



An Analysis of Trends, Patterns and Policies in Asia of Urbanization and Migration

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Abstract: The present paper overviews urbanization and migration process in Asian countries at macro level since 1950s, including the projections made till 2030. It questions the thesis of southward movement of urbanisation and that of urban explosion in Asia. Increased unaffordability of urban space and basic amenities, negative policy perspective towards migration and various rural development programmes designed to discourage migration are responsible for this exclusionary urban growth and a distinct decline in urban rural growth differential, with the major exception of China. The changing structure of urban population across different size categories reveals a shift of growth dynamics from large to second order cities and stagnation of small towns. The pace of urbanization has been modest to high in select countries in Asia, not because of their level of economic growth but its composition and labour intensity of rapidly growing informal sectors. Several countries have launched programmes for improving governance and infrastructural facilities in a few large cities, attracting private investors from within as well as outside the country. These have pushed out squatter settlements, informal sector businesses along with a large number of pollutant industries to a few pockets and peripheries of the cities. The income level and quality of basic amenities in these cities, as a result, have gone up but that has been associated with increased intra-city disparity and creation of degenerated periphery. Nonetheless, there is no strong evidence that urbanization is associated with destabilization of agrarian economy, poverty and immiserisation, despite the measures of globalization resulting in regional imbalances. The overview of the trend and pattern suggests that the pace of urbanization would be reasonably high but much below the level projected by UNPD in the coming decades.

Keywords: urbanisation, migration, exclusion, periphery, informalisation, small towns, economic concentration, urban rural growth differential, Asia, China and India.

Introduction: An overview of the contemporary literature on population mobility in Asian countries suggests that despite widely different trends and patterns, alternate policy frameworks and varying ideological dispositions of the policy makers and researchers, the dominant perspective is that the region is currently experiencing rapid urbanisation and migration and that this would continue in future



years. The past decade and a half has been considered to be a period of a progressive shift of the epicentre of urbanisation from “the predominantly northern latitudes of developed countries to the southern ones of developing countries” and that “the mean latitude of global urban population has been steadily moving south.”¹ Several countries in Asia are noted to be experiencing acceleration in the growth in the number of migrants and urban population since the late seventies and as a result the continent currently account for about half of the world’s urban population. Projections have been made that the pace of urbanisation would go up in the next few decades which would double Asia’s urban population during 2000-30, its share in global urban population going up from 48 per cent to 54 per cent².

The proponents of „market and governance“ oriented perspective believe that the strategy of globalisation and structural reform is responsible for the acceleration of rural urban (RU) migration, giving boost to the pace of urbanisation. The later is attributed to pull factors operating through the cities and towns and much of the investment and consequent increase in employment would take place within or around the existing urban centres. This rapid pace of urbanisation is promoted by the scale of production, particularly in manufacturing, information asymmetries contributing to agglomeration economies, technological developments in transport and building sectors and substitution of capital for land. Even when the industrial units get located in inland rural settlements or virgin coastal areas, in a few years, the latter acquires urban status.

This perspective and the proposed package of solutions have not gone unchallenged. It is argued that the pace of migration and urban development in Asia is associated with accentuation of regional and interpersonal inequality, resulting in increased poverty³. Furthermore, employment generation in the formal urban economy is not high due to capital intensive nature of industrialisation. A low rate of infrastructural investment in public sector - necessary for keeping budgetary deficits low - is resulting in deceleration of agricultural growth. This, coupled with open trade policy is responsible for “contraction of purchasing power” and destabilisation of agrarian economy, causing high unemployment and exodus from rural areas. All these are leading to rapid growth in urban population in several countries, most of the migrants being absorbed within informal economy. The protagonists as also the critics of globalization, thus, converge on the proposition that urban growth in the post liberalisation phase would be high. An analysis of the trend and process of urbanisation in Asia, however, gives reasons for questioning its validity. It would be important to begin the analysis of demographic trend by examining the empirical validity of the proposition of rapid RU migration and



unprecedented urban growth⁴. The data on urban and total population used in the statistical analysis are from World Urbanisation Prospects (Revisions 2007) brought out by the Population Division, United Nations (UNPD)⁵. The Migration data are from the Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division, UN. The UNPD classification of countries into regions and groups, have been adopted here, unless there are reasons for making a departure from this which then has been mentioned specifically.

A Macro Overview of Urbanisation and International Migration: The demographic weight of Asia, accounting for over 60 per cent of world population, is so overwhelming that researchers, planners and administrators have often build their perspective on Asian urbanisation and migration based on the absolute magnitudes or the changes in these in relation to corresponding global figures. The facts that the share of Asia in global urban population has gone up from 32 per cent in 1950 to 44 per cent in 1970 and then to about 50 per cent in 2005 have often been quoted to support an over optimistic or alarmist view of urbanisation. That Asia claims about half of world's urban population in 2008⁶ and that it would exceed the global figure by 16 per cent in 2030 are simple milestones and not significant landmarks⁷. There is a need to look at these in the context of the increases in its share in total population rather than treating these as sensational events or major achievements in history. The large shares of Asia in total number of migrants or incremental urban population reflect the impact of the rural and urban population base that are responsible for sending out and receiving these people. Similarly, the number (or its share in global total) of cities above certain cut off point (say a million or five million) increasing dramatically in recent past simply implies that a large number of cities existed just below that point in Asia and the population growth here, which is largely due to natural and socio-cultural factors, is higher than their counterparts in developed countries. These milestones would have been achieved in a decade or so, even if the urban rural growth differential (URGD, taken here as the in the annual exponential growth rate of population difference between urban and rural areas) was below that of the rest of the world, simply because of Asia's higher population growth.

Analysing the changing pattern of international migration, it is noted that the stock of immigrants in Asia was less than 2 per cent in 1960 which has declined systematically since then (Table 3). The corresponding figure for the world as also all other regions were much higher. A declining trend, however, is noted in other developing regions as well. The growth rate in the stock of foreign migrants in Asia has declined dramatically during nineties as compared to the preceding two decades which corresponds to the deceleration in urban growth. The continent as a whole is experiencing net



outmigration (3 per thousand during each quinquennial period since 1990), although the rate is below that of Africa and much below that of Latin America (Table 4). Importantly, the growth in the stock of immigrants was negative during sixties, primarily due to political turmoil/transition in Cambodia, Turkey etc. The corresponding rates for Latin America and Caribbean and all less developed countries were also negative. The Asian growth rate in the stock of migrants picked up during seventies and eighties working out to be 2.1 per cent and 2.4 per cent respectively - the aggregative figure working out to be just below the world average. It came down significantly to 0.1 per cent during nineties and subsequent period - much below the average figure of the world⁹.

It may nonetheless be noted that the refugees, who face far serious problems of rehabilitation, as a percentage of total immigrants has increased in Asia from 2.3 per cent in 1960 to 14.6 per cent in 2005 (Table 5). In contrast, the corresponding figure for the world has gone up only marginally from 3 per cent to 7 per cent. Further, Asian migration tends to be more male selective than in the rest of the world. The female share in total migrants in Asia is 45 per cent in 2005 compared to the global figure of 50 per cent (Table 6). Interestingly, the ratio was only 46.5 per cent both in the World as well as Asia in 1960. While in case of the former, it increased to achieve male female parity, in Asia it has worsened marginally.

Policies and Programmes The explanation for declining URGD can possibly be sought in terms of decline in RU migration. The data available on migration from a few of the countries may be examined for this purpose. One must analyse internal migration in China in some detail as this is the most discussed subject among quantitative demographers as also this is one of the very few Asian countries which reports acceleration in urbanisation and migration. The Fourth Population Census of China which considers persons who have stayed in the enumeration areas for more than 1 year during the period of July 1st, 1985 - July 1st, 1990 as migrants, reports their number to be 34 million in 1990. Of these 16 million are rural migrants in urban areas, constituting 59 percent of the total urban migrants (PCOSC, 1993). The National Population Sample Survey covering the period 1990-1995, which excluded the persons who moved within the city from the category of migrants, however, reports the figure to be 36 million in 1995, giving a very low annual growth of 1.1 per cent per annum. This may be considered unrealistic in view of the urban dynamics in the country during this period. The sample survey conducted by the State Family Planning Commission in 1992 covering 30 provinces, suggested the migration rate to be much higher. As per the Overseas Development Institute (ODI 2006), the number of migrants has increased dramatically from about 26 million in 1988 to 126 million in 2004 implying



an annual growth rate of 14 per cent. The information from these sources, thus, vary significantly, reflecting unresolved conceptual and methodological issues and non comparability of data. There “is no consistent criterion for collecting data” on mobile population who continue to remain “statistically invisible” (Fang 2000). Given the widely different estimates and projections, one has no basis to hold that migration would accelerate in future years.

Concerning Internal Migration and their Impact: The government programmes to launch policies to strengthen the rural economy are likely to slow down RU migration, as has been observed in recent years³¹. The State Council has issued a policy document in the year 2008 vowing to set up a permanent mechanism for closing urban-rural gaps. The government has boosted investment in the countryside, slashed fees and taxes for farmers, rolled out favourable medical care schemes and strengthened protection of farmers’ land rights. As per Chen Xiwen, the Director of the Office of the Central Leading Group on Rural Work, the central government is raising its rural budget by about a third compared to last year. Importantly, the latter, too, represented a record-high increase of 17 per cent over the previous year. Correspondingly, the local governments in cities have adopted policies that aim at reducing competition from rural migrant workers through a series of discriminatory policies.

Urban population in China has been noted to be 530 million in 2005 by the Population Division of the UN. As per the NBS, the number of workers in urban areas was 480 million at the end of 2006. China’s rate of urbanization was between 3 and 6 per cent during early 1990s before coming down to the 3-4 per cent during the late 1990s. However, in the early years of the present decade, the rate appears to have accelerated again³². The Bureau Release in February 2008 reveals that number of rural people engaged in agriculture shrank by more than 80 million between 1996 and 2006. Further, 70.8 percent of rural workers were engaged in some type of agriculture at the end of 2006 which is five percentage points less than that of 1996. Furthermore, a nation wide survey (see Chan and Hu 2003), had reported the floating population to have gone up from 70 million in 1993 to 140 million in 2003. Westendoff (2008) estimates the size of the floating population in the range of 150- 200 million. The majority of these migrants are circular migrants who retain strong links with their rural family³³. Faced with all these statistics, one may hold that while sectoral diversification will shift workers from agriculture to industries and business, the state may not allow large scale absorption for avoiding pressure on urban infrastructures and social security system. It would nonetheless allow them to shuttle between rural and urban areas and consequently, the share of migrants in incremental urban population may not go up significantly.



Indonesia has policies restricting internal migration like China, though the system is less rigid. The government here has taken several measures to discourage the prospective migrants from entering the large cities and re-directing them to rural areas or provinces that have labour shortages (Munir 2002). Interestingly, a field study by Hugo has noted widespread prevalence of circular migration and commutation from rural to urban areas, as in case of China, as early as in the seventies which slowed down permanent migration. A resurvey conducted in 1992-93 further confirms this kind of mobility since only 20 percent of households reported dependence on agriculture for their livelihood. (Hugo 2003). A comprehensive longitudinal study (Collier et al. 1993) of 37 villages in Java carried out over the period 1967-91 further corroborates this finding.

Many city level initiatives have also made it difficult for the migrants to become legal residents of the city. For example, in Jakarta³⁴, under the "closed city" policy, migrants are required to show evidence of employment and housing before being issued a residence permit. Furthermore, they must deposit with the city government for six months the equivalent of the return fare to the point of origin. In September 2007, a new law has been passed forbidding giving money to beggars and roadside workers and banning squatter settlements on river banks and highways. Reducing Jakarta's population growth has now been taken up as a national goal and the government is desperately trying to promote reverse migration.

Vietnam had an elaborate and complex system of controlling migration flows, especially to large cities through migration policies and household registration system (*ho khau*), similar to that of the Chinese which made spontaneous migration a costly affair (Anh, 2003). Although the economic renovations (*Doi Moi*) officially launched in 1986 have abolished much of that, giving increased economic opportunities and avenues for mobility to rural labour (Dang, 1999), the apprehension of rural poor flooding the cities has resulted in several policy initiatives to control migration. In view of the limited success of these measures on the ground (Anh, 2003), an incentive system has been introduced under which a person registered in the district of birth is entitled to all government facilities. Those registered in a district other than that of origin and those with temporary registration (a) for a period of six months and more and (b) for less than six months, are placed in different categories and receive lower levels of facilities.

The data on migration from rural to urban areas in India seems to have serious problems as is the case of



China. The major criticism of the official sources that provide the basic demographic data on migration in India - Population Census and National Sample Survey (NSS) - has been that these do not capture large segments of migrants due to deficiencies in data gathering – designing and canvassing of the questionnaires. Furthermore, the scope and coverage of data compilation have varied significantly from one Census to the other and over different rounds of NSS, as noted above. Temporal comparability of this data has been rendered difficult due to not-too-infrequent reorganization of state and district boundaries.

The problems of comparability of migrants with different durations of stay at the place of enumeration are equally serious (Kundu 2005). Many of the recent migrants have falsely claimed their arrival date to be before ten or more years. The reason for the deliberate misreporting is to claim legitimacy against eviction, access civic amenities and escape social hostility. The motivation for claiming longer duration of stay is high in large cities as entitlement to land, basic amenities etc. is often linked to the date of arrival. The conclusion, thus, emerges inescapably that not only the data on inter and intrastate migration but even that on migrants by durations of stay have serious problems of temporal comparability.

It is important to point out that the percentage of rural migrants arriving in urban areas during 1991-01 is marginally less than that noted in the previous decade. This would be in line with the proposition of increasing immobility of Indian population³⁵. One may add that even the percentage of lifetime migrants, which in 2001 is slightly above that of 1991, is significantly below those of 1961 and 1971. The data from NSS, too, confirm the declining trend of migration when one considers the period from 1983 to 1999-00. The general conclusion, thus, emerges unmistakably is that internal mobility in India, particularly of *men*, which is often linked to the strategy of seeking livelihood (as opposed to family linked migration for women), has gone down systematically over the past few decades³⁶. Besides the indirect measures of urban development making the cities unaffordable to the poor, there are regular slum clearance programmes whereby development authorities or municipal corporations in most of the Indian metropolises, are bulldozing unauthorised structures, often at the initiative of resident welfare associations. Thus, it is not so much the reactionary policies of the state that are restricting migration in India. The functioning of the market for land and basic services, combined with a sense of „otherness“, has become the major barrier.

Bangladesh is an interesting case in the South Central Asia which is pushing out slums and informal



activities from its cities through administrative and fiscal measures, despite grass-root mobilisation by powerful civil society actors like Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh Legal Aid Society Trust (BLAST) and Coalition for Urban Poor (CUP). In Dhaka, for example, police and city authorities came down heavily on the slum areas (BBC News, August 8, 1999) in late nineties with the avowed objective of „reducing crime rate and illegal activities“. The evictions in Agargoan and other settlements in the city led to major outbursts of violence, raised human rights issues and created job displacements, particularly for women³⁷. The High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh in a landmark judgement in 1999 equated the right to housing with right to livelihood and ruled that there shall be no eviction without serving proper notice and a follow-up rehabilitation plan. The National Housing Policy adopted in the same year also placed emphasis on programmes for housing the poor. Despite all these, the eviction drive has continued unabated. A note released by Sultana Kamal (2007), Executive Director of ASK reveals that the number of persons evicted annually during 2003 and 2006 has varied between 4,000 and 8000 in the city of Dhaka. The presentation on behalf of CUP entitled “NGO Perspective on Evictions and Resettlement in Dhaka” reports eviction of 29 slum settlements during January-March 2007, affecting over 60,000 people. Several petitions have been filed by these NGOs against eviction in several cities forcing the Courts to order stay the government’s plans. The latter, however, has not been able to make it obligatory for the government to provide permanent accommodation for slum dwellers. All these lead to the argument that the decline in URGD is possible in Asian countries only when RU migration is declining. The former is certainly not a proxy of RU migration but the two are likely to move in the same direction and cross sectionally, there will be strong positive correlation between the two. In cases of countries for which reliable RU migration data are available, one can check if the rate of migration has indeed declined. In India, RU migration has gone down significantly over the past couple of decades, particularly for the male population. Such data are not available for a large number of countries within a comparable format.

Based on the evidence available from the existing literature, as attempted above, there is no reason to believe that RU migration has been accelerated or that it makes a larger contribution to urban growth in Asian countries. There have been specific years, regions and cities wherein high immigration is recorded but that does not provide a basis for macro level generalization. The perspective of rapid and unprecedented RU migration is linked more to the apprehension of urban collapse due to infrastructure deficiencies and legitimisation of the harsh initiatives for evicting slums or deterring future migrants.

Under standing Historical Context of Urbanisation and Migration and Perspectives for Future



Growth: The last few decades of the Twentieth century emerges as exhilarating for the urbanization process in modern history in more than one sense. This period is marked by culmination of prolonged cold war into the disintegration of the „Second World“ and leaving many smaller countries in the block completely disoriented and disillusioned. The collapse of the Soviet system has also been associated with the undermining the importance of institutions at international levels and curtailment of state’s welfare oriented interventions. It would therefore be important to look at declining trend of migration and urbanisation not merely as an outcome of individual decision making based on economic rationality, characterising the Harris-Todaro model, but in the context of wider social, political and economic change.

Migration needs to be viewed not as a dependent but largely an independent variable³⁸ by stipulating that many of the countries, regions and their citizens have developed a negative attitude towards in-migrants, despite benefiting from the supply of low cost labour through them. This attitude has got reinforced through growing regionalism, voicing concerns about „foreigners“ interfering in local political process, threatening internal socio-economic stability, impacting adversely on culture, norms and values etc. Economic opportunities at micro level, therefore, may not be the key determinants of international and internal migration since it is state policies and social environment that currently determine whether people would be allowed to leave their country of origin and be welcome in receiving countries. While the role of individual’s decision cannot be dismissed, the later is not guided purely by economic benefits accruing to the person. This perspective would get theoretical underpinning from the security/stability framework (SSF), as expounded by Myron Weiner.

It is important to look at the changing migration streams in Asian countries with reference to the historical legacy of both the colonial and the pre-colonial era. Globalization, which is signified by the movement of capital across national borders, is not a new phenomenon in Asia. Since the sixteenth century, the Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, English, French and more recently Japanese³⁹ have been important players on the regional arena. The logic of surplus generation within the Colonial framework had made deployment of workforce from one part of the empire to another relatively easy in early decades of the last century⁴⁰. It is in the colonies where plantation and mining activities came up in a big way, requiring labour being recruited, often from outside their erstwhile political boundaries. Transmigration was also carried out in an effort to remove the potential for political instability⁴¹.

Urbanisation and Migration: Impact on Economic and Social Wellbeing:



Given the serious data limitations, alternate perspectives and conflicting empirical claims on the causes and consequences of urbanization and migration, as discussed above, an analysis of interdependencies of migration and urbanization with a select set of developmental variables, taken as „context indicators“ pertaining to all Asian countries, has been carried out in the present section. The objective of looking at these interrelations is to bring in larger macro considerations within the explanatory framework. This implicitly implies making a departure from the Harris-Todaro model, as argued in a preceding section⁴⁷, the latter stipulating that RU migration decisions are governed by individual rationality and is a matter of weighing the difference between the expected earnings in urban areas against that in present rural employment. The departure here is in a more fundamental sense than proposed by scholars like Stark and Bloom (1985) and Haan (2005) who had made a case for considering households as units of decision making rather than individuals. It may be argued here that while micro level rationality holds the key to mobility, a much better understanding of the process is possible if socio-political factors at regional or country levels are also brought in as the determinants in the model. In the absence of data on internal migration for the countries, URGD may be considered as its proxy variable, as discussed above.

set of 54 indicators pertaining to level of urbanization, urban growth, URGD, immigration etc. have been taken up along with those of economic and social development including those of poverty, health, education, access to civic amenities etc., as given in Table 7. For undertaking the analysis within a comparative static framework, the key indicators have been built at different points of time, depending on data availability. The first 24 indicators pertain to demographic dimension, reflecting the level and pace of urbanization, migration, growth rates of population, density and female male ratio among migrants. The next set of 18 indicators pertains to levels and pattern of economic growth, investment, exports, employment etc. Social dimension covers poverty, access to water and sanitation, education and health, accounting for the remaining 12 indicators.

Focusing on the decade of the nineties and later, one observes positive and significant correlations of the percentage of urban population and of international migrants with most of the indicators of economic development (Table 8b). The positive correlation with percentage of value added in industries, FDI and exports of goods and services as percentages of GDP, besides per capita income, merit special mention. This is not a startling result as most of the presently developed countries in Asia have grown during the past half century with foreign investment or that by a federal government of which these are no longer a part (countries emerging from erstwhile Soviet Union) which explains



their high percentage of foreign population. The values of the positive indicators of social development such as life expectancy at birth, both for men and women, are also high in countries having high international migration while those of the negative indicators like Infant mortality rate are low (Table 8c). This can be explained in terms of the capability of these countries and their institutions to take care of the social problems much better than in less developed countries. The correlations of the levels of basic amenities are high with the levels of urbanisation but not with current urban growth, URGD, percentage of immigrants, per capita income and its growth. The developed economies nonetheless record high level of per capita carbon emissions due to high level of urbanisation and concentration of industries in and around a few cities.

It is evident that the relatively developed countries that also happen to be more urbanized would not be in the forefront of urbanization in future years. The critical question would, therefore, be whether the high URGD in less developed countries would be backed up by growth in income and industrial value added. The correlation between URGD and GDP growth during 1990-95 is noted to be positive but this turns out to be negative when the more recent period 2000-05. The GDP growth rates during the three quinquennial periods during 1990-05 show no stable spatial pattern, correlations turning from negative to positive⁴⁹. Given this volatility of income growth in Asian countries, no definite conclusion can be advanced regarding the relationship between the pace of urbanisation and GDP growth. Interestingly, the correlations of urban growth rates and URGD with unemployment rate or poverty are negative but not significant. It is, therefore, difficult to hold that current and future urban growth would make a distinct and positive impact of the economic scene, including unemployment and poverty and access to basic amenities. On the other hand, there is no definite evidence that future urbanisation would be driven by poverty or be a manifestation of destabilization of agrarian economy. Many of the smaller countries with low level of urbanization would endeavor to get linked to global capital market by opening up their economies. In a cross sectional analysis of the pattern of migration and urbanization, The Department of Social and Economic Affairs of the United Nations has posited that “the least developed countries within the less developed regions (that) are characterized by a low proportion of population residing in urban areas” would experience “faster urban growth”. Location of a few global projects here would push up the figures of economic development and urban growth as the economies are very small. The high income growth in countries like Macao (China), Myanmar, Cambodia, Afghanistan Bhutan, Armenia, Azerbaijan Tajikistan, Maldives during 2000-05 and 2005-06 may be cited as examples.



Perspectives, Policies and Programmes for Intervention in Migration and Urbanisation:

The task of overviewing the policies and programmes in this section has been lessened as the strategies to push out slums and squatters along with their informal activities into peripheries, promote growth of satellite towns and discourage migration into large cities launched by different countries have already been discussed towards the end of section 5. It would, nonetheless, be important here to categorise the major programmatic interventions, based on their underlying perspectives on urbanization and migration and analyse how these impact RU migration and wellbeing of the affected population. The three categories would be (a) promotion of globally linked urban centres and benefiting from scale economies, (b) stabilisation of agrarian economy and discouraging migration and (c) welfare programmes for poor migrant workers and their families in urban areas. Importantly, many of the countries have pursued all the three types of programmes concurrently, the outcome being determined by the relative emphasis and resource allocation.

Promoting Globally Linked Cities and their Scale Economies: Policy makers, planners and administrators in Asian countries have mostly viewed urbanisation and RU migration as positive phenomena, interpreting these in terms of growth in manufacturing, benefits of scale and agglomeration *economies* etc. Asian Development Bank (1996) which has played a crucial role in guiding policy thrust in the region argues that the countries experiencing rapid urbanisation “in the last 10 to 20 years are generally those with most rapid economic growth”. It observes that “macro economic changes within Asia and the region”’s transactions with OECD countries - in particular emergence of global economy.... will further increase the role played by urban areas in these countries” as there exists “well established correlation between development and level of urbanisation”. In a study undertaken for Australian Agency for International Development, Forbes and Lindfield (1997) observe that in Asia “urbanisation has been an essential part of most nation”’s development towards a stronger and more stable economy over the last few decades.

Linking migration with poverty reduction, Adams and Page (2003) conclude that an increase of 10 per cent in a country”’s share of international migrants leads to 2 per cent decline in \$1 a day poverty. The study by Oberai and Singh (1983) on internal migration in India shows that the remittances improved distribution of income in receiving regions. Similarly, Durand et al. (1996) hold that income from migration stimulates economic activity, both directly and indirectly, and that it leads to significantly higher levels of employment and investment. It is, therefore, no surprise that Jones and Douglass (2008) find the state policies in Asian countries mostly treating RU migration as an instrument of poverty alleviation and the cities an „engines of economic growth“ rather than as a habitat.



The perspective that cities must enable countries to realise the highest economies of scale and production efficiency has understandably characterised the policies of most of the governments. The new system of urban governance emerging since eighties has allowed the Asian metropolises attract national and multinational companies. Many of them have attempted to create "select global centres of the future" by providing land to the companies at preferred sites and opening up the land market. This is being done by simplifying the legal and administrative procedures for changing landuse and by pushing out "low valued" activities including slum colonies from the city core to the peripheries. The „sanitisation drives" are often carried out or facilitated by state agencies. In the absence of formal registration in urban areas, in China, for example, migrants are excluded from land and housing provisions, leading to emergence and fast growth of „urbanizing villages" (Song et. al., 2007). Their settlements are often allowed to stay within the cities for simple economic reasons. However, when their utility is over, these are systematically demolished⁵⁰. Michael Cernia (1989) suggests that “the frequency and magnitude of compulsory displacement are likely to increase in the developing world as the trend towards urbanization grows stronger.

Stabilising Agrarian Economy and Discouraging Migration: The perspective to promote urban centre to attract global capital and maximise macro economic growth is fraught with problems. This builds up a case for greater openness of the economies in Asia, which unfortunately has been associated with higher spatial inequality and massive inflow RU migrants, without their physical and economic absorption in formal urban system⁵⁴. At a conference organised by DFID entitled “Asia 2015: Promoting Growth, Ending Poverty”, inadequacy in infrastructure and basic amenities and illegal (informal) settlements facing perpetually a risk of eviction, have been identified as the key concerns in the Asian cities (see Satterthwaite 2007?). A report from the United Nations for Asia and the Pacific Commission notes that the pace of urbanization has resulted in economic growth but has increased the level of poverty within cities. Pietro Gennari (2008), chief of ESCAP’s Statistics Division holds⁵⁵ that current growth of cities is having a “knock-on effect” through erosion of “people’s ability to access clean water and sanitation in urban areas”, pushing “more and more people into slums. Homeless International (2006) stipulates that poor, being encouraged to live in the city and provide cheap labour, on which city economies are built, without benefiting from the city's development process, is one of the major paradoxes in Asian cities. Also, the policies of national and city governments focused on issues of economic efficiency and global competitiveness have resulted in massive proliferation of slums⁵⁶. It argues further that the process of urbanisation in Asia has led to marginalization of a large majority of local population and also caused serious environmental problems due to industrial concentration and production of energy intensive consumer durables. Many of the countries in Asia may be seen as trying to channel “private investments to designated



areas or removing subsidies that previously favoured the developed locations” like their national capital. The idea behind this approach is to create “level playing field” whereby a number of areas of a country become equally attractive to potential migrants”. Forty-four per cent of the countries of the world of which 88 per cent are in less developed regions consider their settlement pattern to be a matter of major concern. Importantly, eighty per cent of the countries in Asia hold this view.

Welfare Programmes for Migrant Families: Conscious of the poor physical conditions of the migrants and their not having access to basic amenities, many of the Governments in Asia have launched programmes at national and local levels to improve the micro environment in slums and squatter settlements. Unfortunately, however, resource allocation and their spatial coverage have gone down in recent years under the new system of governance and more recently due to global meltdown. Lukewarm response of private sector to get into provisioning of civic amenities, reduction of subsidies in social sectors and local governments becoming increasingly dependent on capital market have resulted in dilution of pro- poor and pro-migrant thrust in the policies. There has been avowed concern for socioeconomic upliftment of the workers in unorganised sector absorbing the migrants in most countries but not much have come up in term of programmatic interventions to facilitate their absorption in urban centres.

Several provinces and cities in China have started setting up social security schemes for rural migrant labour in urban areas since the early years of the present decade. The coverage under these has however been low - far less than similar schemes for other urban workers (Du and Gao, 2005). Consequently, migrant children generally pay fees several times more than the local children in public schools. In fact, very few local governments have actually implemented the policy of accommodating migrant children in public schools (Liang, 2006). Importantly, the National People’s Congress has passed a law, going into effect in 2008, designed to increase workers’ ability to obtain long-term, stable employment. Chan and Buckingham (2008) however argue that the new conditions for formal entry into the cities under the more “entrepreneurial” approach of local (city) governments have actually reduced the chance of poor migrants getting a *hukou* in cities. Similar programmes in most of the East and SE Asian countries have had limited success due to weak administrative and financial support, particularly due to financial crisis of the late nineties and in recent years.

Summary of Findings and Reflections on the Urbanisation/Migration Experience in Asia: Based on an overview of the theoretical and empirical literature on the subject as also the empirical analysis carried out in the study, one would tend to agree with David Ellerman (1991) that the current policy



perspective happens to be somewhat optimistic regarding the impact of not only international but also internal migration although the policy debate on the relationship between migration/urbanization and development remains „unsettled“. This was the conclusion arrived at also by Sorensen et. al. (2003) analyzing more recent studies on the subject⁶². It is nonetheless a bit surprising that despite the positive assessment of urbanization and migration dynamics at the conceptual and policy level, many of the national, regional and city governments in Asia are pursuing programmes that tend to decelerate immigration as also evict and relocate the existing slums, with predominantly migrant population, into city peripheries.

A large majority of the countries belonging to different geographical regions have recorded deceleration in urban growth and migration in recent years that can not be fully explained in terms of decline in natural growth, definitional or boundary adjustment factors. Exclusionary urban growth, increased unaffordability of urban space and basic amenities for the rural poor and a negative policy perspective leading to greater restrictions on migration are the key determinants. The logic of exclusion have had both internal as well as external manifestation as the countries experiencing deceleration in urban growth in recent years report decline in migration towards urban centres both from within and outside the country.

The impetus of urban growth has shifted from large metropolises, from five million plus cities, to those having population between 1 to 5 million or even less. Despite this downward shift of urban dynamics, a large number of small and medium towns with less than one hundred thousand population report economic stagnation and deceleration in population growth in majority of Asian countries. The emergence of new towns has been far and few, resulting in top heavy urbanization, except in South East Asia

The pattern of interdependencies of the indicators of urbanization/migration with those of economic development suggests that the former have not been determined by the latter to a significant degree and vice versa. The pace of urbanization has been high in several countries in Asia not because of their level of economic growth but its composition and labour intensity of rapidly growing informal sectors. The correlations of urban growth with the level of urbanization, as well as per capita income, value added in manufacturing, foreign direct investment etc. and several other indicators of economic development turn out to be low and statistically insignificant.

Several countries have launched programmes for improving governance and infrastructural facilities in a few large cities, attracting private investors from within as well as outside the country. Land for



them has been made available through the market as also state supported schemes. These have pushed out squatter settlements, informal sector businesses along with a large number of pollutant industries to the city peripheries that have poor quality of micro environment. The income level and quality of basic amenities in these cities, as a result, have gone up but that has been associated with increased intra-city disparity and creation of degenerated periphery. Nonetheless, there is no strong evidence that urbanization is associated with destabilization of agrarian economy, poverty and immiserisation, despite the measures of globalization resulting in regional imbalances. Several of the governments have taken major initiatives to tackle these problems by promoting rural development, creating satellite towns for slowing down RU migration and reducing pressure on infrastructure, particularly in the globalizing cities. These regional development measures, in a sense, have been complementary to the city level interventions that have encouraged only selective migration into central areas and „sanitisation of the cities“. All these questions the proposition that the urban dynamics would shift to Asia in the next few decades, notwithstanding the magnitude of absolute figures of increment due to pure demographic weight of the region. The pace of urbanization would be reasonably high but much below the level projected by UNPD.

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