

Environment

Challenges of urbanisation

by Dr. Rita Afsar

DEMOGRAPHICALLY, THE WORLD now stands at a crossroads. Population estimates by the United Nations (UN, 1998) suggest that just after the turn of the millennium urban dweller will outnumber his or her counterpart in rural areas as the global urban population will double from 2.6 billion in 1995 to 5.1 billion in 2030. By that time three of every five persons in the world will be living in urban areas. What is the urban scenario in Bangladesh at the dawn of the new millennium? It is already well known that Bangladesh is a rapidly urbanising country where the urban base has expanded from 7.6 to nearly 20 per cent between 1970 and 1995. A combination of socio-economic, political and demographic factors are responsible for this. It reflects for instance the redistribution of the rural and urban population. Also the growth in the magnitude of urban economy, change in the scale and nature of economic activity and distribution of income between regions and among classes, demographic transition and change in the scale and nature of governance are likely to be influenced by rapid urbanisation and urban settlement patterns in Bangladesh.

Demographic implication

It is important to realise that the rural share of incremental population showed declining tendency since 1990 and is likely to become negative between 2020 and 2030. By way of contrast, urban share of incremental population increased significantly since the second half of the century and with the dawn of the 3rd millennium, its share is likely to be larger compared to the rural areas. Thus for example, in the year 2000, the urban share of incremental population would be 10 million compared to rural share of 8.6 million. More importantly, whereas urban areas are likely to absorb nearly 50 million incremental population between 2000 and 2030, rural area will not only lose its share of incremental population in each census year, but even in absolute terms, its share of incremental population is estimated at 11 million and is likely to decline from 113 to 112 million between 2020 and 2030. Therefore, the whole question of urbanisation and urban growth deserves serious attention of the planners and policy makers, more so because there is no

explicit policy on urbanisation since the Reorganisation and Decentralisation policy, 1982/83.

Consequences of urbanisation

Apart from the negative consequences of urbanisation such as environmental degradation, pressure on basic services, growing polarisation of rich and poor classes, etc. a global review of rapid urbanisation shows strong positive impacts, which are often overlooked by the planners and policy makers of our country. These are:

- Increase in the size of landholding
- Shortages of labour induces mechanisation
- Reduction in the demand for cereals
- Reduced pressure on land for producing food
- Increased farm incomes and employment from production of non-cereal food
- Generation of employment in economic activities stimulated by urban settlements

All these impacts are meant for rural development, which the well-intentioned unfocused rural development policy could not achieve. From the BIDS panel data on rural households, Rahman et al (1996) found that fertility reduction and out-migration are the major factors for controlling rural population growth and thus improving rural poverty situation between 1988 and 1996. From the author's own study on urban change (Afsar, 1999), she observed that population growth has been consistently high in those cities and towns where there is record of high agricultural growth or expansion of trading, services and/or manufacturing activities. These included the four metropolitan cities and Comilla, Sylhet, Jessore, Dinajpur, Bogra and Narsingdi (Afsar, 1999). By way of contrast, cities that exhibited slow or negative urban growth are the ones, which can be characterised largely by slow agricultural growth. These are Madaripur, Chowmohani, Tangail, Sirajganj, etc (Afsar 1999). They are also located in the flood prone areas. Thus she found a close connection between rapid urbanisation and high agricultural growth, apart from links between expansion of trading and services, and manufacturing activities which are generally found in the literature.

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However, the question arises what are the consequences of urbanisation for urban areas in the context of increasing trend of metropolitanisation and

ers migrate to Dhaka and other metropolitan cities. Lower wage and higher level of poverty in rural than urban areas are the other major reasons for the migration of rural population to urban areas. This can be empirically supported from

and towns, with new roads, hospitals sewers and other infrastructure tending to by-pass the slums. Poverty and lack of access to social services affect levels of earnings, which depends mainly on the human capital content of the worker.

The urban poor generally lack access to basic social services such as, education, health care and family planning. Excepting specialised NGO schools, mainstream schools are generally scarce in slum and squatter settlements and even where they

exist, they are marked by low attendance and high dropout rates. In addition, the urban poor usually have limited access to private or public health care due to high cost of medical attention and drugs, lack of information and physical as well as cultural inaccessibility of modern curative care.

There is a clear polarisation in the distribution of educational infrastructure where schools are generally located in the rich and middle-class dominated areas but there is also a marked divergence in the quality of education acquired by rich and poor students. More importantly there is conspicuous gap in the enrolment rates between slum and non-slum age-cohorts at each and every level. For example, at the primary and secondary levels, more than 90 per cent age cohorts are enrolled from non-slum and it did not change over time. On the contrary, 33 and 56 per cent of the respective age-cohort remain out of school at those levels from slum households (Afsar, 1999). At the higher secondary and degree level, polarisation between slum and non-slum becomes more acute. Among 17-24 years age cohort more than 60 per cent are enrolled from non-slum households at higher secondary and degree level college and university. In the case of slums, this figure comes down to a fraction.

The overall morbidity rate is much higher in slum (56 per cent) than that in non-slum (35 per cent) areas. Poor sanitation condition of slum and squatter settlements that emanates from their locations in low-lying areas surrounded by ditches and stagnant water, inadequate access to safe and running water, lack of access to disposal of solid and human waste and limited access to preventive health care services. However, the threat of health hazard cuts across slum and non-slum boundary in Dhaka city as it disproportionately affects certain age-groups e.g., children, ageing and working age population and women are more vulnerable than other categories. Moreover, majority that is between 50 and 60 per cent of slum and non-slum households identified major disease or sickness as the number one crisis they faced during last 10 years. Death of the major bread-earner and road accidents are the other important health-related crisis that affected both slum and non-slum dwellers alike. Therefore,

health emerges as the priority area for policy intervention.

They are thus trapped in a vicious cycle in which low-income leads to poor education and nutrition and high morbidity, which in turn result in low productivity and low incomes. Considering the paramount importance of developing human capital for sustainable development, the main policy question is how to help the poor to break this vicious cycle. Therefore, instead of restricting NGO-led human development programmes, the government must encourage those activities.

Emphasis should be given to universalise primary education in urban areas bringing girls from slum and squatter settlements of municipalities under the fold of Female Secondary School Scholarship Scheme and start schemes to improve quality of education and credit to finance technical education of low income communities for the development of efficient and high quality human resources. At the root of the widespread morbidity is the problem of environmental sanitation that needs to be taken care of. Lack of effective system of co-ordination between different service giving agencies and inadequate authority and weak capacity of DCC create major impediment to ensure effective delivery of services in an integrated manner. Moreover, areas like sewerage connection, control of environmental pollution, environmental degradation are highly neglected. Physical infrastructure of the city is built on century old systems that are extremely costly to install and maintain and unnecessarily wasteful of water, energy and materials. Over the past 100 years the major advances in science and technology have been adopted to the military and to consumer product, and a number of experiments are made with regard to urban management and resource mobilisation in other developing countries. Extremely limited or none of these experiments are applied to the building and maintenance of the urban infrastructure, urban management and service delivery, and regeneration of the urban environment. In Bangladesh like many others developing countries, internal mindset of outmoded assumptions prevent a clear view of opportunities posed by the new realities and block any creative leap towards urban transformation.

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Haphazard growth: Signifying an uncertain future

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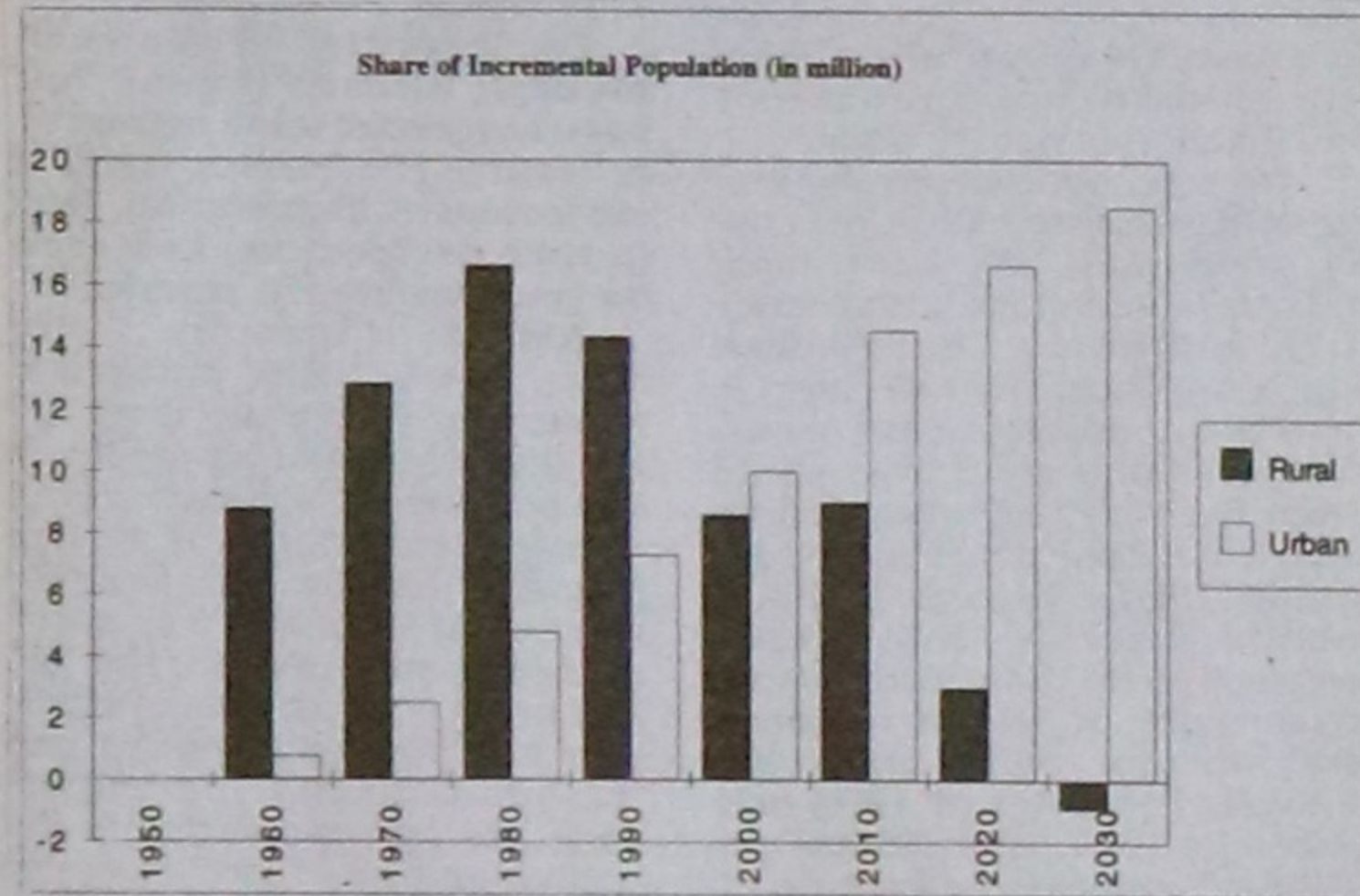


Table						
Year	Population (in million)		Share of incremental popu- lation in million		Percent of the total population	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1950	40.0	1.8	-	-	95.7	4.3
1960	48.8	2.6	8.8	0.8	94.9	5.1
1970	61.6	5.1	12.8	2.5	92.4	7.6/
1980	78.2	9.9	16.6	4.8	88.7	10.3
1990	92.5	17.2	14.3	7.3	84.3	15.7
2000	101.1	27.2	8.6	10.0	78.8	21.2
2010	110.1	41.7	9.0	14.5	72.5	27.5
2020	113.1	58.3	3.0	16.6	66.0	34.0
2030	112.1	76.8	-0.9	18.5	59.4	40.6

Completed from UN (1998) Tables 3 and 4.
Note: - Figure in parentheses is the percentage increase for each decade.



High-rises here and there: Whither comprehensive planning?



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iMac 350 MHz G3
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56k Modem, 6GB disk
storage, slot loading
CD-ROM drive, stereo
speaker by Herman
Kardon, Dual USB ports,
10/100 Mbps Ethernet.

Family Edition DV

iMac 400 MHz G3
Processor 64MB Memory,
56k Modem, 10GB disk
storage, dual 400 Mbps
fireWire ports, video
editing software, slot
loading DVD drive, stereo
speakers by Harman
Kardon, dual USB ports,
10/100 Mbps Ethernet.

Professional Edition DV

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Memory, 56k Modem,
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400Mbps fireWire ports,
video editing software,
slot loading DVD drive,
stereo speakers by
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*Note: Restriction applies