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Editorial

The urbanising effect

Reza Ali, the urban planner, has conducted a path-breaking research and published the findings of that research in a paper titled “Estimating Urbanization”. The paper that was published in the Political Economy pages of *The News on Sunday* three weeks back, does something startling in the context of Pakistan. Of course he and his team waited a few years to see if a new census was conducted. Thinking that as an improbability, he relied on the data from 1998 census because all he wanted was to get a sense “of the magnitude and trends of the urbanization phenomenon and map these accurately across the geographical space of Pakistan.”

To begin with, his paper states that the categorisation of urban and rural is inadequate and imprecise. Unlike the previous method, in this work he defines both urban and rural. There seems no reason, he says, to segment the population into just these two categories: therefore he brings in the concept of an ‘urbanising’ area or areas in transition, which do not fall in either rural or urban definitions.

According to this new categorization, all of Balochistan except Quetta, large parts of Sindh, KPK, and the Seraiki sub-province in Punjab are rural.

Of course that is not where the research stops. It goes on to shatter various myths, including the dominance of both the ‘rural first’ lobby as well as those that sell ‘cities as the engines of growth’. But such an impressive research must lead to policy implications that should benefit the people of this country in terms of resource allocation and reducing inequality. In today’s Special Report, besides asking Reza Ali himself of what he makes out of this research, we have asked a different set of economists, academics and planners of what kind of impact it is going to make in the months and years to come.

As for Reza Ali himself, with the social, economic and political inequalities being at the level that they are in Pakistan, the question worth asking is not “Can Pakistan survive?” It could well be “Should Pakistan survive?” This indeed is a tough question for us as a nation and as individuals.

DEBATE

Urban sense

Pakistan is a rural and agricultural country and that it is feudal are faulty assertions once you have read Reza Ali's two articles

S. Akbar Zaidi

In early August, in an article entitled, "The Urban Present", I discussed the work of Reza Ali, an urban planner and researcher from Lahore, who wrote a path-breaking article in 1999, called "How urban is Pakistan?", in which he argued that perhaps half of Pakistan was 'urban'. The short newspaper article led to much debate and discussion in academic circles and the impression many of us had of Pakistan being urban then, was backed up by very thorough research provided by him.

In many ways, it was a definitive essay which fundamentally changed how the urban/rural divide is seen by scholars in Pakistan. He has followed up with his previous detailed research and published a follow-up article in *The News on Sunday* entitled, "Estimating Urbanisation", and makes an even stronger case for ending the debate, once and for all, that Pakistan is predominantly a rural country.

His argument is based on many key points. Firstly, definitions matter. On the one hand, 'rural' and 'urban' seem clear terms with contrasting images: isolated farms, tiny hamlets, cultivated fields, villages, versus the thriving city, skyscrapers and slums. This many have been a simple way of defining 'urban' and 'rural' some centuries or even decades ago; this dichotomy is comfortable but imprecise, over-simplified.

It is no longer a single homogenous activity, but is multi-functional and diverse. The urban/rural divide appears as a gradient, rather than a dichotomy. There does not appear to be a natural dividing line or break point between rural and urban areas any more. Many social, cultural, economic and environmental issues are inadequately addressed by current approaches separating 'rural' and 'urban' agendas. Behaviour and conditions change drastically along the gradient, but there seem no compelling reason to segment into just these two categories.

Reza Ali makes the argument that there is no reason to restrict analysis to just these two categories – urban and rural – and one can introduce the concept of an 'urbanising area', which is an area that does not meet the criteria of an urbanised area as we defined, yet, it has both an urban core and an overall density higher than that for a rural area. Thus, it's clearly not rural, but, it has not urbanised yet, hence the term 'urbanising'.

The population which has physically not moved to the cities has adopted urbanism as a way of life, reflected in changing pattern of consumption and use of services. The cumulative effect of this has been intense urbanisation, city populations are much higher than what official data is prepared to reflect, and there is a connectivity and integration of services and manufacturing access across city boundaries.

This redefinition and remapping of the urban and the rural has made Reza Ali argue that Pakistan is evolving a system of cities, and developing urban regions – connecting, linking, integrating trade, services, manufacturing and the work force – within city core and suburbs, peri-urban areas, satellites, small towns and neighbouring villages, causing the co-movement of urbanisation and informality, a phenomenon seen in many other global cities.

What Reza Ali's articles do is that they lay out the fact and nature of urbanisation and of the urban, they do not traverse into the direction of what this means. That is left to the reader.

Clearly, one must attempt to make something of this information and interpret it in order to give further value to his work.

There are numerous outcomes and consequences from his research which are fairly obvious. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, there is not just an urgent need for a census, which is five years over due to be undertaken, but when the new census takes place, there is a need to critically rethink definitions and categories of the urban and the rural. As Reza Ali shows, definitions matter fundamentally to how we map a population, hence, there is a need to be able to capture the nature of population dispersal spatially in a way that it would make some real sense, for whatever purpose it is meant to serve.

Government budgets, policies, and plans would need to accommodate the real reality which exists, rather than some mythical ideas of rural villages and villagers, most of whom now live in cities or live in areas designated as 'rural' but dependent on non-agricultural incomes.

This would also mean that electoral boundaries need a sharp remapping as well, as do administrative units, having implications for, especially, local government. There is no way any of the provincial governments can go back to Ziaul Haq's local bodies system with a dividing line between urban and rural.

What is required is a continuum in how units are designed, reflecting how the population lives and the nature of services they require. Ironically, Musharraf's district government system is a better reflection of the spatial layout than the other systems dividing urban and rural and although it needs to be considerably reformed, it does reflect reality more than other options being proposed.

Having taught Pakistan's economics for three decades, the most frustrating set of statements which students repeat ad nauseam, through no fault of their own since the government and others only confirm them, are the following: Pakistan is a rural country, Pakistan is an agricultural country, and that Pakistan is 'feudal'. Anyone who reads Reza Ali's two articles would desist from making such nonsensical statements once and for all.

The writer is a political economist

IMPLICATIONS

Defying common notions

From understanding the urbanisation process to estimation, policy makers now have a firmer basis to re-examine their biases

Dr Pervez Tahir and Babar Mumtaz

For some five decades, development planners in Pakistan looked at rural and urban areas as if the two had to be protected from each other. Nearly all rural development programmes, from the rural works programmes of the sixties to the Parliamentarian's and local bodies' programmes of later years, stated the containment of rural to urban migration as a key objective. The migrants only added slums to the cities and were a source of congestion. Urban development worried about slum clearance and decongestion.

In effect, these programmes were an addendum to the overall strategy of development, designed to cater to the rural and urban lobbyists. Regardless, the overall strategy was based on industrialisation and structural change by increasing the share of manufacturing in the national output. In 2000s, devolved local governance did away with the administratively defined urban-rural divide. But the divide has returned in the present decade, not only in local governance, but also in the thinking of planners.

Limiting the 'urban' to cities as engines of growth, the 2011 Framework for Economic Growth included them in its count of four pillars. More recently, there is a shift from engines to drivers. Vision 2025, the latest arrival on the scene, has eleven 21st Century Drivers of Growth. Cities are not among them. Where the action lies after the 18th Amendment, the provincial planning documents continue to talk of cities as engines of growth.

Underlying the rural-urban dichotomy is the failure to look at urbanisation as a process. No city is an island. Research based on the results of the last census in 1998 showed that the urban population is more likely to be over 40 per cent of the total instead of the 32 per cent in the census.

By far, the most important research programme has been pioneered by Reza Ali since 1999. Taking note of the changed definition of 'urban' in the last two censuses, he brought into sharp focus the cumulative effect of the urbanisation process that was underway. Recently, this programme has moved from understanding the urbanisation process to estimation. Taken together, the results now provide policy makers with a firmer basis to re-examine their 'biases' and 'tilts' to consider a realistic framework.

In the 1970s, Lipton and Bates led the chorus about an urban bias in development policies and plans, nurtured by pressures from organised urban groups to promote their interests. They provided intellectual sustenance to the neo-liberal advocacy of agricultural exports. Nolan and White (1984) pointed out in the Chinese context the complexity of rural-urban realities and the presence of "state bias". What is dubbed "new" economic geography focused on the rising spatial inter-dependence. Duranton (2009) stressed on "broadening the focus from within city to between cities by reducing obstacles to reallocation across cities".

As noted earlier, an important implication of the 'rural bias' has been (other than suggesting that cities are intrinsically evil and, therefore, bad) to try to stop the outflow of people by directing investment to rural areas. We need to recognise the symbiotic relationship between the rural areas and cities, and to clarify our ideas regarding development.

A society engaged in subsistence agriculture is unlikely to develop surpluses unless there is demand for them. It is not agricultural surpluses that sustain cities, but the reverse. What would be the possible point of a surplus if everyone were engaged in agriculture? As

agriculture becomes more efficient, fewer workers are required. Surplus workers must look to non-agricultural activities for their survival. Studies show that less than 30 per cent of the future growth of rural population can be absorbed in the agricultural sector.

There is nothing to support the notion that cities have become too big, as if there were an ideal size for them. All available evidence suggests that urban size and efficiency are not mutually related. By suggesting that investing in rural areas should have priority, development funds allocation has been misdirected away from urban areas where the same investment, better managed, would have produced better results for the benefit of the poor and the deprived.

A partial adoption of Euro-centric settlement patterns has also been inimical to development, based as these are on concepts that assume a flat, feature-less plain with settlements achieving a hierarchy determined by spatial placing and distance. Consequently, rural development resources are located in “central places”, such as would ensure equi-access to the population living around them.

A significant concentration of population in recent years has been what Reza Ali calls “ribbon development”. Urban areas are not merely those that fall within given administrative boundaries, but include the “urbanising” populations that line either side of the radial inter-city roads. To ignore these phenomena and direct health, education, and other social investments primarily to rural areas is ill advised.

Being urban is not merely a physical fact; it is also, and perhaps more importantly, a state of mind. It is in this respect that we particularly underestimate the importance of our urban population. Access to urban facilities, and in particular information, is dictated by access to transport and communications. Increasingly, this means that those living along inter-city highways are far more urbanised than those in more “central” places.

Currently, we have been ignoring these ribbon settlements in favour of central places, and directing our resources accordingly. Our national planners justify this by assuming that stopping the flow of internal migration to the major urban areas and redirecting it to secondary cities is somehow more desirable. The reality is that despite official exhortations and monetary concessions, the majority of our teachers and doctors do not want to live and work in the secondary cities.

To conclude: increased urbanisation is not a threat; it is perhaps the only glimmer of hope that we, as agriculture-dominated economy, have.

Secondly, an inadequately understood spatial development policy will waste scarce resources, committing them to areas that do not correspond to the real needs, demands and expectations of our people.

Thirdly, attributing urban problems merely to their size and magnitude is misleading and blurs the overall perspective for national planning, development and priorities in the matter of allocation of resources.

Fourthly, by implying that urbanisation is somehow excessively rapid and chaotic allows urban managers to hide their own inadequacies instead of forcing them to take a realistic approach that is inclusive, participatory and decentralised, and far less bureaucratic, patronising, reactive and restrictive.

Finally, we are not arguing against the development of agriculture. Nor are we saying that cities are necessarily the engines of growth. We are merely warning against the simplistic notions of the ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ in matters of resource allocation.

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INTERVIEW

“Out of the petty rural-urban squabble, the real, tough question is that of inequality”

Reza Ali is a distinguished researcher based in Lahore. He is known for his much-discussed article, 'How Urban is Pakistan?' His recent article, 'Estimating Urbanization', which appeared in this section of the newspaper recently, challenges the notion that Pakistan is predominantly a rural country by redefining categorisations and bringing in a new category of areas that are 'urbanising' or areas in transition. But this is only one part of his research. TNS sat with him to discuss the research and its possible implications.
By Farah Zia



TNS: *In your paper, Estimating Urbanization, you have concluded that the categorization of rural and urban is inadequate and imprecise. To begin with, just give us a sense of the process of arriving at a definition, what constitutes a better definition, and is one country's definition good for the other.*

Reza Ali: The categorization of the rural and the urban is deeply ingrained: be it our vernacular socio-cultural idiom, our folk cosmology, our literature and poetry, 'putli-ka-tamashas' (puppetry), theatre and cinema, the 'sheri-babu' a'la Dilip Kumar or the Sharif-Singh 'dehati-aurat', we have a good, seemingly clear idea of what we imply when we speak of the 'urban' or the 'rural'.

You of course are referring to the discussion in 'Estimating Urbanization' where the concern is with measurable, verifiable indicators. You see the census defines 'urban', and then proceeds to classify as rural everything other than what they term urban. In Pakistan, the definition of urban used since 1861 included all municipalities, civil lines, cantonments, and every other continuous settlement of at least 5,000 persons that the census commissioner decided "to treat as urban for census purposes". The 1981 census adopted an administrative definition treating as urban only the population within the boundaries of what were towns, municipalities or cantonments. G. M. Arif Sahib has estimated that considering the population of 361 places of over 5,000 population and urban characteristics better than many places administratively classified as urban, adds 6.5 per cent to the urban population of the country - this means that almost 40 per cent of Pakistan's 1998 population was urban.

So there are the varying definitions, and the definition changes, that complicate comparisons over time; this should not be interpreted to mean that national definitions are flawed, but that they distort inter-country comparisons. Further that in many instances, the implied urban/rural dichotomy is inadequate to reflect the degree of agglomeration.

TNS: *Tell us about your methodology and the data. If you have relied on the 1998 census, how much of what you are saying now is relevant and useful because this data may have changed tremendously.*

Reza Ali: We began working on our Urbanization Research Program when the results of the 1981 census were published and our early work was based on the 1981 data. Once the preliminary results of the 1998 census were released, we began a detailed analysis of the urban census results over the entire century, 1901 to 1998. In the course of this work we produced a compilation of 100 year census data; published an urban places map and data sheet based on the 1998 census; carried out field research - of course given the fact that as our entire work is self-financed, we have resource constraints; conducted a study of the effects of the migration at Independence on our settlement pattern; and in 2011, we presented our work on rurality, '*Pakistan the Rural*'. Earlier this summer we made a presentation '*Pakistan - an emerging spatial geography*'.

You ask about our use of the 1998 census data, which is the latest data available, and how relevant it would be today - our purpose is to provide an understanding of the nature of the urbanization process, using the latest numbers as an indication of the magnitude and trends of the urbanization phenomenon and map these accurately across the geographical space of Pakistan. This provides a good basis for future analysis and change, once, and if, a new census is taken.

TNS: *You have brought in an additional category of urbanizing areas. Please explain what is that? Isn't there a need to redefine the rural instead of calling it urbanizing?*

Reza Ali: The census defines only the urban, classifying all the rest as rural. In our work, we define *both*, urban and rural, on the basis of measurable indicators of population density, urban core and proximity to city, rather than administrative definitions. The approach was proposed by Uchida and Nelson, based on earlier work by Chomitz, Buys and Thomas, and used in the World Bank's World Development Report 2009. This allows us to adequately capture human settlement concentration. We have adopted significantly higher thresholds for the urban than those used in the earlier work; thus we classify all of Balochistan except Quetta, large parts of Sindh, Pakthunkwa, and the Seraiki sub-province in Punjab as rural.

The framework leaves a gap between what we are considering rural areas and urban areas. As we show, the categorisation of rural and urban appears inadequate and imprecise and there does not appear to be a natural dividing line or break point between the two: *the urban/rural divide appears as a gradient, rather than a dichotomy* - life changes in a variety of dimensions along the urban-rural route: from fields and intensive cultivation, villages and small market towns, to larger towns, small cities and the cosmopolitan city and is not a single homogenous activity - it is multi-functional and diverse. There seems no compelling reason to segment them into just *these two* categories.

We introduce the concept of an '*urbanising*' area for areas which clearly are *not* rural since they have both an urban core and an overall density higher than the criteria we are using to classify the rural but do not achieve our criteria for urban areas - they could be considered in *transition*.

TNS: *How does this new categorization help in matter of policy; you have mentioned certain areas like poverty, politics, gender, development, empowerment, governance, marginality etc?*

Reza Ali: I am merely a researcher and must not venture into the realm of policy. But obviously it does have implications, some rather of a fundamental nature.

On the one hand there is the 'rural first' lobby where *zamindars* lobby for subsidies on agricultural inputs - water, tubewells, energy, fertilizers, and more justifiably, investment in rural areas, which is fine as people live in these areas and are entitled to services, facilities and the benefits of development; this lobby resonated well with the bureaucracy and the traditional political masters.

On the other hand, there is the power of new money, and its hand-maiden, the middle class and the chattering crowd, concentrated in large cities. They provide the steam for the engines of growth that cities are supposed to be - so, we are told cities is where the investment must go, policy must focus on - the pendulum is now to swing in the other direction, everything must happen in the cities. Once again, realistically speaking, not only do people of the cities deserve services, but also that cities are the easiest to provide with infrastructure and services, there are large economies of scale. The provision of municipal services, transport, electricity and communication are the easiest in cities and I dare say, if you can't do it in cities, then you really don't have it in you to do it anywhere else either. Every rupee spent in the city benefits much more people than it would in rural areas.

We cannot take the need for rural development to the level of a religion in itself, nor preach the mythology of cities as engines of growth to the exclusion of everything else.

Cropping and livestock directly account for a little less than a quarter of our GDP, directly employ 40% of the work force in addition to those in the supply chain, transport, etc.; agricultural exports constitute more than 11% of the total and downstream industries, textiles, others, add another 40%. Yes, agriculture's share is down from almost 46% in 1960, but really it's not just the large cities that sustain the economy of Pakistan. Actually, the rural areas *do* provide the resilience to our economy and our ability to bounce back after every natural and man-made disaster that we have faced can *largely* be attributed to it.

TNS: *So is that the problem with the thesis "cities are the engines of growth"?*

Reza Ali: Personally I feel it's looking at things in black and white, that's the undoing. There's a lot that is grey - the *exclusive* focus on large cities or on rural areas misses out on the rural towns and the other cities. I don't want to be dragged into policy for we have so, so, so many experts for that. Research does bring out the critical role of these, both as an interface and anchor for rural prosperity and balanced regional growth.

TNS: *It seems as if this is not a Pakistan-specific issue. The discussion everywhere around the globe is on urbanization. Is there an assumption that ultimately the entire world is going to urbanize?*

Reza Ali: Well, it is also said that the cropping and livestock requirement of the world can be produced in very small space while cities constitute not more than 1% of the land surface of the entire world. In the US, a vast space, more than 70 per cent of its population lives in and around cities and so it is in Europe.

India is different. Academics now insist that in 'shining India' a certain class glitters in the largely urban based 'rise' of India. About 80% of India's billion and a quarter people live in settlements of 200,000 or less and they are not in the high-skilled businesses that make India to be a dominant economic player that it is today. Yes no doubt there is some trickle-down to the otherwise less fortunate but still the India of the 85% is different from the shining India of the 15% who glitter. So *growth* is necessary to shine, but something more seems essential for *all* to bask in it.

Our own work on spatial geography of Pakistan shows that inequalities across space appear to be increasing - especially when you look at rural areas or what we call underdeveloped areas or less fortunate areas - and when these happen to be the whole of Balochistan, the Seraiki sub-province and large parts of Sindh and Pakthunkwa.

TNS: *How much of government intervention is involved in this urbanizing phenomenon that you are talking about?*

Reza Ali: Once again, you want to drag me into policy! From what I understand, without government, nothing happens. To me, the way our large-scale private sector is organized, be it manufacturing, trade or services, it feeds off the public sector. In any case, municipal works will remain a public sector activity, so will development of most infrastructure.

TNS: *You had talked about the lack of debate regarding inequality? And aren't policies supposed to be made after a lot of debate?*

Reza Ali: Yes, there is debate and there is debate. We had a debate on inter-provincial inequality and the kind of academic work that was done then has in my view not been produced since; but "all debate, no change" stoked the political fires that led to Bangladesh. Policies are being made all the time: okay, forget about policy, let's say action is being taken all the time and we don't wait for consensus to develop. For instance, in reducing tax rates for the rich, an action has been taken, without a debate; we give rebates to industries, whatever the reason, good or bad, we don't wait for consensus, nor do we seek any. Academics stay engaged in debates, as they must, but shouldn't there be action regarding inequality? In any case, inequality is not about a policy, it's a matter of basic principle.

When we get out of the petty rural-urban squabble, and such others, the real, tough, question awaits us - that of inequality - sub-national, sub-provincial, regional - a reflection of the social, economic and political inequalities in Pakistan. Personally I believe we are past the question posed in the sub-title of Tariq Ali's book "Can Pakistan survive?" In the wake of increasing inequality between people, between households and between regions, and the general apathy towards it, the lack of debate on it, the question that suggests itself could well be 'should Pakistan survive?' Should a people so apathetic to inequality survive - as a nation, community, family, even as individuals.

Impact on inequality

Pakistan's urbanisation needs to be looked at from a fresh perspective

Dr Nadia Tahir

Pakistan is increasingly an urban country. According to the latest Economic Survey, Pakistan is almost 38 per cent urban in 2013, with projections of 50 per cent by 2030. Reza Ali is challenging this story. Official figures seem to hide more than explain Pakistan's true urban picture by dividing the country into water-tight rural and urban areas.

Ali provides the missing link by introducing the concept of 'urbanising', defined as areas which clearly are not rural and have an overall higher population density and proximity to an urban core. In other words, it is an area in transition.

Based on this new concept, lumping together urbanising and urban areas gives a different picture. Pakistan was almost 47 per cent urban in 1998 on the basis of his estimates and, most certainly, much more now. Our own preliminary projection, based on Reza Ali's initial estimate and assuming the same growth rate as implied in official projections, is that the urban population will be around 70 per cent of the total population by 2030.

Another dimension of his estimates is that official numbers are overestimating urban population in Sindh and Balochistan and understating in case of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkwa. It is Reza Ali's contribution which makes us think that urbanisation process is of varying degrees and intensity across Pakistan. Further, it is not appropriate to divide the country in urban and rural boxes. There are suburban areas which may be considered urban on the basis of population density and proximity but enjoying fewer urban facilities and opportunities as in an urban core.

Looking at urbanisation as a process has implications for the way we look at inequality. There is a significant and positive relationship between "social goods" and equality. In this case, equality is not same income but relative access to social goods, which appears in income, wealth, and status.

A person or society can benefit at the expense of others and seize the opportunity of growth. It may emerge from natural and moral differences. Differences in wealth, power, status or class are moral inequalities. Differences in physical and mental abilities, age, health, strength and intelligence are all physical inequalities. Fair access to health and education create a more productive, just and enabling society.

By way of common observation that people move to urban residence because they think there is better access to civic amenities. They also perceive to be treated more justly and feel more equal in terms of economic, social and political rights.

Urbanisation has been advocated on the parameters of equality. Here equality means equal worth of all citizens. An equal society is a just society where no one can influence resource allocation and the right of equal citizenship. It does not necessarily require equality in income. According to John Rawls, an American Philosopher (1921-2002), inequality creates unequal access to the political system and to positions of power. In this way, extreme inequality undermines democracy. Inequalities are socially undesirable because it causes inequalities of opportunities. In 1955, Simon Kuznet, a Russian-American economist (1901-1985) focused on the process of "urbanisation which is followed by industrialisation" as a means to achieve equality of opportunity. But it entailed relatively higher productivity as well as inequality due to the social structure.

The “divergence” hypothesis explains the spatial distribution of economic development in which individual pursuit of self-interest increases income inequalities that can generate all types of health and social problems because of rent-seeking, corruption and expropriation. Urbanisation and inequalities go hand in hand. The Gini coefficient, the simplest measure of inequality, was 0.35 in urban areas and 0.25 in rural areas in 2005-06. Rural population is, thus, less unequal in Pakistan. But this tells only half of the story. First, we are discussing inequality only in terms of consumption expenditure and not considering moral inequality in Pakistan.

Secondly, by underestimating urban population we are understating the extent of inequality. Thirdly, a more powerful indicator of rural inequality is the trend of concentration of land ownership. The Gini in this regard, has been rising, leading to increasing landlessness.

Pakistan is increasingly an unequal society. Low-ranking in terms of Human Development Index and failure to achieve MDGs are pointers in this direction. Another way is to look at the effect of government action in education and health in urbanising areas. A specific example is net primary enrolment rate and full immunisation in four provinces of Pakistan.

In the rapidly urbanising area, which is Punjab and KPK, the demand for full immunisation as a social outcome is higher as compared to Sindh and Balochistan. It is understandable for Balochistan but not for Sindh as it has the second largest urban population. Net primary enrolment follows roughly the same trend.

Pakistan’s urbanisation needs to be looked at from a fresh perspective. It has far-going implications for what we know about inequality in its multifarious dimensions.

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Close to ground realities

Some practical suggestions for the estimation of the degree of urbanisation in Pakistan

G. M. Arif

Although no consensus has yet emerged about the degree of urbanisation in Pakistan, there is a growing agreement among social scientists that the use of administrative criterion to define the term 'urban' has led to an underestimation of urbanisation. The recent article of Reza Ali, 'Estimating Urbanisation' has reinforced it.

In the administrative-based definition, 'rural' is always a residual category after defining 'urban'. Ali has not only redefined the term 'urban' based on density and proximity but also has defined 'rural', with an identification of a new category of 'urbanising areas'. One can differ with him on definitions used for all three terms — 'rural', 'urban' and 'urbanising', but, his thinking is very close to the ground realities.

In 2003, I used both the micro-data files of the 1998 Population Census and the published reports of the earlier censuses to evaluate the use of administrative criterion for defining 'urban'. The first conclusion was that the strict use of size-specific criterion, giving all rural localities having 5,000 or more persons the status of urban, as claimed in first three population censuses (1951, 1961 and 1972), has never been applied. In fact, in the 1951 to 1972 censuses only a small number of localities outside the notified urban localities was declared 'urban'. If the populations of these small numbers of localities are excluded from the total urban population of the country it makes no real difference on the level of urbanisation, which, after adjustment, declined only marginally. So, practically, in all five population censuses the administrative criterion has been used to define 'urban'.

The use of size-specific criterion in the 1998 Population Census, giving all rural localities having 5,000 or more persons the status of urban, would almost double the urban population. But, it can be argued that in terms of other characteristics, these localities are predominantly rural. I tested this argument by comparing the characteristics of the 210 declared 'urban' localities, which inhabited 20,000 or fewer people with those rural localities that were inhabited by 5,000 or more persons and were not given urban status in the 1998 census.

The analysis found that 361 rural localities were better than many declared 'urban' localities in terms of the urban-related characteristics. A close look at these rural localities shows that some of them were adjacent to a large urban centre. The treatment of these localities as rural cannot be justified; it leads to underestimation of the overall level of urbanisation in the country, as well as the actual population of the large cities.

Some other large rural localities having 20,000 or more persons are, in fact, trade and industrial centres situated at the Grand Trunk (GT) Road; in all aspects these are towns. Some rural localities, not located even on GT Road, are quite large towns having more than 50,000 people.

The analysis further found that the 361 rural localities inhabited by 5,000 or more persons having urban-related characteristics are concentrated in four districts of central Punjab — Lahore, Faisalabad, Sheikhpura and Gujranwala. Few localities are also found in Rawalpindi and Attock districts in northern Punjab. In KP, the concentration was found in Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda, Nowshera, and Malakand districts. In Sindh and Balochistan, the districts of concentration were Hyderabad and Quetta respectively.

Overall, the rural localities that have urban characteristics are located in relatively more developed districts of the country. It appears that Reza Ali has incorporated this geographical concentration of urban-type rural communities in his concept of 'urbanising areas'.

What would have been the level of urbanisation if those 361 rural localities that were better than many small urban centres in terms of urban-related characteristics were treated as urban in the 1998 Population Census? The overall share of urban population would have increased from the recorded level of 32.5 per cent, based on the administrative criterion, to 36.2 per cent.

I further estimated that, if the excluded rural communities having urban characteristics were treated as urban, and rural localities adjacent to large urban centres were considered as part of these centres, the total urban population in 1998 would be around 51 million.

The share of urban population in the total population would approximately be 39 per cent in 1998, with largest increase in KPK and lowest in Sindh. If this figure of 39 per cent is considered as base for the degree of urbanisation in 1998 and urban growth rate, which is presently much higher than the rural growth rate, is applied to project urban population, the degree of urbanisation in Pakistan today would be much higher than the level projected in official or UN documents.

What Reza Ali has proposed in his article for defining the terms 'rural', 'urban' or 'urbanising areas' may not be a perfect solution for estimating urbanisation in Pakistan, because its application alters markedly the province-level estimates. However, he has given some practical suggestions for the estimation of the degree of urbanisation.

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