



FACTORS BEHIND RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION: A STUDY OF RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

In India a large chunk of population is dependent on migration for their livelihood. Assam, the North-eastern states of India, has been witnessing the increased movement of people from rural areas to urban areas in recent years.

This paper is an attempt to understand the causes and consequences of rural to urban migration in Assam. The study revealed that the poor condition of agriculture and limited development of the rural non-farm sectors raises the incidence of poverty, unemployment and underemployment in rural areas. As most of the high productive activities are located in urban areas, many people of rural areas migrate to urban areas in search of jobs. Even when availability of jobs is limited in number relative to the supply, and often they are not accessible, population from rural areas still flows to the urban areas in search of opportunities in urban areas. The immediate effect of rural to urban migration is increasing in population or at the extreme, its explosion. Population explosion activates the housing challenge both at micro family and macro society levels. The rapid urban growth leads to induce tremendous pressure on existing infrastructure of the town and cities, creating undesirable fallout in the form of unemployment, congestion, slums and environmental degradation.

Thus to stem down the rate of the migration, functional amenities such as pipe borne water, electricity, recreational facilities should be provided in the rural areas. Better educational facilities and qualified teachers should be made available in the rural areas.

KEYWORDS: *Rural-Urban Migration, Agriculture, Population, Urban Growth, Unemployment, Congestion, Slums*

INTRODUCTION

Migration brings people towards the interface of different environment. The movement of people from one place to another essentially carries their own characteristics. Migratory people often find themselves to adjustment problems. There are a plenty of reasons of why a person is forced to migrate or why the individual choose to migrate. Causes vary from regions to regions in the world. Statistics has shown that migration in developing countries usually happens mainly for economic reasons, apart from the ethnic violence for which many people migrate. People migrate in search of better livelihood opportunity. With 64 percent of people living in rural areas Assam is one of the least urbanised states in India. Although relatively less urbanised than the many states of India, Assam has experienced increased movement of people from rural to urban areas in recent years. This paper seeks to address and analyse the major causes behind rural to urban migration in Assam. Generally, the unskilled labourers from rural areas find the urban informal sector as an attractive place to find employment in.

This study has shown that rural-urban migration is a double-edge problem affecting the rural community as well as the destination urban areas. The study revealed that problems in agriculture, unemployment, inadequate social amenities in the rural communities, negative attitude associated with agriculture and recurring floods are the major factors influencing rural-urban migration in Assam. The paper also tries to see the socio-economic impact of rural to urban migration.

OBJECTIVE

1. Identify the reasons and examine the various factors affecting rural-urban migration in Assam.
2. To examine the socio-economic impact of rural-urban migration in Assam.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data, which are collected from various research journals, Govt reports, newspaper etc.

AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION

Generally, rural-urban migration dominates the domain of research as its role in changing the lives of migrants and families at the place of origin and destination (Hossain, 2001).

On the basis of 64th round of the National Sample Survey (NSS), the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has published a report titled “Migration in India 2007-08” where it is mentioned that migration of households in both the rural and urban areas was dominated by the migration of households from rural areas. Again, among the migrants in the urban areas, nearly 59% migrated from the rural areas. The report also revealed that nearly 60% of urban male migrants and 59% of urban female migrants had migrated from rural areas. In that context, the rural to urban component of the flow is estimated to be highly significant both in terms of number and its subsequent socio-economic impact.

Assam, the north eastern states of India also experienced a process of rapid urbanization. This was evident in the census figures, where the urban population went up from 344,831 in 1951 to 2,487,795 in 1991, thereby increasing the percentage of urban population to the total population from 4.29% to 11.10% (Table1). Within the state, the urbanization process was the strongest in Kamrup district, where the percentage of urban population to the total population went up from 7.65% in 1951 to 32.76% in 1991. The extraordinary rate of urbanization of Kamrup was fuelled by the explosive growth of its principal city, Guwahati, which accounted for 89.18% of the district’s urban population(Table2).

Table-1: Urban population and its proportion to total population, in Selected Districts

District	Urban population		Urban population as a % to total population	
	1951	1991	1951	1991
Kamrup	48,321	655,215	7.65	32.76
Jorhat	16,164	133,032	3.6	15.27
Dibrugarh	37,991	183,850	8.06	17.61
Cachar	34,059	119,224	6.29	9.81
ASSAM	344,831	2,487,795	4.29	11.10

Source: Census of India, 1991



Table-2: Concentration of urban population in principal cities, in selected Districts

District	Principal city	Population in principal city	City population as a % to total urban
Kamrup	Guwahati	584,342	89.18
Jorhat	Jorhat	112,030	84.21
Dibrugarh	Dibrugarh	125,667	68.35
Cachar	Silchar	115,483	96.86

Source: Barua, 2012

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR RURAL URBAN MIGRATION IN ASSAM

The decision to migrate involves 'push factors' which force migrant out of the rural areas as well as 'pull factors' which attracts migrants to urban areas. Rapid geographic shift of people from the rural to urban region in different countries has been the result of the combination of both rural push and urban pull factors (Farooq and Cheema, 2005; Hossain, 2001; Ullah, 2004). The earlier model developed by Harris and Todaro (1976) explains rural-urban migration as a response to the expected rather than current income differential between rural and urban areas. In other words, workers will continue to migrate from rural to urban areas until wages they expect to earn in urban areas are equal to the wages they expect to earn in the rural areas. Some studies indicate that economic push factors (for example lack of rural credit, unemployment, lack of land, general rural poverty) are most important while others suggest that economic pull factors (e.g. perception of high wages from urban employment) are predominant. A number of other motivations for rural-urban migration including educational opportunities offered in urban areas, marriage and joining the family already at the destination are cited in the literature.

ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION IN ASSAM

A. Poor condition of Agriculture:

Agriculture remains the main source of livelihood in Assam engaging majority of the rural work force. More than 70 per cent of the population depends on agriculture in Assam. But agriculture today is faced with massive problems like decreased landholdings, lack of irrigation facilities,

primitive means of cultivation etc. The average size of operational holding in Assam has declined from 1.47 hectares in 1970-71 to 1.11 hectares in 2005-06 (Table 3). This indicates the impact of the growing problem of fragmentation and sub-division in land holdings. In Assam, about 86 % farmers belong to small and marginal category (Table 4). Due to scattered and tiny plot of land, full utilization of inputs cannot be possible. In Assam, only 22.50 % of net-cropped area is under irrigation which is 72% in case of all India. Due to the absence of electricity connection, the farmers are compelled to use diesel running pump sets making the cost of production very high. 82% of farm families are deprived of agriculture credit through KCCs. Only Rs. 2,626 per hectare agriculture credit is available in Assam as against Rs. 15,379 per hectare for all India (Agricultural Census 2005-06). Assam is also severely lacking in storage facilities for agricultural products. The lack of marketing and storage facilities puts the farmers in Assam at a great disadvantage in comparison with their counterparts elsewhere in the country. With few markets to sell their output, farmers have little incentive to improve productivity and production by adopting modern farming techniques and increasing input use efficiency.

Thus, in a state where more than 64 percent of the total workers are agricultural workers, the failure of agriculture remains a worrisome phenomenon. In addition to this, perennial flood and loss of crops are other reasons because of which agriculture is no longer a viable option for livelihood in Assam. Thus the people are left with no choice but to flock the cities in lookout for an earning to support their families back home.

Table3: Average size of holdings (in hectare since 1970-71 to 2005-06)

Agricultural Census	Average size of holdings
1970-71	1.47
1976-77	1.37
1980-81	1.36
1985-86	1.31
1990-91	1.27
1995-96	1.17
2000-01	1.15
2005-06	1.11

Source: Agricultural Census, 2005-06, Govt. of Assam

Table4: Distribution of number of operational holdings and Area operated size group wise as per 2005-06 Agricultural Census.

Size groups (in hectares)	Number of holdings	Percentage of concentration	Operated Area	Percentage of concentration
Marginal (Below 1.0)	1752989	63.74	760145	24.93
Small (1.0-2.0)	591431	21.51	718383	23.56
Semi-Medium (2.0-4.0)	317859	11.56	846006	27.75
Medium (4.0-10.0)	82933	3.02	425403	13.95
Large (10.0 & above)	4902	0.18	298606	9.80
All	2750114	100.00	3048543	100.00

Source: Agricultural Census, 2005-06, Govt. of Assam

B. Social Unrest: In certain rural areas of Assam, social conditions are not favourable for free living. Unsociability, class antagonism, personal conflicts and the like may induce people to leave such societies. In cities, social evils affecting personal freedom are comparatively less. Therefore, people are attracted towards cities.

C. Lack of employment opportunity: Rural areas of Assam are less developed and people do not know the scientific methods instead of traditional methods of farming. Besides that the economy of Assam usually fails to provide the proper value of the crop to the cultivators. Besides, there is huge under-employment or disguised unemployment existing in the rural areas of the state, which is putting a heavy pressure on the rural economy of the state. Thus, the jobless youth is resented and has practically nothing to fall back upon. Thus, they choose the inevitable option of quitting their schools or colleges and take the road leading to the cities. Unemployment pushes migrants towards areas with greater employment opportunities where they engage themselves in petty business activities such as vegetable vendors, grocery stores, petty shops like pan shops, hotels and tea stalls etc.

D. Poor Infrastructure: Many rural areas of Assam have been deprived of basic infrastructures such as roads, markets, electricity, communication

technologies and absent of skill development institutions. Absent of significant reforms, lack of investment in rural areas and competitions for increasingly scarce arable land are likely to result in increased rural-urban migration.

E. The Problem of flood in Assam: Annual floods between the months of May and August wreak havoc in the valley of the Brahmaputra River in the north-eastern State of Assam. People lose their homes, livelihoods and frequently their family members. If we look at the scale of floods, as much as three-fourths of the State's districts are faced with it annually. The peak discharge in the Brahmaputra River varies significantly from year to year. As per Central Water Commission records, the flood affected area ranged from 4.22 million hectares in 1988 to a low of 0.19 million hectares in 1961. As per the Government of Assam estimates, around 0.475 million hectares equivalent to 19.1 per cent of the Net Area Sown is chronically flood prone in the State. Floods in are not a new phenomenon and many flood based disasters have occurred through the years including the washing away of around half of the town of Dibrugarh in 1954. Floods caused havoc in 1986 in Nagoan district. In 2000, the floodwaters rose as high as 30 feet. In 2013, 350 villages in 11 districts of Assam were flooded affecting around 1.1 lakh people. The catchment areas in Arunachal Pradesh received heavy

rainfall leading to floods in the Jiahol River in particular. The waters rose and inundated areas in the district of Dhemaji in Assam. The Brahmaputra flowed above the danger level at Nematighat too in Jorhat district. Its tributaries that flowed above the danger mark are Burhidehing in Dibrugarh district, Desang in Sibsagar and Jia Bharali in Sonitpur. This led to submergence of 6000 hectares of agricultural land and consequent destruction of standing crops mainly paddy.

ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACTS OF RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION IN ASSAM

Rural-urban migration is attributed to have both negative and positive consequences at community, household and individual levels (Adepoju, 1982; Mendola, 2006; Regmi and Tisdell, 2010). It is important to remember that, migration activities have implications for those moving, those left behind and those at the destination. Thus, rural-urban migration has implications for both areas i.e. sending and receiving and on migrants themselves (De Haan, 1999).

A. Socio-economic impact of rural-urban migration:-

This study has shown that rural-urban migration is a double-edge problem affecting the rural community as well as the destination urban areas. The rural community is being affected in such a way that youths and adults that suppose to remain in the community and contribute their own quota to the development of agriculture and their community are no longer available in the rural areas. They move to urban centres in search for non-available greener pasture and abandon the farming activities which they believe cannot earn them what they will get in the urban areas. Subsequently this tends to reduce agricultural production and food availability in the country. In urban areas, increase in the population of urban dwellers tends to lead to inadequate housing, poor education due to overcrowded schools, inadequate health care facilities, increase in criminal activities, traffic problems, few employment opportunities and other social problems which can make life difficult for the urban inhabitants. This rural-urban migration in developing countries is accompanied by positive and negative consequences for the area of origin and destination. For the rural people, in the short run it may help to alleviate the poverty by creating new income and employment opportunity and it has helped in facilitating rural-

urban economic and social integration and motivating the expansion of the urban sector. Later, this alarming migration process has led to congestion, unemployment, pollution and poverty in urban areas, gender and age imbalances and decrease in productivity in rural areas (Aliyev, 2008). The first problem encountered by both the migrants and the host community is accommodation or increase in slums. This problem breeds other problems like infectious diseases, sexual abuse/harassment and etc. If migration is continuous, after a long period of time it reduces the number of the young and able bodied people from the rural village. This may cause imbalance in the quality of human resources between rural and urban areas, which may eventually impede rural development (Bhuyan et al, 2001).

B. Environmental impact of rural urban migration:-

The rapid urban growth leads to serious impact on the environment and the well being of the citizens. Besides all other factors, migration from rural areas to the urban centres has been the driving force behind the explosive population growth rate which has created serious impact on the environment in these urban centers besides causing strain on the limited urban services and infrastructure and increase in urban poverty and unemployment levels.

- a) As a direct result of urbanization, great threat to health and safety in the towns comes from water and air pollution, especially at the households and community levels. Waterborne diseases are found most commonly in low-income neighbourhoods as a result of inadequate sanitation, drainage and solid waste collection services. Health risks, especially to the poor, are also posed by pesticides and industrial effluents. In Assam many towns lack access to basic services such as drinking water supply and sanitation. Access to potable water is nonexistent in slum areas of Dibrugarh and Guwahati. The poor depend on open, unprotected water sources; wells; hand pumps; and stand posts. Lack of access to an efficient drainage system exacerbates the vulnerability of slums to recurrent flooding and loss of livelihood in Dibrugarh, Guwahati and Tinsukia.
- b) The productivity of many cities such as Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tinsukia and

Silchar of Assam is adversely affected by traffic congestion and air pollution. The loss in productivity includes the total productive time wasted in traffic and the associated increase in the costs of operating and maintaining vehicles such as wear and tear as a result of idling in traffic and frequent acceleration and braking. For example, delays, which may result in late arrival for employment, meetings, and education, result in lost business. Furthermore, Fuel wastage owing to increased idling, acceleration and braking increases air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions.

- c) Uncollected and improperly handled solid waste can have serious health consequences. They block drainage systems and contaminate groundwater at landfill sites. Most urban centres in the state are also unable to manage the increasing amounts of hazardous wastes generated by hospitals and the rapid growth of industries. In Guwahati around 500 metric tonnes (MTs) or more municipality solid waste generates in a day (Assam Tribune, 2012). The management of municipal solid waste has become an acute problem due to enhanced economic activities and rapid urbanization. Urban population growth together with the development of markets and new industries resulted in the quantum of a huge amount of hazardous organic and inorganic waste daily. Proper management of the waste is a challenging issue that must be addressed adequately. The sources of waste are multiple and haphazard and disposal method is not a scientific, as a result of it; the environment is getting polluted day by day and gradually. The trace elements polluted the air and poses as a health risk to the city people.
- d) Conversion of agricultural land and forest, as well as reclaiming of wetlands, for urban uses and infrastructure, is associated with widespread removal of vegetation to support urban ecosystem and put additional pressure on nearby areas that may be even more ecologically sensitive. Major urban centres such as Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Tinsukia and Jorhat are the most affected and environmentally fragile areas which are triggered by rapid expansion of human settlement and infrastructural development.

CONCLUSION

The unfettered flow of rural migrants imposes tremendous pressure on existing infrastructures of the towns and cities creating undesirable fallout in the form of unemployment, congestion, slums & squalor, environmental degradation and spiralling crime rate.

Some cities of Assam such as Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Silchar experience uncontrollable expansion in terms of their population, market size, human settlement etc. which creates unmanageable problem resulting in significant decline in the quality of life of the population. To protect these cities from the inevitable decline and decay a consistent, logical and systematic strategy related to urbanisation and migration need to be adopted by the govt. for the better future of the cities.

In this context, the rapid rise of rural migrants into urban areas can be checked if a sustained effort is made to induce development of the rural sector. Development of the non farm sector helps to create employment opportunities in rural areas. Availability of jobs in the rural areas can reduce the flow of people to urban areas and on the other hand productivity increasing strategies needs to be adopted for those who are engage in the low productivity jobs in urban informal sector. In addition to this Vocational training of the rural people on small scale industries (non-farm) activities that could generate an income for the rural household should be introduced in rural areas as it is supposed to alleviate the problem of landlessness and land shortage and their total dependency on only one source of livelihood i.e. Agriculture.

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