

Rural-Urban Linkages, Labor Migration & Rural Industrialization in West Bengal

Subrata Dutta & Subhendu Chakrabarti

This article focuses on the process of rural-urban continuum as one of the basic determinants of rural-urban linkages. The authors discuss labor migration (both short and long term) from rural to rural areas and rural to urban areas and try to understand whether rural industrialization helps find gainful employment in local villages or nearby small towns / growth centers. Livelihood pressure on farm land has been tremendously increasing whereas modern industries have very limited scope for absorbing unskilled rural labor. The case of West Bengal elaborates and establishes the arguments in favor of rural industrialization.

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Introduction

During the past decades, the growth of urban areas in both the developed and developing countries became one of the important characteristics of spatial development. Urbanization is a process to accomplish the art of advanced state of human civilization and therefore it not only refers to change in land use, but also accompanies socio-economic changes which may or may not be apparent as physical changes in the built-up area. The concepts of the dynamics of urban development or the theories of the cycle of urbanization, suburbanization and counter-urbanization (Antrop, 2004; Champion, 2001) failed to explain fully the rural-urban development that is occurring today in many developing countries. It has therefore become indispensable for the developmental policy makers to analyze the process of urbanization along a rural-urban continuum, based on a broad range of indicators.

Urbanization is often considered as an indicator of both economic development and a higher state of social welfare. Therefore, the development endeavors in both the developing and un-

derdeveloped countries are becoming typically urban-biased. Thus, rapid urbanization is often seen to be the impact of continuous rural-to-urban migration and various linkages (Aier & Kithan, 2011). One should, however, bear in mind that the process of urbanization which often leads to unequal distribution of income and wealth between rural and urban people not only weakens the process of urbanization itself but also leads to a state of unsustainable development of the economy as a whole. Both the sectors are mutually dependent for their inputs towards maintaining a decent living of the inhabitants of their respective arenas. Although there exists impressive evidence for the differences between the entities of 'rural' and 'urban', the degree of rural-urban continuum steps up with the process of development. The developing countries often find it hard to hide acute disparities between the rural and urban levels. The objective indicators are quality and quantity of public amenities such as health care facilities, education, roads, transport, and electricity, among many others. The subjective ones are social indicators, representing people's own assessment of their quality of life as compared to their community at large.

Rural-Urban Linkages

One of the basic determinants of rural-urban linkages is the rural-urban continuum. Rural-urban continuum is a process of socio-economic and cultural interaction between villages and towns or cities. In his work on Mexican peasants, Robert Redfield (1930) introduced the concept of rural-urban continuum as

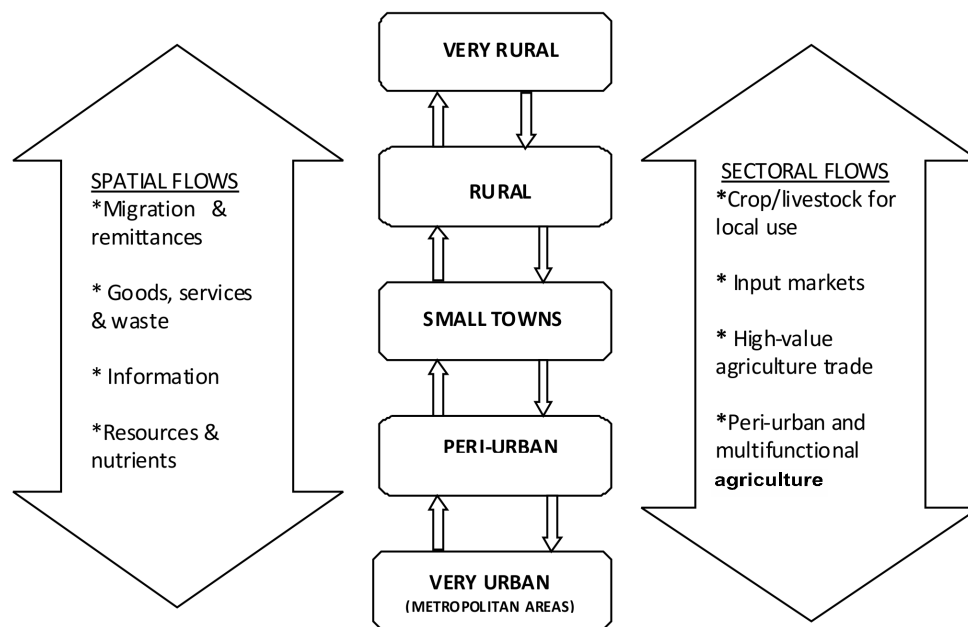
Rural-urban continuum is a process of socio-economic and cultural interaction between villages and towns or cities.

folk-urban continuum. He observed that as community moves from folk to the urban end of the continuum, there occurs a shift from cultural intimacy and organization towards disorganization. Consequently, what will happen in the long run is a lack of organization and detachment from culture and that directly reflects in the social aspect of an economy. In a general sense, the term 'continuum' refers to the gradual transition between two extremes (e.g. very rural and very urban). Hence, rural-urban continuum refers to the observed differences in terms of degree of urbanization as one moves from one extreme to the other. As a result, the concept of rural-urban linkages takes different forms in terms of flows (spatial and sectoral). In general, it refers to flow of people (through migration, commuting, etc.), capital (through investments) and goods (through trade) between rural and urban areas. Along with the above flows, there are simultaneous dynamic flows of ideas, innovation and environmental impacts of linkages (Munankami et al. 2005; Tacoli, 2004; Funnell, 1988). Many cultural traits, like dress patterns and new thoughts and ideologies are diffused from the cities to the rural areas. But the outreach of urban lifestyle to the rural areas often depends on their proximity to cities and/or media exposure in rural areas. Any degree of urbanization in the rural areas, i.e. providing, to a certain extent, the urban fa-

cilities to the rural areas actually reduces the differences between villages and cities. Due to increase in transport and communication by means of improvement in road, railway and water transport facilities and via radio, television, newspaper, etc. the village's proximity to cities has increased significantly. Thus, while the

urban socio-culture has an influence on the rural lifestyle, the converse may also be true, but perhaps to a limited extent. Such types of to-and-fro movements of various elements between two extremes impact mutually the economy, culture and lifestyle of both the rural and urban areas (fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Rural-Urban Continuum



Source: von Braun (2007)

An important aspect of this rural-urban continuum is that we cannot establish or demarcate between the line entries of rural and urban across different geo-political boundaries. As already said above, there has been a growing recognition that rural and urban areas have become increasingly interconnected through a constant movement of people, goods, capital, ideas and information. In terms of concepts, “urban” and “rural” seem to fall short to cover the complex

web of flows and exchanges that have made rural and urban areas dependent on each other (Munankami et al. 2005). Tacoli (1998) argues that even while we treat rural and urban areas and related issues separately, multiple inter-linkages between these two areas play significant role in the process of both rural and urban changes. However, one important point to be noted here is that there are differences of definitions of the rural and urban sectors between nations. Yet,

urbanization is accompanied with a change in employment options as well as other inputs — i.e. from a predominantly agricultural-rural to a predominantly industrialized and service oriented urban sector (Mills & Becker, 1986).

Johnston (2000) points out a demographic, socio-economic and behavioral dimension of urbanization and insists to look into the multidimensional features of the rural-urban continuum. Hence, the distinction between rural and urban has also been diffused and multifaceted (Antrop, 2004). It becomes important to note here that the continuum cannot be understood without the idea of transitional locations that exist within the urban-rural continuum. A variety of characteristic elements of different locations has been deployed to explore the diverse formations and consequences of urbanization. Some of the most frequently used terms of locations that are relevant for our understanding are presented here.

Urban fringe: This word suggests a topological category — not a clear-cut edge, but a broader zone of an urban area. According to Hite (1998), the fringe is a frontier in space where the economic returns to land from new urban land-uses are roughly equal to the returns from traditional land-uses. In this sense, the fringe is the losing edge of rurality and steady moving outward from the countryside. But, as regards the present state of developing countries such as India, land is highly precious at the urban frontier and also in the areas immediately beyond the frontier level. This has occurred as an

effect of industrialization and the growth of the real estate sector.

Peri-urban: The countryside at the further end of the fringe front is called peri-urban (Meeus & Gulinck, 2008). The term peri-urban is frequently in use to describe, as indicated above, urbanization of rural areas. But, the definition may differ from Europe (and other developed regions) to developing countries. As a broad based operational definition OECD (1979: 9) states that the impacts of economic growth and physical expansion of the urban area are not confined within urban boundaries; they reach into much wider areas surrounding urban centers, creating so-called “rurban areas”, “urban fringe areas”, or “peri-urban areas”. While the peri-urban area retains the characteristics of the rural area, the overall feature of such area is subject to several variable aspects such as physical configuration, economic activities, social relationships and so forth.

Rural areas: Areas away from urban influence with low population density, limited urban land use or urban status and a high degree of primary production can be termed as traditional rural areas. Many socio-economic indicators, e.g. education, income, etc., are also used to categorize these areas.

Remote rural areas: Remote rural areas represent a special sub-category of rural areas having low accessibility to economic centers. These areas are not directly influenced by urbanization and need special development programs for sustainable development. They are indi-

rectly influenced by urbanization, e.g. tourist destinations (as in Sundarban areas of West Bengal, India) or summer cottages (as in developed countries).

The dynamics of linkages that have come into existence between urban and rural areas are assumed to have evolved from small centers that stimulated changes in agricultural regions (Friedmann & Douglass, 1976; Rondinelli & Ruddle, 1978). Ulied et al. (2010) identified the several relationships between rural and urban sections — e.g. home-and-work relationships, centre-periphery relationships, relationships between rural and urban enterprises, rural areas as suppliers of natural resources for urban areas etc. But, Preston (1975) clearly defines the main categories of interaction between rural and urban areas as follows:

- The transfer of people: migration (both long and short term);
- The flow of goods, services and energy;
- Financial transfer through trade, taxes, and state disbursements;
- The transfer of assets: property rights, allocation of state investment, capital investment, etc.

Migration

One of the principal mechanisms of urbanization is migration from rural to urban areas and regions. The underlying reasons for migration to urban areas are classified into two broad-based categories: pull-based migration and

push-based migration. In both cases, the motivation for migration generates from people's perceptions of differentials between urban and rural areas. The pull-based migration involves differentials being driven by real differences in living standard, better jobs and income opportunities and access to various services. The push-based migration, on the other, involves migration fueled by unemployment and poverty in rural areas. The living conditions for many rural and urban residents may have been difficult but they are increasingly vulnerable to other influences such as drought or earth quake. Hence, vulnerability to social, economic, political and ecological factors can be considered as factors of push-based migration (Helgesson, 2006). In reality, at the macro scale, particularly the search for human betterment becomes important in understanding the magnitude of migration. The movement of population at the regional level acts as part of urban expansion and this search for alternative lifestyle has been facilitated by investment in road construction and by the expansion of public transportation. But there are situations when movement of rural labor-force in a poor region may display a different feature. For example, unskilled rural labor-force may move to town for a living if employment in local agriculture is not available. However, if employment is not also available in town for the unskilled labor then such labor can move to other villages where agricultural work is available. This can be shown by the following simple formulation.

RURR: $\frac{\text{Rural - Urban migration (for employment \& income)}}{\text{Rural - Rural migration (for employment and income)}}$ effective demand for non-agricultural goods and ser-

where RURR indicates the tendency of rural-to-urban migration over rural-to-rural migration and can be explained in the following three ways:

- $RURR > 1$; this indicates higher tendency of rural-to-urban migration in search of non-agricultural employment (either for survival or for a better living).
- $RURR < 1$; this indicates higher tendency of rural-to-rural migration in search of agricultural employment (either for survival or for a better living) due to lack of non-agricultural skill or urban links or information.
- $RURR = 1$; this indicates equal tendency of rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration.

However, whether or not rural labor-force would migrate to cities (or major urban centers) or to some rural areas (for better employment or income) may depend on factors such as differentials of physical infrastructure (e.g. rural roads, rural electricity, etc.) between rural and urban areas; differentials of social infrastructure (education, health service, etc.) between rural and urban areas; access to banking services (including credit) in rural areas; commercial as well as industrial activities at the rural growth centers at district level; and spread of urbanization in rural setting of a district; among others. Rural non-farm activities may get boosted by higher agricultural income (which would create additional

effective demand for non-agricultural goods and services) and technical skill of rural labor-force. As far as growth of agricultural output is concerned, ample attention should be paid to agricultural infrastructure — for example, better irrigation, adequate as well as better storage system, among others — because this may scale up farm production and their marketisation, and thus may increase the general level of rural income. As regards technical skill of rural labor-force, scope for technical as well as vocational training in the rural areas needs to be increased. All this, as is expected, would facilitate rural industries to grow and thereby check out-migration.

Underemployment & Rural Industrialization

The twenty-first century can be regarded as the century of urbanization and it is more so for the developing countries. What we are observing in and around us is that globalization and marketisation of the economy have made it possible for the city dwellers of the developing countries to consume high value goods (and high quality goods) and services which are otherwise consumed only by the people of the developed countries. The changes in the world's economic sphere brought significant changes in the socio-cultural spheres of the developing coun-

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tries and that in turn brought the obvious changes in the choice sets of the people of these countries in respect of both food and non-food items. However, the demographic characteristics prevailing in these developing countries do not match with that of the developed industrialized nations. As has been experienced the most needed industrialization did not occur in many developing countries, they are burdened with an excess labor in their rural areas (Bose, 1978). Again, as population has kept on increasing, the pressure on rural land has amplified leading to increased fragmentation of holding (Harriss, 1993). This phenomenon has appeared as the greatest single detriment to agriculture in the rural region (Grigg, 1983; Jacoby, 1971; Pina-Cabral, 1986). Critics claim that one of the main reasons for the fragmentation of land is due to portable inheritance that leads to an ever decreasing field size (Clout, 1972; Moore, 1972). In some regions, farmers are unable to afford tractors and other agricultural machines and are forced to depend on old, medieval field systems of cultivation which are used to adapt to smaller chunks of land (Meliczek, 1973; Smith, 1978).

Thus, agriculture seems to be facing many problems such as fragmentation of land, low productivity and excess labor (in the form of disguised unemployment), among others. In rural areas (which are predominantly agrarian in nature) of a developing country, if agriculture is unable to provide gainful employment to rural population, people are often found to live in acute distress. To mitigate rural unemployment problem on the one hand, and to

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check rural out-migration on the other, rural transformation process (from agriculture to non-agriculture) needs to be facilitated. For this, rural industrialization programs need to be adopted. Otherwise, pressure of labor-force on rural, petty, subsistence level, informal activities will be mounting. Technological issues, among others, need to be given priority as far as rural industrialization program is concerned. However, in the absence of vibrant rural industrial sector in villages, as just said, people might engage in low-profile non-farm activities. Readjustment or redistribution of rural labor-force can be done in the following way:

For the sake of simplicity, we classify the entire rural workforce into three categories, C_1 , C_2 and C_3 as follows:

$C_1 \Rightarrow$ engaged exclusively in agricultural activities;

$C_2 \Rightarrow$ engaged partly in agricultural and partly in non-agricultural activities; and

$C_3 \Rightarrow$ engaged exclusively in non-agricultural activities.

Let

χ = Total number of rural small (informal) enterprise

N = Total number of rural workforce, $n_1+n_2+n_3$ where

n_1 = Number of workforce (including underemployed) engaged in C_1 ;

n_2 = Number of workforce (including underemployed) engaged in C_2 ; and

n_3 = Number of workforce engaged in C_3 .

Now, the pressure of rural working population on rural small enterprise sector is expressed as .

$$\frac{N}{x} = \frac{n_1 + n_2 + n_3}{x} = \frac{n_1}{x} + \frac{n_2}{x} + \frac{n_3}{x} \dots (1)$$

We assume that the employment capacity of the rural non-farm sector has increased (either in the form of expansion per enterprise, or in total number, or both) as a result of growth in this sector (this is possible due to the fact that rural non-farm sector uses mainly labor-intensive techniques). Let us now express the rural non-farm sector with its new capacity as χ_1 (where $\chi_1 > \chi$). We assume that total number of rural workforce remains unchanged and there has not been any rural-to-city migration of rural workforce. Then, there will be some redistribution of employment within the above-mentioned workforce categories.

Thus, after redistribution, let

n_1 = number of workforce that left c_1 for c_3 (for example, some have started non-farm business for higher return and/or some have joined non-farm employment for higher wages or salaries). Here, note that $0 < n_1^* < n_1$.

n_2 = number of workforce left c_2 for c_3 and, $0 < n_2^* < n_2$ depending on their skill and opportunity to join c_3 .

n_3 = number of workforce shifted to c_3 from c_1 and c_2 after redistribution of workforce.

Hence, $n_3^* = n_1^* + n_2^*$ = number of workforce that has been absorbed in the non-farm sector. Such adjustment, which can solve rural underemployment problem (and, similarly, also rural unemployment problem) is possible when successful rural industrialization takes place.

Indian Scenario

The historical fact is that a few urban centers had flourished in India from time to time but India has been predominantly rural in character through the ages. It was in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century that some industrial cities grew in India. One of the major problems of contemporary developing countries such as India, as Mellor (1995) observes, is the unhealthy structure of urbanization — a tendency for the urban population to concentrate in one or a very few of the major population centers. That was not a characteristic of developed countries when they were at similar stages in development. Their urban centers were more numerous and the urban population more diffused over those centers. As Table 1 suggests, urban population of India has increased from 62.44 million in 1951 to 285.35 millions in 2001, thereby showing nearly five-fold increase in urban population. According to 2001 census, the total urban population of India is more than ten

Table 1 Growth of Urban Population in India and West Bengal

Census Year	Total Population (million)		Urban Population (million)		Per cent of urban Population	
	India	West Bengal	India	West Bengal	India	West Bengal
1951	361.09	26.30	62.44	6.28	17.30	23.90
1961	439.23	34.93	78.94	8.54	18.00	24.40
1971	548.16	44.31	109.11	10.97	19.90	24.70
1981	683.33	54.58	159.46	14.45	23.30	26.50
1991	844.32	67.98	217.18	18.62	25.70	27.48
2001	1027.02	80.22	285.35	22.49	27.78	28.03
2011	1210.19	91.35	377.10	29.13	31.16	31.89

Source: Census of India, 1951 to 2011

Table 2 District-wise Classification of Area and Population in West Bengal

District	Population			Area (in sq. km.)			Percentage of	
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Urban Population	Urban Area
Bankura	3192695	2957447	235248	6882	6820.51	61.49	7.37	0.89
Birbhum	3015422	2757002	258420	4545	4495.02	49.98	8.57	1.10
Burdwan	6895514	4348466	2547048	7024	6223.82	800.18	36.94	11.39
Cooch Behar	2479155	2253537	225618	3387	3345.66	41.34	9.1	1.22
Uttar Dinajpur	2441794	2147351	294443	3140	3095.64	44.36	12.06	1.41
Dakshin Dinajpur	1503178	1306324	196854	2219	2196.3	22.7	13.1	1.02
Darjeeling	1609172	1088740	520432	3149	3073.77	75.23	32.34	2.39
Hooghly	5041976	3354227	1687749	3149	2950.19	198.81	33.47	6.31
Howrah	4273099	2121109	2151990	1467	1247.76	219.24	50.36	14.94
Jalpaiguri	3401173	2794291	606882	6227	6105.93	121.07	17.84	1.94
Kolkata	4572876	0	4572876	185	0	185	100	100
Malda	3290468	3049528	240940	3733	3707.63	25.37	7.32	0.68
Midnapore	9610788	8626883	983905	14081	13695.78	385.22	10.24	2.74
Murshidabad	5866569	5133835	732734	5324	5195.11	128.89	12.49	2.42
North 24-Parganas	8934286	4083339	4850947	3927	3716.83	210.17	54.3	5.35
South 24-Parganas	6906689	5820469	1086220	9960	9783.24	176.76	15.73	1.77
Nadia	4604827	3625308	979519	4094	3594.44	499.56	21.27	12.20
Purulia	2536516	2281090	255426	6259	6179.63	79.37	10.07	1.27
West Bengal	80176197	57748946	22427251	88752	85427.26	3324.74	27.97	3.75

Source : Census of India, 2001

percent of total urban population of the world. From the population census 2011 data, which have been recently released, it appears that Indian urban population has increased to 377.10 million (Table 1). However, in many states, concentration of urban population exhibits geographically skewed pattern. For example, more than 27 per cent of population are characterized as urban population in West Bengal state and they are found to live in only 3.75 per cent of its total geographical area (Table 2). Moreover, the district of North 24 Parganas displays even tighter situation. More than 54 per cent of its population live in 5.35 per cent area only.

However, the pace of urbanization does not match with adequate housing and other basic facilities and the result is rapid proliferation of slums and slum population. In fact, large sections of slum dwellers are living under conditions of multiple deprivations and crime. Hence, the long standing presumption that large cities provide better living conditions than the countryside is only true if and only if there are sufficient employment opportunities, efficient city management, and good governance. However, it is also observed that migration is not taking place only among the weakest and vulnerable sections of the labor-force. Educated and skilled workers do also migrate for better income.

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Rural Industrialization for West Bengal

Indian cities such as Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai are historically characterized as the port cities of the country. Especially, such geographical advantage of the city of Kolkata has resulted in skewed urbanization as well as skewed industrialization pattern in West Bengal state during the British period. Important traditional industries such as jute, engineering, iron and steel, and coal dominated West Bengal's economy for several years. However, the state experienced prolonged economic stagnation and relative decline in industrial output in the second half of the last century. In 1960, nearly 23 percent of India's industrial output was produced in West Bengal; it declined to about 10 percent in 1980, and to under 7 percent by the end of the 1980s (Sengupta & Gazdar, 1996). By the end of 1997, the share had gone down to 5.1 percent (Banerjee et al, 2002). In a similar vein, employment in the organized private sector went down from about 1.1 million to about 800,000 over the period 1980–1997. Furthermore, while in the mid-1960s, West Bengal was the second most industrialized among the larger states, it occupied a much lower position by 1995 in terms of industrial output. Endemic industrial sickness and increased unemployment situation in the state during the late 1990s forced many people to take up jobs in the informal sector, which covers a wide range of activities, in urban areas (Sen, 2009). As we are aware, employment in the informal sector characterizes the presence of labor intensive technology, small-scale

operation and an unregulated and competitive market. In course of time such kind of an informal sector flourished in West Bengal. Marjit et al. (2009) argued that in the presence of such a flourishing informal labor market, the formal labor market faced trouble. People employed in the informal sector were willing to be paid less than those employed in the formal sector and hence thereby created stiff competition among the formal sector employees. Entrepreneurs preferred to employ people from the informal sector since the benefit for the entrepreneurs was enormous. For example, while employing labor from the informal sector, they enjoyed manifold benefits such as (1) they did not have to face the rigidities of the labor market; (2) their cost of hiring employees reduced drastically; and (3) employees could be hired for flexible time period. But, on the other hand, such flourishing informal labor-force in West Bengal was going through an acute crisis of job insecurity in the labor market.

On the other hand, the West Bengal agrarian sector experienced slow growth in output between 1950 and the end of the 1970s (Boyce, 1987); it was only after the mid-1980s that agricultural output started growing. Particularly, from the mid-1980s to 1999, the average annual growth rate of food grain production for all major Indian states was 2.5 percent while for West Bengal it was 4.2 percent—higher than for any other state (Hanstad & Majumder, 2002). However, Ghosh & Kuri (2007) show that the growth rate again fell sharply from the mid-1990s to 2003. They recommend appropriate extension programs to exploit

the advantages of globalization and thus to achieve a higher growth path for agriculture in the state.

The experience that we gain is that the doctrine that combines sheer city size and growth of organized sector fails to create much developmental effects in the peripheries, especially on the remote peripheries that are far away from the city core. On the other hand, agriculture has been proved to be of limited capacity as far as generation of employment for the rural masses is concerned. Here lies the great importance of promoting rural urbanization and rural industrialization in the economies such as West Bengal. Let us discuss this in further detail.

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As in large cities, the impact of globalization and marketisation has also been spread into the rural areas and small urban centers through changing pattern of demand (rising level of per capita income has also been responsible for such effects). Table 3 suggests that, during 1994-95 to 2007-08, there has been a shift in consumption pattern in the cases of both rural and urban households of the state. The share of expenditure on cereal consumption has decreased in the reference period (this has been observed at the all-India level as well). Conversely, the share of expenditure on consumption of beverages has increased. Also, the

Table 3 Average Monthly Expenditure (in Rupees) Per Person on 28 Groups of Items of Consumption for Urban and Rural Areas in West Bengal (1994-95 and 2007-08)

Items	Urban		Rural	
	1994-95	2007-08	1994-95	2007-08
Cereals	31.59	25.17	50.45	37.97
Gram	0.20	0.06	0.05	0.05
Cereal substitutes	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.01
Pulses and pulse products	3.99	3.99	3.31	4.09
Milk and milk products	12.60	9.13	5.61	4.68
Edible oil	8.57	8.25	7.11	8.45
Egg, fish and meat	12.39	17.05	10.01	13.92
Vegetables	10.99	13.80	11.58	14.64
Fruits (Fresh)	2.98	3.04	1.18	1.90
Fruits (Dry)	0.13	0.36	0.01	0.12
Sugar	2.86	1.78	2.90	1.72
Salt	0.37	0.36	0.41	0.40
Spices	2.93	3.08	3.01	3.49
Beverages etc.	9.99	13.95	4.29	8.56
Total Food Group	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Pan	1.16	0.38	1.19	0.91
Tobacco	4.88	2.58	6.17	3.22
Intoxicants	0.24	0.75	2.19	1.01
Fuel and light	18.72	16.28	24.76	23.81
Clothing	12.81	9.96	18.96	14.15
Footwear	1.55	1.37	1.59	1.60
Education	11.29	11.97	12.86	9.61
Medical institution	1.13	3.17	7.62	4.78
Medical Non-institution	8.09	8.79	0.06	10.63
Miscellaneous consumer goods	11.57	11.05	0.08	12.06
Miscellaneous consumer services	16.47	23.10	5.25	11.66
Rent	5.43	4.31	1.08	0.42
Taxes and cesses	0.29	0.77	12.74	0.14
Durable goods total	6.36	5.51	5.03	6.02
Total Non-food Group	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Note: "Miscellaneous consumer goods" include entertainment, goods for personal care and effects, and toilet articles, among many others.

Source: Reports on household consumption expenditure, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), 1994-95 and 2007-08

state has experienced a rise in the share of consumption in non-vegetarian items (for example, egg, fish, meat, etc.) in both rural and urban areas. These tendencies indicate that processing industries which can accommodate a good number of small firms/enterprises have tremendous possibility to grow in West Bengal. Thus,

to respond to such changing pattern of demand (i.e. change in the choice of consumption set) in West Bengal (and in India), small enterprises need to be encouraged in small urban centers and/or rural growth centers. For this, small urban centers in rural settings need to be promoted in dispersed patches through investing in

their infrastructure including physical connectivity — a process we refer to as rural urbanization. These centers can facilitate rural industrialization, corroborating the changing consumption pattern in both rural and urban areas. Furthermore, as Bendavid-Val (1991) argues, rural towns are important links in marketing agricultural exports from the area. Their export marketing function may include commodity processing, grading and packaging, storage, bulking, and depot activities, wholesale trade, transportation activities, and the maintenance, repair and supply services to support these functions. Thus, this process would create new avenues of employment generation for the rural unemployed and underemployed by both fostering growth of some rural industrial activities in the rural areas and in rural towns and by encouraging creation of agro-based non-farm activities through the process of agricultural diversification. The process of rural urbanization as well as rural industrialization would not only facilitate the rural-urban linkage mechanism through the process of rural-urban continuum, but also reduce distress driven rural-to-urban migration to a greater extent.

Conclusion

In this article, we discussed a part of the process of rural-urban continuum as one of the basic determinants of rural-urban linkages. Thus, we attempt to capture an inclusive approach of the development process in a developing country. In this context, we discussed the issue of migration (both short and long term) from rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban areas and

tried to understand whether rural industrialization helps rural people find gainful employment in local villages or nearby small towns / growth centers. It is argued that the pressure of finding livelihood on farm land has been tremendously increasing whereas modern industries have very limited scope for absorbing unskilled rural labor. The case of West Bengal elaborates this discussion and establishes the arguments in favor of rural industrialization. Scopes for growth of farm as well as rural non-farm activities are extended when we observe that consumption pattern of both rural and urban population in developing countries such India is changing.

Acknowledgments

This paper is part of a research which has been funded by the South Asia Network of Economic Research Institutes (SANEI), Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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