularly the private and community sectors; securing greater effective empowerment of local

government, including greater autonomy in finance and legislation; and reform of unresponsive organizations and bureaucratic structures.

Causes of rural-urban disparities

Disparities between urban and rural areas and between regions are the result of three sets of factors. Natural factors, such as differences in agro-climatic conditions, endowment with natural resources or geographical location, such as distance to a sea outlet or centres of commerce, determine the potential for the economic development of an area or a region. Some of these conditions, such as climate and natural endowments, are largely invariable, while others can be improved, for instance through infrastructure such as roads to overcome isolation, and irrigation to overcome arid conditions. In addition, urban areas have the advantage of economies of scale and agglomeration, while the terms of trade favour the urban areas as producers of industrial goods over the rural areas as producers of primary commodities. Sociocultural factors, such as values and traditions that either encourage or discourage innovation, entrepreneurship, and social and economic mobility, form a second set of factors. Since most rural families are engaged in agriculture, their income is highly influenced by climatic conditions. They maintain large family networks and patron-client relationships to reduce vulnerability and spread the economic risk. These safety nets help the weaker members of society, but also act as disincentives for the more entrepreneurial. With its larger population size, urban society is characterized by more diversified but less personal

relationships. People in urban areas often live and work together without developing the level of sentimental and emotional ties characteristic of rural areas. There is a spirit of competition and mutual exploitation, and rigid social hierarchies are difficult to maintain. The potential for social mobility increases, and instability and insecurity become the norm. Specialization and innovation result in increases in productivity and the generation of wealth. Many of these urban norms and values are spreading to the rural areas through the media and education.

Political factors form the third set of factors. While different in character, rural and urban areas are politically and economically integrated and form one system. Policy decisions for one part of a country can have consequences for other parts. Differences in political power between regions can result in intended or unintended biases in government policies. Policies that leave the allocation of resources to the market and that invest scarce resources in places with the best growth potential will benefit some areas and regions over others. Owing to the scattered settlement pattern and the inadequate communication and transport networks, rural people are disadvantaged when it comes to organization and the articulation of needs, priorities and preferences through political processes. This lack of political power is reflected in the extent to which decisions about rural areas and their natural resources are made in the national capital or in a provincial or state capital, and the profits of their exploitation accrue to the urban areas.

Strategies for sustainable development

The core strategy should implement the following;

- Strengthen urban-rural and urban-urban linkages for sustainable development,
- Expand the growth opportunities of all urban centers through balanced development of urban centers,
- Reduce urban poverty and unemployment, Increase participation of the community in different aspects of rural-urban development,
- Create strong partnership with the private sector, and Decentralize urban governance.

It's becoming increasingly clear that traditional definitions of urban and rural fail to capture the complexity of the land uses and connection between them. Changing settlement, commuting and migration patterns contribute to an interface where "populations and activities described either as 'rural' or 'urban' are more closely linked both across space and across sectors than is usually thought and that distinctions are often arbitrary." Economic and social conditions in peri-urban areas can be improved through targeted intervention aimed at the linkages and interactions within regions. For that to happen, however, it is important for planners and policy makers to develop strategies based on the realities of people's lives.

More specifically, governments need to adopt policies that increase the opportunities for people, areas and regions to improve their conditions:

1. Investment in education

Education will have to prepare for change rather than for stability. Thinking schools and learning nations will be the paradigm of the twenty-first century: lifelong learning for lifelong employability. Improving education will no longer be only a matter of providing education for all, but also of enhancing the quality of education, teaching students to learn and think, to be creative, and preparing them for lifelong learning. The knowledge-based economy will require changes in the curriculum and the teaching strategy and changes in the attitude and the mindset of every member of the community: the learners, the educated, parents and society at large. While the changes will first of all affect the professionals and later the industrial workers in the economy, they will eventually have an impact on farmers. All will face new and rapidly changing technologies that they will have to use in daily life and in whatever sector they are working in to add more value to their products. Investment in education will be necessary, but not sufficient, to enhance the competitiveness of the countries of Asia and the Pacific in the global knowledge economy. A well-educated work force, in combination with other factors, will attract the foreign and domestic private investments that generate income and employment for the population. However, investments are also necessary in local research and development to create the capacity for technological innovation. Research and development can succeed only in high-quality research institutes and in a legal environment that promotes research and recognizes intellectual property rights. Moreover, countries have to ensure that they are both physically and mentally connected to the global information networks and participate in the global knowledge generation on the one hand, and that their people become connected so that they can benefit from the newly created knowledge and technologies on the other hand.

2. Connecting areas and regions

The rural population will increasingly depend on a combination of agriculture and off-farm work in rural industries to make a living. For economic growth to occur, isolated and economically backward areas and regions will need to be linked to markets at the local, regional, national and global levels. The provision of economically essential infrastructure, such as roads, railways, ports and airports, or the establishment of links to such infrastructure is critical in order to create economic opportunities. Such infrastructure will reduce the cost

of agricultural and industrial goods produced in the region, and will make these more competitive in the world market. Transport and communication infrastructure form an indispensable part of the package of interventions necessary to stimulate the rural economy.

With the development of regional trade blocs, roads and railways do not need to lead to the capital city and main port of the country, but could link a region to a port, an airport or a market in another country, if it is nearer. However, better transport and communication is a two-edged sword because it not only links an area to the outside world, but also links the outside world to a previously closed area and thereby intensifies competition. To enhance their participation in the economy, farmers and rural enterprises need capacity-building and information so that they can take better decisions about farm inputs, the farming process and the marketing of their products. Modern telecommunication technology can now provide them with the necessary information.

3. Improving urban management

As rural-urban migration and urbanization will continue, the urban areas will have to absorb an ever-growing population. Rural-urban migration should not result in an urbanization of poverty. Ensuring that the growing population will be able to find acceptable housing, have access to essential infrastructure and services, and find adequate employment and income will be an enormous challenge for local governments. Those in charge of mega-cities will be especially pressured to find new ways of dealing efficiently with these challenges. The urban informal sector in particular needs a level playing field. Governments should remove any discriminatory regulations that obstruct the development of informal sector activities into the mainstream urban economy, and enable small and medium-sized enterprises to gain access to space, credit, market information and technology. Similarly, they should support urban low-income communities that want to improve their living environment through the upgrading of their houses and the construction of neighbourhood infrastructure. Local governments will have to ensure not only that the urban population has adequate living and working conditions, but also that their city or town can compete in the global economy for private-sector investments. This means creating and maintaining an investment environment that meets the needs and priorities of the private sector. In this endeavour, the government, civil society and the private sector will have to search for ways to reconcile economic competitiveness in the global market and environmental protection through market-based incentives to internalize environmental costs. Reconciling the needs of the population, those of the private sector and those of future generations will require an efficient use of available resources and good urban governance. The development of partnerships between urban stakeholders (government, local communities, civil society groups and the private sector) will be critical, but this will require a different attitude among government officials and considerable capacity-building.

4. Decentralizing and ensuring good governance

In order to be able to seize new economic opportunities, decentralization of decision-making power from the national to the regional and the local level is necessary. Decentralization of decision-making on local issues is critical to ensure that policies and programmes match the needs and conditions of the local population and that good and fair use is made of regional and local resources for development. This holds true for both the urban and the rural areas.

Decentralization places a heavy burden on local governments and local communities, which have to assume many new responsibilities and undertake many new tasks. In the process, mistakes will be made, power will be misused for personal benefit, and traditional power structures will only gradually give way to a more representative system. Decentralization is a learning process that takes time and that requires a central government which supports and assists local institutions rather than reluctantly cedes power, ready to take it back as soon as it can. A prerequisite for decentralization is capacity-building of local

governments and local communities, in particular in the area of good governance and the quality of the process of decision-making by the government. Good governance implies that all stakeholders are involved and can participate in any decision-making that directly affects them, that they are well informed so that they can take informed decisions, and that those taking the decisions are accountable for the decisions and their consequences.

5. Empowering the poor

To ensure that the poor and not only the better-off benefit from development, they need to be organized to increase their economic and political bargaining positions vis-à-vis those who are politically or economically stronger. In this respect, organizing the poor into rural and urban cooperatives and community based savings-and-credit schemes can strengthen their economic position. The experience of running an organization will build the capacity and confidence of the poor with respect to participation in political decision-making as well. This requires a responsive government, particularly at the local level, that is prepared to recognize local communities as partners in development and to listen to them.

6. Introducing social safety nets

To ensure that the poor also draw some benefits from development and that their children are not locked into the vicious circle of poverty, social safety nets are necessary. Experience from past social safety nets in developing countries shows that government-administered social safety nets often miss their target groups and are open to abuse and corruption. On the other hand, the poor should not be completely dependent on the presence and the goodness of families and communities. New, possibly community-based, delivery mechanisms for delivering social services need to be explored and researched. As the Asian and Pacific region enters the twenty-first century, it can expect immense demographic, economic, social and technological changes that will turn the region from a predominantly rural continent into a predominantly urban and globally connected continent. Like all transitions, this transition will most likely be painful. However, it need not be traumatic, if governments enact policies that ensure globally connected level playing fields, with adequate security for the vulnerable in society.

Conclusion

Not all disparities can be removed because some are the result of inherent differences between people, between urban and rural areas and between regions. As free-market economic policies are today's prevailing trend, the scope for government interventions is also limited. The primary challenge for any government is to ensure that all (rich and poor, urban and rural) can participate in economic growth.

Many governments have also failed to recognize that urban and rural areas form one system and that decisions taken for one area have an impact on the other area that is often unintended and unanticipated. They have tended to look at rural and urban development as separate issues rather than as closely related issues. This is reflected in the institutional structure of many governments having separate ministries dealing with development in urban and rural areas. Governments have always stressed the critical importance of agriculture and the improvement of living conditions in the rural areas, because that was where the majority of the population lived. At the same time, they felt that the country could emerge from "underdevelopment" only if the industrial sector, based in the urban areas, was developed. The results were policies that protected the industrial sector, kept the cost of living low in Urban areas and used the income from the export of agricultural products to finance urban-industrial development. The winners in

these policies were government (net revenue gain), urban consumers (lower food prices) and industry (cheap raw materials). The net effect was an enormous income transfer out of agriculture and this depressed private investment in agriculture. The result was massive rural-urban migration and the rapid growth of urban areas, including the development of mega-cities. Because of a lack of housing and employment, migrants had to resort to squatting and work in the urban informal sector.

Attempts to develop the rural areas by developing urban centres encountered similar problems because of the unequal relationship. The penetration of the urban-industrial economy into the countryside only increased the exploitation of natural resources in the rural society for the benefit of the urban economy. A developing urban area in a backward region may not draw its resources from its immediate hinterland, but from other more developed regions. Improved transport links between a regional centre and the rest of the country reduce transport costs not only for goods produced in the region, but also for goods from other areas moving into the region and for migrants moving out of the region to national urban centres.

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