



Urbanization: An Overview of Causes, Effects and Sustainability

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Abstract:

Urbanization is the trend of people moving from rural to urban areas, with over half the world's population now living in cities. It is driven by various factors like job opportunities, better services, and improved infrastructure in urban settings. In the present scenario, rapid urbanization is reshaping human settlements, creating both opportunities and challenges. This research article examines the patterns of urbanization, focusing on its causes, effects, and sustainability. It explores the economic, social, and policy-driven factors driving urban growth and assesses the positive impacts on livelihoods and infrastructure, alongside negative consequences such as environmental degradation and overcrowding. Emphasizing sustainable urban development, the article provides an analysis of current trends and statistics. It concludes with recommendations for policymakers and community participation to promote balanced and sustainable urban growth, ensuring equitable development and environmental preservation. By addressing these critical issues, the study aims to contribute to the discourse on managing urbanization in a manner that benefits both people and the environment.

Keywords: Urbanization, Growth, Livelihood, Environment, Sustainable Development.

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I. Introduction

Urbanization, a pervasive and historic transformation, denotes the gradual shift of populations from rural to urban areas, thereby fueling the growth of cities and towns worldwide. This phenomenon, driven by economic, political, and social factors, has become a hallmark of modern civilization, reshaping landscapes and societies on a global scale. Historically, the evolution of human settlements has seen a progression from scattered hunter-gatherer communities to the aggregation of populations into villages, and ultimately to the emergence of sprawling urban centers. This journey from rural to urban living marks a profound shift in cultural norms, social dynamics, and economic structures. In the contemporary context, urbanization is accelerating at an unprecedented pace, particularly in developing nations like India, China, Indonesia, Nigeria, and the United States. The allure of better economic prospects, improved access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure, alongside the promise of diverse opportunities, draws millions from rural hinterlands to urban metropolises. However, the rapid urban expansion brings forth a myriad of challenges, ranging from environmental degradation and strained resources to social inequalities and inadequate infrastructure. Despite these challenges, urbanization remains inexorable, reshaping the fabric of societies and economies around the globe. By understanding the dynamics of urbanization, we can better navigate its complexities and harness its potential for sustainable development and inclusive growth.

II. Methodology and Objectives

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach and relies solely on secondary sources of data, including articles, books, doctoral thesis, journals, and internet websites.

The main objectives of the study are -

- a) To understand the causes of urbanization.
- b) To analyze the effects of urbanization.
- c) To determine the sustainable measures for urbanization and urban livelihood.
- d) To analyze urbanization dynamics in India and world statistics.

III. Causes of Urbanization

Industrial Growth: Industrial growth is a major course of urbanization. The industrial revolution has prompted a shift from agriculture to non-agricultural jobs, driving urbanization as people migrate for better employment opportunities, thus fostering economic development. Moving from traditional to industrial development has created more jobs, allowing people to work in modern industrial sectors of the economy.

Employment Opportunities: Many job opportunities in urban areas attract rural residents seeking better livelihoods. This migration is driven by well-paying jobs in sectors like public health, education, transport, sports, recreation, and business. Urban areas offer higher value-added jobs, both in services and industries, creating more employment opportunities.

Rural to Urban Migration: Push factors such as inadequate amenities and government presence in rural areas prompt this migration, while cities offer employment, education, healthcare, and improved infrastructure, attracting rural residents. Urban areas also provide better housing, road networks, and market access. Amenities like electricity and street lights further incentivize migration, while environmental changes and rural livelihood pressures also contribute to rural-to-urban migration.

Commercialization: Trade plays a crucial role in urbanization, with various types of commerce driving the growth of towns and cities. Modern marketing institutions and exchange methods have evolved, facilitating the distribution of goods and services and boosting commercial transactions. This perception is widespread: people believe that commercialization and trade in urban areas offer better opportunities and returns compared to rural areas.

Modernization and lifestyle: The modernization of society and the evolution of lifestyles are key drivers of urbanization. Cities are becoming hubs of advanced technology, communication, medical care, and social amenities, drawing people seeking improved living standards. This influx of migrants fuels the rapid growth of urban areas day by day.

Improved Transportation and Communication: Improvements in transport and communication, such as the development of infrastructure and better connectivity between rural and urban areas, have accelerated population migration. With more roads and enhanced communication, people find it easier to move from rural to urban areas, attracted by the multitude of job opportunities. Additionally, the expansion of rail communication in underdeveloped regions further encourages population migration to towns, cities, and metropolises.

Social Factor: Cities and towns offer many social benefits like better education, sanitation, housing, healthcare, and recreation. This attracts people looking for improved living standards and a wider range of services not found in rural areas, prompting more migration into urban areas.

Political turmoil: In developing areas, war, civil unrest, and political disorder can create instability and danger, prompting people to seek safer places in urban areas to live.

Growth of service centre: As cities expand, living standards improve, and trade flourishes. Services such as retail, entertainment, banking, and administration become concentrated in urban areas, attracting more people and driving further urban growth.

Market force: The rise of consumer goods industries driven by market forces boosts the importance of market-oriented locations. Towns, with their large ready-made markets, attract new manufacturing industries. This influx of industries and labor expands the potential market, setting off a snowball effect that fuels self-sustaining urban growth.

IV. Effect of Urbanization

Positive effects: Urbanization has numerous positive impacts, including improved access to healthcare and education, enhanced communication facilities, and more effective administration. Urban areas offer a greater array of employment opportunities, which contribute to higher living standards through increased job availability, advanced technology, and superior infrastructure. Enhanced transportation and communication networks in cities further elevate living conditions. Moreover, urban centers provide a broader range of services compared to rural areas, such as extensive public transportation, efficient water and sewage systems, well-equipped educational institutions, recreational facilities, and comprehensive healthcare centers. Urbanization also brings access to diverse market and entertainment options, with numerous shopping malls, retail stores, and cultural activities enriching the urban experience. However, the dominance of large commercial chains can pose challenges for small businesses. Modern infrastructure development in cities significantly improves the overall quality of life, making urban areas highly desirable for living and working. This diverse enhancement of living standards highlights the substantial benefits of urbanization in fostering economic growth, social development, and improved quality of life.

Negative effects:

Environmental Issues: Urbanization poses significant environmental challenges. With rapid urban growth and expansion of cities, there's increased pollution from construction sites, industries, transportation and waste. This leads to air and water contamination, habitat destruction and resource depletion.

Global Warming: Urbanization exacerbates global warming through heat retention, increased energy usage, deforestation, transportation emissions, and inadequate waste management. As cities expand, they trap heat, demand more energy, emit greenhouse gases, and contribute to deforestation. Urban transportation emits pollutants, while improper waste management releases methane.

Overpopulation: In big cities, a huge number of people live in a very small space causing consistent congestion in urban areas. Problem of over-population is increasing day by day as a large number of people and immigrants move into cities and towns in search of better life. People from rural or undeveloped areas always have the urge of migrating into city that normally leads to congestion of people within a small area.

Housing problem: Urbanization poses significant challenges in providing healthy housing, leading to serious housing problems and the growth of urban slums in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Ahmedabad. Ricard Arnott highlights that unauthorized and squatter housing is notably high in low- and lower-middle-income countries, which struggle to provide adequate housing for rural-to-urban migrants.

Slum and its consequences: When cities grow too fast, they struggle to accommodate everyone, leading to slums forming on the outskirts. These areas have lots of issues because people settle there without permission.

Unemployment: The government faces a daunting task in generating employment for the expanding urban populace, compounded by the prevalence of informal sector engagement, contributing to underemployment and impoverished living conditions among urban dwellers.

Rising criminal activities: Large cities face rising crime due to issues like poverty, overcrowding, and lack of resources. Social problems like vandalism and drug abuse are common, with crimes such as murder and robbery being more frequent in urban areas. Some criminals receive protection from politicians and the elite, even reaching high political positions through money and influence.

Traffic congestion: Urbanization brings more people to cities, leading to reliance on cars for commuting, causing traffic jams and pollution. Suburbs contribute to this by increasing vehicle use. As cities expand, traffic congestion worsens, especially during rush hours, due to people driving to work and market access.

Scarcity of water: Many cities worldwide face water scarcity, with residents often receiving inadequate water from municipal sources, sometimes for less than half an hour every other day. During dry summers, the scarcity worsens, leaving people in need. Some small towns lack a main water supply, relying on individual tube wells, household wells, or nearby rivers.

Insufficient Sanitation: Rapid urban population growth often leads to insufficient sewage facilities, causing sewage to flow into nearby water bodies. This poor sanitation triggers the spread of diseases like typhoid, dysentery, and diarrhea, resulting in suffering and deaths. Overcrowding exacerbates water scarcity issues as demand exceeds supply.

Health problem: Urbanization brings easier access to healthcare services and information, improving emergency care and public health awareness. However, it also exposes people to poor living conditions, contaminated water, and air pollution, leading to increased risks of infectious diseases and respiratory issues, especially among vulnerable populations like children and the elderly.

Problem of garbage: Urban solid waste includes building materials, plastics, hospital waste, and kitchen waste. It's often dumped in public areas, creating a foul smell and contaminating the air. Hospital waste isn't properly covered during transport. Urban sewage lacks proper disposal methods.

Pollution: As cities expand, they produce more pollution: air gets dirtier from increased traffic and industry, water becomes contaminated with untreated waste, land suffers from improper waste disposal, noise levels rise due to more activity, and excessive artificial light disrupts natural rhythms. This pollution harms both people and the environment.

V. Sustainable urban development:

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainable development as a process aimed at enhancing human life while preserving resources for future generations, emphasizing both ecological and economic stability over time. Sustainable urban development, as outlined by the UN Conference on Human Settlements (UNCHS), focuses on creating cities where social, economic, and physical development endure, prioritizing lasting access to natural resources and protection from environmental risks. Urban areas play a significant role in GDP contribution and offer various benefits such as education, healthcare, and innovation. Achieving sustainable urban development requires ensuring constant or increasing returns to scale, guaranteeing minimum living standards, fostering enterprise and equity, promoting self-reliance, and encouraging diverse participation. The Agenda 21 of WCED outlines key actions for sustainable human settlement development, including providing adequate shelter, improving infrastructure, promoting sustainable land use, and enhancing disaster management.

Moreover, the theory of urban sustainable development addresses key concerns such as environmental pollution prevention, promoting recycling, and reducing socioeconomic disparities, emphasizing democratic principles and advocating for government support in creating sustainable urban environments. Central to this

approach is the recognition that natural resources cannot be replaced solely by technology. To achieve sustainable cities, social equality, community cohesion, and family support must be fostered, alongside strategic urban planning and cultural development. Efficient urban policies, citizen rights, education, and continuous evaluation of urban management systems are essential. Additionally, environmental considerations play a crucial role in ensuring the long-term viability of urban development.

VI. Urbanization in India:

India's journey of urbanization throughout the 20th century stands as a testament to its profound impact on every facet of national life. As the world's second most populous country, India's urbanization has far-reaching regional and global implications. From 1901 to 2001, the urban population surged from 2.58 crores to 28.53 crores, showcasing a significant demographic shift. However, this transition wasn't without hurdles. Conflicts with China and Pakistan in the 1960s, coupled with economic recessions and droughts, slowed industrial progress and urban migration. Despite these challenges, India witnessed a notable uptick in urban population growth, soaring from 26 million in 1901 to a staggering 285 million by 1991.

State-level disparities in urbanization are pronounced, with Goa leading as the most urbanized state, followed closely by Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra. Notably, southern, western, and northeastern states exhibit higher levels of urbanization compared to their northern and central counterparts. Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh emerge as major urban hubs, hosting a significant portion of the country's urban populace.

In 2001, India reached a crucial milestone with 285 million urban residents out of a total population of 1.027 billion, highlighting the accelerating pace of urbanization. However, despite this rapid urban growth, the urban population remains just a fraction of the total, indicating the persistent dominance of rural life. This demographic landscape underscores the complexities and opportunities inherent in India's ongoing urbanization journey.

VII. Urbanization Statistics

Over half of the world's population now lives in cities, a significant increase from just 30% in 1950. By 2050, it's estimated that nearly 70% will be urban dwellers. Currently, Northern America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and Oceania are the most urbanized regions, while Asia's urbanization rate is around 50%. Africa remains predominantly rural, with only 43% living in urban areas. Urban populations have surged from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion in 2018, with Asia hosting over half of them. This growth is fueled by both population increase and rising living standards, expected to add 2.5 billion urbanites by 2050, mostly in Asia and Africa.

VIII. Conclusion and recommendations

The world's population is growing quickly, with governments often focusing on developing cities. This focus leads to people moving from rural areas to urban ones because cities offer better amenities and job opportunities. However, this migration causes overcrowding, traffic, and other problems in cities. Sometimes, rural areas become big cities due to industrialization or government investment. Urbanization brings challenges like crime, pollution, and high living costs. Solutions include creating jobs and making policies that support rural areas. Here are some measures to be taken for urban sustainability- i. Better resources management and City planning ii. Create employment opportunities iii. Efficient Government policy iv. Sustainable use of urban resources v. Automation improvement in public transportation vi. Community participation etc. Here, it becomes imperative for policymakers, urban planners, and communities to adopt holistic approaches that prioritize sustainable development, equitable access to resources, and resilient infrastructure. Embracing innovative solutions, such as smart urban design, green technologies, and community-driven initiatives, can mitigate the negative impacts of rapid urbanization while fostering inclusive growth and enhancing the quality of life for all urban residents.

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