

Lecture 22: Causes of Urbanization

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CAUSES OF GROWTH OF URBAN POPULATION

Urbanization, being a process of population concentration, is caused by all those factors which change the distribution of population by size of locality. Thus all those factors which make people move from places of lower population concentration to places of higher concentration lead to urbanization. In practice, it refers to growth of urban population in relation to rural population (Box 7.1) and is dependent on the definition of urban and rural localities. One may say that urbanization is caused primarily by migration of people from rural to urban areas (or smaller town to large cities). This assumes that the natural growth rate of urban and rural areas is similar because urban areas have better health facilities as well as lower fertility. However, sometimes this is not the case and urbanization may also be caused by differences in natural growth between urban and rural areas. In India, in the past natural growth in urban areas has been a major factor in the country's urban growth (Box 7.3). Yet, as a rule natural growth and the rural to urban migration are two main sources of growth of urban population and increase in level of urbanization. In addition, urban areas and city limits expand and as time passes they tend to incorporate a few villages at the outskirts leading to increase in urban population. Sometimes urban population also grows due to graduation, i.e., growth of population of localities which are classified as rural in one census and as urban in the subsequent censuses. Lastly, change of definition of urban areas may also increase or decrease urban population. Therefore, whenever we analyse trend in urbanization it is important to ask whether the definition of urban population has remained unchanged.

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BOX 7.2: CAUSES OF GROWTH OF URBAN POPULATION

There are five major causes of growth of urban population:

1. Natural growth in urban areas (i.e., the difference between births and deaths)
2. International and internal migration (mostly rural to urban migration within the country)
3. Absorption of peripheral rural localities in city limits
4. Graduation of small villages to small towns
5. Reclassification of urban and rural localities

According to the Sample Registration Scheme (SRS) data, in year 2008 the natural growth rate of urban areas is 12.6 per thousand (or 1.26 percent) while the natural growth rate of rural areas is 16.5 per thousand (or 1.65 percent). This implies that now it is rural-urban migration that will primarily decide the fate of urbanization. In absence of rural-urban migration the level of urbanization in India is likely to decline. But in the future the natural growth rate of rural areas will also change producing a further change in components of urban population growth.

BOX 7.3: CAUSES OF URBAN POPULATION GROWTH

The most important contributory factor behind the growth of India's urban population during the past five decades has been *urban natural increase*, i.e. the excess of urban births over urban deaths. My preliminary estimates suggest that between 1991 and 2001 at least 56 percent of the growth of India's urban population was due to urban natural increase. During recent decades migration from rural to urban areas has been an important, but nevertheless secondary factor behind urban population growth.

- Quoted from Dyson (2003).

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CAUSES OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION

Now the issue is: why do people move from rural to urban areas? Migration is a complex issue and the answer to this question is not simple. **One major problem in studying the causes of migration empirically is that it is difficult to measure migration.** The volume of migration depends heavily on the definition of migration. Overall, the pattern of migration depends on a number of factors:

- Whether the definition is based on place of birth criterion, last residence criterion, duration of residence, residence at a fixed prior date or any other criteria
- Whether the level of analysis is national, state, district, locality or urban-rural residence
- Whether the interest is in long distance or short distance migration
- Whether the interest is in total migration or male migration
- Whether the interest is in development induced migration or migration in general

Yet, researches on the theme of migration show that several factors are important:

- Factors operating at the place of origin because of which people have to think of migrating to other places
- Factors operating at the places of possible destination because of which people at other places feel attracted to migrate
- Awareness and evaluation of the factors of migration
- Economic and psychological costs of migration
- Possibility of assimilation at the place of migration determining whether the migrants continue to stay there or must consider to return back or move to some other places
- Individual level factors – some people at some stage of life are by nature (personality) more mobile than others. Among the individual level factors the three most important factors are: psychological factors; demographic factors; and family background.

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PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

It is convenient to divide causes of migration in terms of push and pull factors. Certain negative factors may push people to move away from place of origin and certain positive factors may attract them to place of destination. In case of rural-urban migration there are several possible push factors operating in the rural areas: lack of work and employment; domination, exploitation and oppression; inequality; lack of education and health facilities; caste hierarchy; disliking for traditions; and lack of opportunities to do something meaningful. Figure 7.1, produced in UNFPA's *State of World Population 2009*, shows the effect of push factors on migration. The pull factors operating in urban areas are: better work and employment situation including possibility of getting a more decent work; higher wages; greater social equality; better education and health facilities; closeness to seat of development and power; charm of city life; modernization; better connectivity with the outside world; and better living condition. In India we also talk of certain push-back factors operating in urban areas because of which rural-urban migrants feel pushed back to native, rural places. They are: lack of expected employment opportunities, ethnic segregation and discrimination; greater vulnerability to various risks; poor quality of life; and exploitation.

However, migration is not a simple function of pull and push factors. Various geographical and legal barriers prevent people from migrating even when they are aware of potential advantages of migration. Other factors remaining same, people will have the tendency to move to such places which are socially, culturally and politically closer to the place of origin. Also there are individual differences which are better explained in socio-psychological terms. Certain types of personalities could be more prone to migration than others. While this is true that certain sociological factors are closely associated with migration this is also true that in the same conditions some people migrate while others do not. This indicates the existence of relationship between personality and migratory tendency.

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FIGURE 7.1: A WOMAN ON THE MOVE

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One may argue that as the natural increase decreases the growth rate of urban population may also decrease. Further, if rural development policies aiming at greater investment in agriculture and expansion of provision for employment generation succeed in mitigating the effect of push factors in rural areas, the growth rate of urban population may decline substantially. In this situation India may achieve a higher level of development without having a high level of urbanization.