

Significance of population densities in large countries like India and managing rural transformation & development based on demographic parameters

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ABSTRACT

Huge changes are predicted in India's economy over the next 10 years. India plans to be USD 5 trillion economy in the next 3 to 5 years. Tremendous investments are being made in different sectors. A well charted plan backed by mind boggling investments awaits implementation for an all-round growth through various Government schemes for all areas of the country's development. What needs to be ensured is that development is extremely well spread out to ensure uniform benefits to interior and rural India, which is in need of real time support, and to ensure that most benefits don't go to the already privileged.

Keywords: development, urban, semi-urban, rural, population, demographics, economy, India, USA, China, highways, education, youth

I. INTRODUCTION

India ranks number 2 in population with 138 crore people, only after China which is marginally higher at 144 crores. We are way ahead of the U.S. which has a population of only 33 crores. The average Indian age currently is only about 28 whereas the average age of China and USA is 38, a significant 10 years more (which is about 15% of an average international lifespan). India has an economy of only USD 3 trillion, compared to China's USD 15 trillion and USA's USD 20 trillion, despite the huge population India has. By all means these figures point out that India could be doing extremely well in the next few decades as consumer demand surges from a massive population- also giving a huge boost to the aspirations of those who are in their twenties and thirties.

It is to be noted that India's population growth rate stands at almost 1%, in comparison to China's 0.4%, so it is inevitable that India will be the highest populated nation in 5 years from now.

Another important factor to note is that the population density of India is as high as 464 persons per sq. km, in comparison to China's 153 and USA's 36 per sq. km. – confirming that India is a very densely populated nation. However, the top 10 most populated cities account for just about 10% of India's population, and the next large 90 cities/ towns account for another 7% only.

Demographic analysis for the future

What all the above means is that currently, just a maximum of 20% of India's population stays in cities and towns and 80% of India's population stays in rural India. This divide is huge. The rural population does not have access to jobs, decent education, higher technical education, healthcare and hence income levels, at least as much as their counterparts in the cities do. This is resulting in mass migration to the nearest cities / towns which do provide income to the people to some extent. It is estimated by the U.N. that by 2050, 70% of India's population (like in other countries of the world), will live in the cities. The Indian Government itself expects 40% of its population to live in urban centres by 2030. The population in cities will at least triple in India over the next 2 to 3 decades, leading to a lot of socio-economic, lifestyle and congestion issues and create a great wage disparity between the haves and have nots.

In 20 years, the young population (under 35) will be close to 70% of the expected 170 crores, i.e. about 120 crores, and over a 10 year span we will have to create employment for these

many youngsters. While creating gainful employment to so many young people itself is a challenge, the bigger challenge is how we possibly curtail the movement from rural to urban areas. Traditionally, even in developed countries, the cities account for around 70% of the jobs and 70% of the GDP, just with less than 10% of the landmass. If that logic stands true, Indian cities will be in trouble and the rural area will be depleted of human resources. Farming and other activities will also stagnate and food production could take a dip.

As you move across Tier II and Tier III cities, you see considerable local talent in the form of young men and women who are smart, capable and educated, and who are getting into the white collared workforce. All this is an effort of the last 10-15 years, aided by technology, the internet, and also due to our schools and colleges in these locations. The work force in most cases is as competent and talented as in the large cities. This talent has to be exploited in full by organisations, by moving in these places. Some differences will always be there, positives and negatives- socially & culturally.

If the market due to a booming young population which is all across India, is harnessed well, the Indian economy will easily cross the USD 5 Trillion figure in a practical 5 to 10 year span.

Planning the next stage of development

It is extremely important that after the Tier II and Tier III cities, we need to focus attention on the smaller towns and then to the rural areas -for a massive development in terms of basic and higher education, well planned skill development courses, technology, internet services, transportation, medical facilities and the like. In short, holistic development driven by infrastructure will be the key to get this in place. Highways, Roads, Electricity, Water, Low cost/ mass Housing are the keys to development. The other requirements of growth will follow these aspects of development. Income generation has to shift into India's towns and villages. Intelligent people have to stay where or nearby they currently are, and investment and talent has to move inwards. The young population whose average age is 28 - and which also amounts to 80% of India's population in the non-urban areas - could number around 100 to 120 crores over the next 15-25 years and is the future of India. This future is scattered all across India. Unless a rapid movement to the semi urban & rural areas is not initiated, all developments in science,

technology, commerce and even in politics will be underutilized.

We have 40 crore to 50 crore of the population that includes the rural segment and tier-2 cities that need digital intervention to help them solve their problems. This is perhaps the most important demographic to reach in the digital space. The need of the hour here is deep vertical problem-solving.

Driving the change

The move must be supported fully by industry and commerce, and they in turn fully supported by the government. Support here means financial incentives to those working and setting up businesses, education, hospitals and industries in semi urban and rural areas and these could mean tax benefits in multiple formats. If we don't act fast, a huge talent pool across India (about 50 crore youngsters perhaps) could be under educated, underutilized, underperforming, less confident, and underpaid or not paid. Educated India has to live in its villages. The country is building 40 kms of highways per day, and now the migration however has to be from the urban to semi urban, and not continue the other way it has been all along.

All the infrastructure created cannot create jobs on a long term basis unless industry moves into interior India, and no industry would like to move out into the hinterland unless there are long term financial sops.

Ironically, the Indian young population which is going to benefit from this perhaps is themselves unaware of all this, and have to know that they will have to further drive this change. However, the seniors and more experienced people can be the mentors and guides to make the youth entrepreneurs- and entrepreneurs where they stay. Programmes to develop "Grampreneurs" by BYST (Bhartiya Yuva Shakti Trust) will make a huge difference to the Indian rural youth if scaled up everywhere.

It's the youth in the age group 25-35 approximately who should now work on this to generate ideas & businesses, run the businesses, work and create incomes across the diaspora, and it's the highly mature and experienced mentors that need to guide them where ever it is possible. The huge infrastructure developments across India and specially in rural India need qualified personnel to handle development, which at best need to come from local resources as much as possible. There is already a huge shortage of well trained engineers, technicians/ foremen, to work on the projects.

The changing face of education and its relevance to rural education

The future has always been the youth- but in the near future, the youth who make it big in India and will make India big, will be from the rural India. Creating opportunities for the rural youth is the Government's priority, and it has taken a number of steps - directly and indirectly. The new youth will replace the earlier generations faster than before because of faster turnover and obsolescence of knowledge, education, the high-speed internet and the spread /access to education. Actually, the concept of literacy is fast changing.

The faster obsolescence of technology and education in this decade has made the older generation vulnerable to be replaced by the new youth who is armed with new knowledge and easy access to modern education. However practical knowledge and experience cannot be replaced by education and computer software.

The privatisation of education and allowing technical and vocational colleges to flourish, actually has paid off, even considering that they are yet to deliver the best of education. This movement has to continue. We do risk substandard education getting proliferated, but this system nevertheless creates great opportunities for many talented people to get educated. An absence of such an educational infrastructure at affordable levels would have never allowed thousands of young Indians to get an opportunity to begin a career.

II. CONCLUSION

The future belongs to the Indian youth. They should not forget they are likely to see a hugely improved India when they turn into their 40s and 50's, and they need to come into the developmental mainstream now. Experience and direction of leaders matters significantly, but the dynamism of the youth matters multi-fold, to get this change done. The semi urban and rural youth needs a far bigger input to prosper in the time to come.

Creation of a critical mass of skilled engineers, technicians and IT professionals will lead to proper capacity building. Improving educational facilities & opportunities in rural/ semi urban areas is absolutely important, and that includes primary & secondary schooling as well. While the focus is on building quality civil infrastructure in rural areas, one has to now focus on improving cerebral infrastructure of the rural areas.

However even today, as one moves across states in India, we do see phenomenal changes

brought in by better roads and mass transportation, more professional courses and colleges everywhere, better skill development programmes, all resulting in more businesses moving inwards. The model for success can be further scaled up further.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently predicted that the global economy will grow at 4.4% in 2022. As per the latest figures released by the global monitoring organization, India's estimated growth prediction stood at a whopping 9% for 2021-22. IMF has also predicted that the growth rate will remain consistent at 9% in the next economic year 2022-2023.

However, to ensure that we do not have 70% of our population living in cities by 2050 (despite the great economic indicators) and instead to have a balanced geographical development - we need to plan 25 years in advance- and that is now.

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