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## Urbanisation in Kerala: Current trends and key challenges for sustainability

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### Abstract

*The focus of this paper is to provide a broad outline of the recent patterns and trends of urban growth in the state Kerala from the developing country like India. Over the last 2 decades, many urban areas have experienced remarkable growth, because of rapid population growth and as the Indian economy have been transformed by a combination of rapid technological and political change. Around one-third of the total population now live in urban settlements. In addition, while cities command an increasingly dominant role in the Indian economy as centres of both production and consumption. Rapid urban growth throughout the developing world is critically outstripping the capacity of most cities to provide adequate services for their citizens. Over the next 30 years, the virtual majority of population growth is expected to be concentrated in urban areas in the developing world. While much of the current sustainable cities discuss focuses on the alarming problems for the world's largest urban agglomerations, the majority of all urban dwellers continue to reside in far smaller urban settlements. The challenges of achieving sustainable urban development will be particularly difficult in India.*

**Keywords:** Urbanization; Demography; Sustainable development.

### **Introduction:**

The transition from an agrarian society to a modern economy is usually described as involving three structural transformations. Firstly, workers move from the agricultural sector into industrial production and services. Secondly, there is a gradual shift from the informal to the formal sector. Finally, there is an increase in urbanisation in response to the shift towards formal-sector manufacturing and services, which are likely, still not necessarily, located in urban areas. Even in cases where industry locates in or around rural areas, this results in urbanisation through the expansion, rather than the intensification, of urban areas[2]

Urbanization is predictable, when pressure on land is high, income from agriculture is low, and unwarranted population growth. Even where rural jobs are obtainable, flow to cities occurs, as it offers a guarantee of economic opportunity and social mobility. It should be recognized that urbanization is not a disaster but a necessity. Urbanisation is a positive power and urban growth is a thrust to development. It assist the provision of public services to a large sector of the population, and make possible better economic opportunities and improve living conditions for those people even in the rural areas. The optimistic role of urbanisation can be materialized only if the cities are economically feasible and competent of generating economic growth in a sustained manner. If well managed, cities put forward important opportunities for economic and social development. Cities have forever been focal points for economic growth, innovation, and employment. In fact, many cities grew historically out of some natural advantage in transport or raw material supply. Cities, especially capital cities, are where the vast majority of modern productive activities are concentrated in the developing world and where the immense majority of paid employment opportunities are located. Cities are also centers of modern living, where female labour force participation is greatest and indicators of general health and wellbeing, literacy, women's status, and social mobility are in general highest. Finally, cities are also important social and cultural centers those historical museums, art galleries, film industries, theatres, fashion houses, and other important cultural centers. High population density typically implies lower per capita cost of providing infrastructure and basic services. In addition, despite the high rates of urban poverty that are found in many cities, urban inhabitants on average, enjoy better access to education and health care, in addition to other basic public services like electricity, water, and sanitation than people in rural areas do.

'Kerala Model of Development' gained concentration in the international ground due to the occurrence of the 'paradox' of high social development indicators and comparatively low economic growth. However, unique human settlement pattern of the state, its capabilities and implications are rarely discussed in economic scenario. Kerala is characterised by diversified human surroundings. Nevertheless, Kerala shows an urban and rural settlement pattern

manifested with an urban rural continuum having a uniform spread of dwelling units. In other words, the population is scattered more or less evenly over the entire state. Thus considering with other parts of India, Kerala is distinguished with comparatively low population density development in urban areas and high population density in rural areas.

In 2011 census shows that Kerala witnessed the highest level of urbanisation 47.71% as against the national average of 31.16% during 2001-11, with a growth of 83.20% over the previous decade. The analysis shows that new urban jurisdictions of a hitherto rural area as urban, due to the shift in the occupational structure from agriculture to other categories of employment causes such a huge urbanisation in the state. The paper observes that in a state like Kerala marked by scattered settlement, physical and economic dimension also should be taken into account while describing an area as urban.

The aim of this paper is to examine the kind of relationship that exists between urbanization and economic development in developing regions with a special reference to Kerala economy. The specific objectives includes to examine the trend and pattern of urbanisation in Kerala and sustainability of urban growth. For this study, we uses, secondary data sources especially various census reports of government of India, state urbanisation reports of town and country planning board of Kerala.

### **Unique features of Kerala:**

Kerala has a good quality socio economic status compared to other states in India. It has the top quality of life index in the country with a high literacy rate at 93.91% as against country's literacy rate of 74.04% according to the of Census 2011 with the male literacy rate 96.0 per cent and the female literacy rate 92.0 per cent. Kerala State, in south India, is an exception within the developing country like India. Despite having a poor per-capita income, Kerala's health indicators and life expectancy are close to those of advanced countries. Health status normally measured in terms of mortality indications like Death Rate, Infant Mortality Rate, and Life Expectancy etc. These indicators show that health status of Kerala is far advanced and higher than the all India average and still comparable with developed countries. It has been experienced that Kerala's economy is driven by the secondary and tertiary sectors, of which the tertiary sector being the fastest growing sector , the largest contributor to Kerala's economy whereas the primary sector's share in Gross State Domestic Product(GSDP) has been declining with the mining and quarrying segment in this sector registered a high growth rate.

Kerala is a home of peculiarities known as 'God's own country'. It has prosperous cultural heritage, high achievement in social development indicators even comparable to the developed nation but with moderately low per capita income. The plotted development in almost all part of

the State facilitated to the urban rural continuum, a settlement pattern unique to Kerala. Kerala is on the way of high level of urbanisation without physical materialization in tune to it, which is another peculiarity. The 2011 census puts the urban content of Kerala at 47.71% with a decadal growth rate of 82. 23%. A study on the niceties of the. Urbanisation of Kerala is significant in this background.

### Trend and Pattern of Urbanisation in Kerala:

Urbanisation is often measured as a demographic phenomenon. The demographic transition that has occurred in the state has thus happen to an integral part of the study on urbanisation. Kerala is having high population density since its formation in 1956. But due to the rich cultural heritage with high level of socio-economic development accompanied by a good standard of living that the state has achieved, the population growth rate is instinctively controlled and is now the state is trying towards zero population growth rate. India, the second heavily populated country in the world, have 121 crores of population (2011 census) sharing about 17.5% of the world population. Currently population of India is increasing with a decadal growth rate of 17.8%. However, during 1961-71, the decadal population growth rate was 36.2%, the highest growth rate recorded in the history of India. Since then the population growth rate of India underway was declining. The population of Kerala is 3.34 crores presently (2011 census) which represent about 2.7 % of the total population of India. The annual population growth rate of Kerala is 0.5%, which stands very low population growth rate among the states of India according to 2011 census. The variation of the annual population growth rate of Kerala and India from 1951 onwards is shown in the table 1.

**Table 1. Decadal population growth rate of population (in %) India and Kerala**

Year	India	Kerala
1951		
1961	21.6	24.6
1971	24.8	26
1981	24.7	19
1991	23.8	14
2001	21.4	9.42
2011	17.8	4.86

Source: census data, Government of India

The table 1 shows that historically Kerala is facing very low population growth rate, when

compared with the population growth rate of India. The decline in growth rate was contributed to partly by decline in fertility and somewhat by out-migration.

The comparison of the population growth rate during fifties and during present century shows that there is a spatial shift in the region of high population growth rate from the southern districts to the central and northern districts of Kerala. During fifties, the southern districts of Kerala experienced highest population growth rate, but at present, the highest population growth rate is seen in the central and northern Kerala. With very low fertility rate and stabilized death rate, Kerala is expected to achieve zero population growth rates within the next 25 to 30 years [6]

Urbanisation is an index of transformation from traditional rural economies to modern industrial one. It is progressive long-term process of absorption of population in urban areas. It is the population migration from rural area to an urban area that results in its expansion at the charge of rural or natural land. The degree or level of urbanisation is defined as relative number of people who live in urban areas.

Proportion of urban population=  $(U/P) * 100$

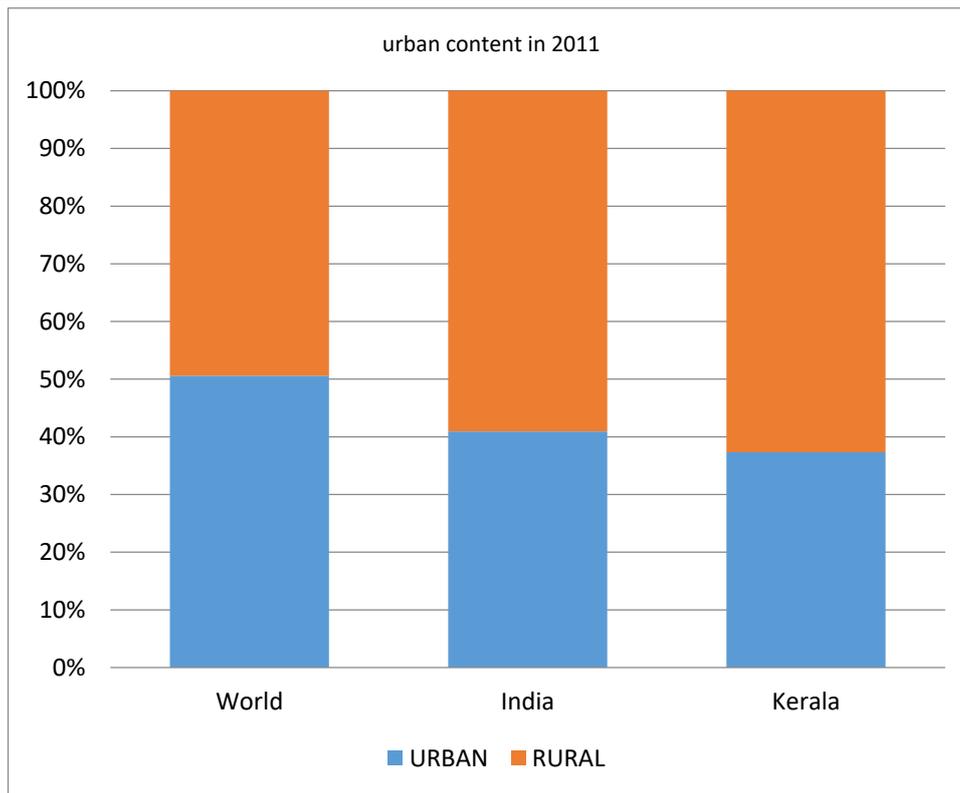
Proportion of urban population =  $(R/P) * 100$

Urban-Rural Ratio=  $(U/R) * 100$

Here U=Urban population, R= Rural population

and P= Total population

These are most commonly used to measure degree of urbanisation. Percent urban population in a place is generally termed as its urban content. A comparison of the urban content of Kerala, with that of the Nation and the World is shown in Figure1. Kerala also has higher level of urbanisation.



**Figure 1. Urban content of Kerala- Comparison with Nation and the World**

The variation of the urban content of India and Kerala from 1951 to 2011 is shown in Figure 2 and figure 3. The rural base that India keeps for a long time and the rural content of the Indian population is still floating around at 68%. The figure also shows that it will take another 4 to 5 decades time to have an urban content of 50%, which the world has already reached.

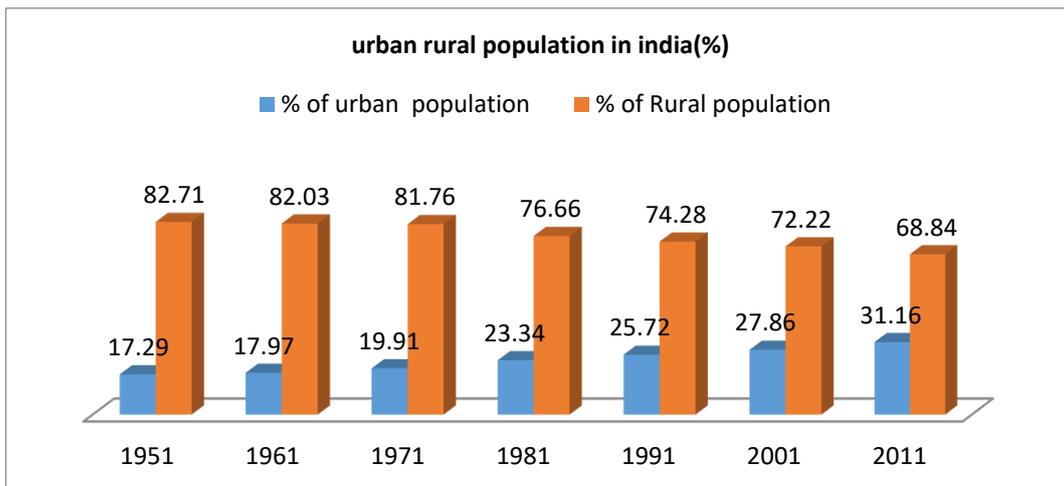


Figure 2: urban-rural population in India (%)

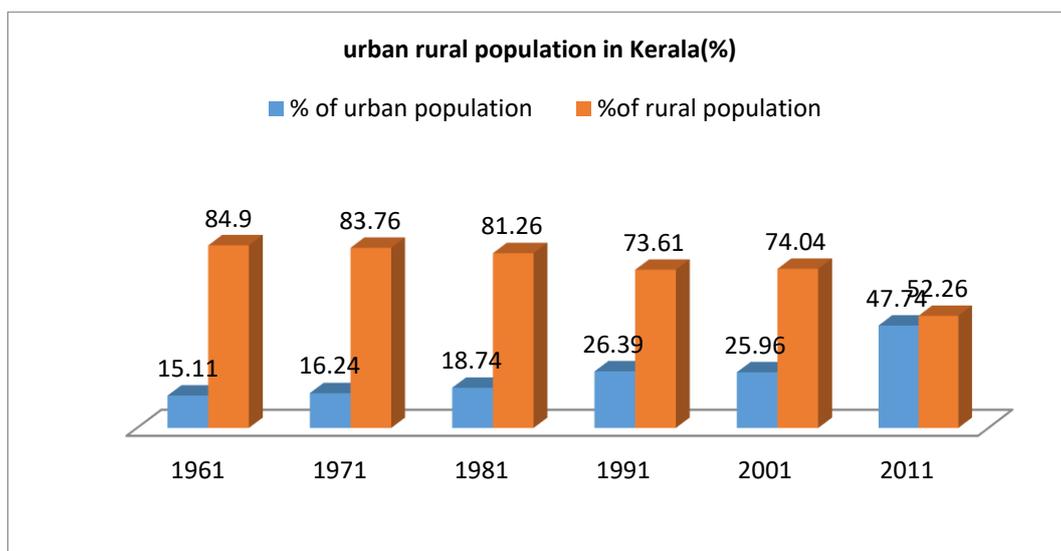


Figure 3: urban-rural population in Kerala (%)

Table 2: District- wise urban content in Kerala in 2001 and 2011

Districts	Urban content	
	Thiruvananthapuram	33.78
Kollam	18.02	45.1
Pathanamthitta	10.03	10.09
Alappuzha	29.36	54
Kottayam	15.35	25.57
Idukki	5.1	4.69
Ernakulam	47.65	68.07
Thrissur	28.21	67.18
Palakkad	13.68	24.09
Malappuram	9.82	44.18
Kozhikode	38.25	67.15
Wayanad	3.79	3.86
Kannur	50.46	65.04
Kasargode	19.41	38.078

Source:census 2001,2011,Government of India

The table 2 compares district wise urban content in Kerala between 2001 and 2011. The data shows that between 2001 & 2011 districts of Thrissur & Malappuram are subjected to the maximum urbanisation based on urban content. District like Idukki, Wayanad and Pathanamthitta have similarities of geographical pattern (including hilly forest areas) which are the eastern part of Kerala showing the lowest Urbanisation in both 2001 and 2011, whereas Central and northern parts of Kerala are subjected to high level urbanisation during 2001-2011. The district wise urban content shows that all the coastal district of Kerala are moderately highly urbanized. It can be summarised that Kerala is experiencing high level of urbanisation all over the State except in the high eastern region.

### Conclusion:

India is in a substantially growing stage of urbanisation. Regarding the growth rate of total population and urban population, India shows the similar pattern of other countries, both are declining with urban population growth rate higher than the total population growth rate. If India is considered, it is not the rate of increase in urban population that matters, but the quantum of population added to urban area for each percentage increase in urban population. The record of population growth rate in Kerala shows that the growth rate of urban population has always been greater than that of the total population signifying the very high pace of urbanisation the state is experiencing. Areal reclassification due to urban jurisdiction (the declaration of a hitherto rural area in to urban due to the shift in occupational structure) is the main reason for the high level of urbanisation noted here especially the last decade. Low population growth rate with high urbanisation in Kerala will get its signal in the life style of the society. Well Quality service in all aspects will be a demand for the society. High quality requirements in housing, commercial establishments, public utilities, social infrastructures etc will be the future obligations in Kerala.

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