

## Introduction

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The process of urbanisation has been relatively insignificant in the Hindu Kush - Himalaya Region through the ages. The rural sector continues to dominate the economy, primarily due to the geographical remoteness and widely dispersed settlement systems of the area. Inaccessibility has retarded the development of trade, commerce, and contact with the outside world, while rugged topography has ensured the perpetuation of rural subsistence pocket economies. Some interaction between households located in different ecological belts has been continuing, but this exchange has not served as the basis for economic transformation. Low and declining levels of productivity have progressively weakened opportunities for economic reciprocity afforded by ecological characteristics.

The limited number of urban centres that have developed are concentrated in valley areas as a response to a number of socio-economic opportunities. Historically, the availability of productive agricultural land that was easily exploitable and capable of generating surplus was a determining factor. While this was a necessary condition, it has not been a sufficient one. Only when such agriculturally favourable locations were along relatively accessible trade routes, or had other locational advantages relating to the distribution of goods and services, did these areas develop as urban centres. In view of the difficulties of east-west trade along the hills, even this trade stimulus has remained confined to a few places.

During the last century, however, a distinct set of forces have generated the growth of specialised urban centres in the Region. The stimulus for urbanisation has originated from activities promoting the development of cash crops, recreational centres, educational and training institutions, and important pilgrimage sites. More recently, with the commencement of planned development, governments in the Region have been supporting projects and programmes in the hills, providing new impetus to urban growth. Developments in transport, communications, and other infrastructures have revived older centres and led to mushrooming of new settlements adjacent to roads and projects. It is clear that in future, urban centripetal forces will grow stronger, acquiring new significance in the context of developing and diversifying hill economies.

In some of the more economically dynamic areas, urbanisation has been particularly rapid. Lhasa Valley's population increased from 51,000 in 1964 to over 200,000 in 1984 with approximately 50 per cent of the population being

urban residents. The annual growth rate in Srinagar and Kathmandu Valleys has been 3.6 and 4.6 per cent respectively. The population in Thimphu is growing at 5 per cent per annum, while Peshawar has an even higher growth of 8.4 per cent per annum.

Migration has played a significant role in these changes. Many of the important towns in the mountains are still small in comparison with towns in the plains. In view of the unique spatial and environmental characteristics of the mountain areas, the process of future urbanisation in the hills is expected to be based on the proliferation of small towns.

In the overall perspective of integrated mountain development, the growing significance of urbanisation as an increasingly important spatial and economic phenomenon cannot be overstated. The forces of urbanisation can generate strong economic impulses capable of transforming the isolated pockets of subsistence economies in the hills. At the same time, urbanisation can impose heavy burdens upon rural hill economies and environments. In view of the potential linkages and their consequences, planned urbanisation becomes a significant component of strategies for reducing pressures on land in the mountains.

Economic interactions between rural and urban areas have acquired new significance for integrated mountain development. Without careful understanding and planning of these rural-urban interactions, urban development forces will tend to function independently of rural development, leading to urban area pocket development in the hills.

With increased focus of development activities on the commercialisation of agricultural production, improved economic infrastructure, and expansion of domestic manufacturing, the need to strengthen reciprocal links between farm and town activities becomes apparent. The growth of towns invariably develops the proliferation of marketing institutions, and policies are necessary to promote their efficiency. Expansion in urban centres provides a spatial comprehensiveness of markets, infrastructure, and a variety of services that will establish mutually supportive interrelations between agriculture and industry, and between rural and urban producers. A decentralised system of urban and market centres strengthens incentives for specialised farm and off-farm production activities with enhanced productivity.

Apart from important potential socio-economic linkages between rural and urban areas, the environmental dimensions of these interactions have an unusually central role in the Region. Despite the development potential of urban areas, it is becoming very clear that specific environmental burdens and costs, such as deforestation, are associated with urban development, and unless planning can begin addressing these issues of economic and environmental trade-offs, short-term gains can become long-term costs.

The third major dimension is institutional linkages. Complicated by the need to transform a predominantly agrarian mountain economy, effective



rural-urban integration programmes are an extremely difficult task, unlikely to succeed without substantial institutional innovations. These innovations are not only necessary in the fields of planning and implementation, but also in terms of promoting effective interaction between rural and urban households, public and private organisations, and national and international agencies.

The study of planned urbanisation in the context of rural-urban integration in these mountains raises important conceptual and empirical issues. Conceptually, the problem is to develop a methodological framework for an evaluation of the critical functions and linkages and to identify the most appropriate policies. Empirically, these exercises involve generation of significant levels of additional information, as the current data base is weak. As empirical problems are likely to vary from place to place, only some of the broader issues are identified here, in the context of developing the methodological framework.

Depending on the type of linkages being discussed, the suitability of the unit varies, making delineation of the Region a complex exercise. Furthermore, rural-urban linkages tend to be functionally differentiated by the prevailing urban hierarchy, and it is clearly necessary to understand these higher and lower order linkages. This could imply examining different physical and economic units. Reference has already been made to the three types of linkages most relevant in this exercise: socio-economic, environmental and institutional. These subsume a complex network of other linkages of varying significance, which need to be prioritised. In order to do so, a basic understanding of the entire socio-economic, environmental and institutional structure is necessary. Many significant changes are likely to occur in the next decade, with implications for the urban regions as well as the various types of linkages. The timeframe being used is undoubtedly a critical determinant in this exercise. The multiplicity of institutions at the local, regional, and national levels is increasing. Proper understanding of their interrelations and identification of policy implications with regard to new developments in hill towns is important to promote integrated mountain development.