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Urban–Rural Divide: Implications of Uneven Urbanization for India’s Economic Superpower Ambitions under the Leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi

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Abstract: India's aspiration to emerge as a global economic superpower has accelerated under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi through policies promoting urbanization, infrastructure development, digital transformation, and industrial growth. Despite these achievements, uneven urbanization and persistent rural–urban inequalities continue to pose significant challenges to inclusive and sustainable development. This study examines how uneven urbanization influences India's economic development ambitions by analysing disparities in income, education, healthcare, digital access, infrastructure, and employment opportunities between rural and urban regions. The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and policy-oriented research design based on secondary data collected from government reports, policy documents, international organization publications, and peer-reviewed academic literature. The findings indicate that although flagship initiatives such as the Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, PM Gati Shakti, Digital India, PMGSY, PM-KISAN, and Jal Jeevan Mission have strengthened infrastructure and improved service delivery, their benefits remain unevenly distributed across regions. Persistent regional disparities continue to encourage rural-to-urban migration, expand informal employment, increase pressure on urban infrastructure, and constrain balanced economic growth. The study argues that India's long-term economic competitiveness depends not only on rapid urban expansion but also on inclusive rural transformation, balanced regional development, and equitable access to education, healthcare, digital connectivity, and employment opportunities. The findings suggest that integrating urban and rural development through coordinated policy implementation can reduce structural inequalities and strengthen India's pathway toward sustainable and inclusive economic growth. This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive political and developmental analysis of the relationship between uneven urbanization and India's economic ambitions while offering evidence-based policy recommendations for promoting balanced national development.

Keywords: Uneven Urbanization; Rural–Urban Divide; Inclusive Development; Economic Growth; Regional Inequality; Narendra Modi.

Introduction

Urbanization is widely recognized as a key driver of economic growth, industrial development, employment generation, and innovation. The experiences of countries such as the United States, Japan, South Korea, and China demonstrate that rapid urban expansion has significantly contributed to national economic progress. India is currently undergoing one of the world's fastest urban transitions. According to the United Nations, India's urban population is projected to exceed **600 million by 2030**, making urban development central to the country's economic transformation.

Since 2014, the Government of India has launched several flagship initiatives, including the **Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, Digital India, PM Gati Shakti, Make in India, Bharatmala Pariyojana**, and **PM Awas Yojana**, to strengthen urban infrastructure, improve digital governance, enhance connectivity, and promote industrial growth. These programmes have accelerated investment, modernized public services, and supported economic development. Despite these achievements, the benefits of urbanization remain unevenly distributed. Metropolitan cities continue to attract greater investment, employment, quality education, healthcare, and infrastructure, while many rural and less-developed regions face persistent challenges of poverty, inadequate public services, and limited industrial development. This imbalance has intensified rural-to-urban migration and widened regional disparities. Although previous studies have examined urbanization, migration, and development policies independently, limited research has analysed how uneven urbanization influences India's aspiration to become a global economic power, particularly in the post-2014 policy context. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between uneven urbanization, regional inequality, migration, and economic development, while evaluating the role of major government initiatives in promoting balanced and inclusive growth.

Research Objectives: The study aims to examine the nature and extent of uneven urbanization in India and to analyse the social and economic dimensions of the rural–urban divide. It also evaluates the contribution of major government development programmes in reducing regional inequalities, assesses how uneven urbanization affects India's ambition to become an economic superpower, and suggests practical policy recommendations for achieving balanced and inclusive regional development.

Research Questions: This study seeks to understand the main reasons behind uneven urbanization in India and examine how the rural–urban divide influences economic development and inclusive growth. It also investigates the effectiveness of major government programmes in reducing regional disparities and explores the policy measures needed to promote balanced urbanization and sustainable economic development.

Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design based on secondary data collected from government reports, policy documents, publications of international organisations, and peer-reviewed literature. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis and comparative policy analysis to examine the relationship between uneven urbanization and India's economic development. Information was cross-verified using multiple reliable sources to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Study Limitations: This study is based solely on secondary data and does not include primary data collected through surveys or interviews. Therefore, it may not fully capture regional variations and local implementation challenges. Future studies can strengthen the findings by using primary data and quantitative methods.

Significance of the Study: This research contributes to the existing literature by combining political, economic, and public policy perspectives to understand the impact of uneven urbanization in India. It provides a comprehensive analysis of how regional disparities influence inclusive development, migration, economic competitiveness, and sustainable growth. The findings will be useful for researchers, policymakers, urban planners, and public administrators in designing effective strategies for balanced urban and rural development.

Literature Review

Existing literature identifies urbanization as a major driver of economic growth and structural transformation. Lewis (1954) argued that shifting labour from agriculture to industry increases productivity and supports economic development, while Henderson (2003) highlighted that cities promote economies of scale, innovation, and higher productivity. Similarly, Todaro and Smith (2021) observed that well-managed urbanization accelerates industrialization, employment, and income growth, whereas unplanned urban expansion can increase congestion, inequality, and environmental challenges. Recent reports by the World Bank, NITI Aayog, UN-Habitat, and the United Nations show that India's rapid urbanization has created significant opportunities for economic growth but has also widened regional disparities. Metropolitan cities continue to attract greater investment and infrastructure, while many rural and backward regions face deficiencies in healthcare, education, employment, digital connectivity, and basic services. The literature further suggests that inclusive economic growth depends not only on urban expansion but also on balanced regional development, effective governance, and well-designed public policies.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: The study is informed by Classical Development Theory, Growth Pole Theory, and Inclusive Development Theory. Classical Development Theory explains the structural movement of labour from agriculture to industry. Growth Pole Theory argues that development tends to concentrate in specific urban centres, generating regional imbalances. Inclusive Development Theory emphasises equitable access to opportunities, public services, infrastructure, and institutional support across all regions. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analysing how uneven urbanization shapes economic development and regional inequality in India.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a **qualitative descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the implications of uneven urbanization for India's economic development and global aspirations during **2014–2025**. The research is based entirely on **secondary data** obtained from government publications (Economic Survey, Census of India, NITI Aayog, Ministries), international organizations (UN, World Bank, OECD, IMF, UNESCO, ITU), peer-reviewed journals, books, policy reports, and official documents related to flagship programmes such as Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, PM Gati Shakti, Digital India, PMGSY, PM-KISAN, Jal Jeevan Mission, Ayushman Bharat, and Skill India. Data were collected through a systematic review of policy documents, statistical reports, and academic literature and analysed using **qualitative content analysis** and **comparative policy analysis** to identify themes related to urbanization, regional disparities, migration, infrastructure, employment, and inclusive growth. Reliability was ensured through the use of authoritative sources and cross-verification of information from multiple references. As the study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary data, no human participants were involved, and ethical approval was not required. Although the absence of primary data limits insights into local implementation challenges, the use of diverse and credible sources provides a robust basis for analysing uneven urbanization and its implications for India's economic development.

Conceptual Framework: Urbanization and Economic Development

Urbanization refers to the increasing concentration of populations in urban areas accompanied by structural transformation from agrarian to industrial and service-based economies (Henderson, 2003). Classical development theories suggest that urbanization facilitates economies of scale, labor specialization, innovation, and productivity gains.

According to Lewis (1954), economic development occurs through the transfer of labor from low-productivity agricultural sectors to high-productivity industrial sectors. Cities become centers of investment, entrepreneurship, and technological advancement. Consequently,

urbanization contributes significantly to GDP growth.

However, unbalanced urbanization may produce adverse outcomes including congestion, environmental degradation, housing shortages, informal employment, and regional inequalities (Todaro & Smith, 2021). The challenge for policymakers lies in ensuring that urban growth promotes inclusive national development rather than reinforcing socio-economic disparities. India's development trajectory reflects both opportunities and challenges associated with rapid urbanization.

Trends in Urbanization in India

Urbanization has represented a major socio-economic transformation in India since independence. Over the past seven decades, the urban population has increased steadily, driven by economic growth, development, industrial expansion, and improved infrastructure. In 1951, approximately **17.3%** of the population resided in urban areas. This figure rose to **27.8% in 2001** and **31.16% in 2011** (Census of India, 2011). According to United Nations estimates (2024), about **37%** of India’s population currently lives in urban areas, with forecasts showing this will exceed **40% by 2035**.

The pace of urbanization has accelerated because of several related factors. First, **industrialization** has created jobs in manufacturing, construction, and services. This has attracted people from rural regions. Second, the rapid growth of the service sector, especially in IT, banking, telecommunications, healthcare, and education, has transformed cities into economic hubs. Cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Pune have become important centers for business, finance, innovation, and employment.

Rural-to-urban migration is another major factor driving urbanization. Millions migrate each year in search of better employment, higher wages, quality education, improved healthcare, and a better standard of living. The Economic Survey of India and migration studies indicate that migration has become a significant contributor to urban population growth. This trend is especially pronounced among young, working-age individuals.

Government policies have also played a key part in promoting urban development. Since 2014, the Government of India has launched several flagship programs to strengthen urban infrastructure and improve the quality of life in cities. These include the **Smart Cities Mission**, **AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation)**, **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban)**, and large-scale investments in highways, metro rail systems, airports, industrial corridors, and digital infrastructure have accelerated the growth of urban economic centers. Improved transport infrastructure, including expressways, dedicated freight corridors, and expanded railway connectivity, has additionally improved the consolidation of cities with regional and national markets.

The expansion of **information technology and the digital economy** has also shaped India’s urbanization. Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Gurugram, and Noida are global IT and startup hubs that attract skilled professionals nationwide. Rapid growth in e-commerce, fintech, digital services, and innovation has strengthened urban economies and created millions of jobs. Cities act as the primary engines of economic growth. Although urban areas accommodate only around **one-third of the country’s population**, they contribute approximately **two-thirds (about 63–67%) of India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** (World Bank, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2023). This demonstrates the high concentration of economic activities, industries, financial institutions, and service-sector enterprises within urban regions. Moreover, cities account for a considerable part of India’s tax revenues, exports, innovation, and investment, making them critical for securing long-term economic development.

Although these positive trends exist, urbanization in India remains **uneven and regionally imbalanced**. States such as **Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Karnataka, Telangana, and Kerala** have achieved relatively high levels of urbanization due to strong industrial bases,

better infrastructure, and broad economies. In contrast, states such as **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Assam** continue to have lower urbanization levels because of slower industrial development, limited employment opportunities, and weaker urban infrastructure. This regional disparity has resulted in unequal patterns of economic progress and social development. Highly urbanized states generally show higher per capita incomes, better educational and healthcare facilities, stronger infrastructure, and greater employment opportunities. Conversely, less urbanized states regularly experience problems, for example, poverty, unemployment, insufficient public services, and continuous out-migration of skilled workers. These differences have widened regional inequalities and placed increasing pressure on rapidly growing metropolitan cities, which face difficulties with housing shortages, traffic congestion, pollution, insufficient public transportation, water scarcity, and the expansion of informal settlements.

In the future, India is expected to witness one of the largest urban changes in the world over the coming decades. The **United Nations** projects that by **2050**, nearly **50% of India’s population, around 877 million people will live in urban areas**. Managing this rapid urban growth through sustainable planning, balanced regional development, affordable housing, productive public transport, environmental protection, and involving governance will be essential to achieving sustainable and fair national development.

Understanding the Urban–Rural Divide

The urban–rural divide refers to disparities in income, education, healthcare, employment, infrastructure, and digital access between urban and rural populations. Despite India's rapid economic growth, development has remained uneven, with urban areas benefiting more than rural regions. Bridging this gap is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Income inequality remains a major concern. Urban areas offer better employment opportunities in information technology, manufacturing, banking, healthcare, and other service sectors, resulting in higher and more stable incomes. In contrast, rural livelihoods depend largely on agriculture, which contributes only **16–18% of India's GDP** while employing nearly **45% of the workforce**. Challenges such as climate change, fragmented landholdings, rising production costs, and unstable market prices reduce farm incomes and encourage rural-to-urban migration. The education sector also reflects this disparity. Although initiatives such as the **Right to Education (RTE) Act, Samagra Shiksha**, and **NEP 2020** have improved educational access, many rural schools continue to face shortages of qualified teachers, digital facilities, laboratories, and internet connectivity. These inequalities became more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when limited access to digital devices and reliable internet disrupted online learning for many rural students. Similar inequalities exist in healthcare. Urban areas have better hospitals, specialist doctors, and diagnostic facilities, whereas rural healthcare largely depends on **Primary Health Centres (PHCs)** and **Community Health Centres (CHCs)**, which often experience shortages of medical staff, medicines, and equipment. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these weaknesses and highlighted the importance of strengthening rural healthcare and telemedicine. The digital divide has emerged as another significant challenge. Despite initiatives such as **Digital India, BharatNet**, and **PM-WANI**, and India's internet user base exceeding **900 million**, rural areas continue to lag behind in broadband connectivity, digital literacy, and access to digital devices. This limits opportunities in education, e-governance, digital banking, telemedicine, and agricultural marketing. Overall, the urban–rural divide remains a multidimensional challenge. While government initiatives have improved rural infrastructure and public services, sustained investment in education, healthcare, digital connectivity, agricultural modernisation, rural industries, and skill development is necessary to promote balanced regional development and inclusive economic growth.

Uneven Urbanization under the Modi Government

Since 2014, the Government of India has adopted an urban-led development strategy, considering cities as the main engines of economic growth. Several flagship programmes, including the **Smart Cities Mission**, **AMRUT**, **PM Gati Shakti**, and **Make in India**, have aimed to improve infrastructure, governance, industrial development, and connectivity. These initiatives have strengthened urban infrastructure, attracted investment, and enhanced service delivery in many cities. However, their benefits have been concentrated mainly in large metropolitan and selected urban areas, while many small towns and rural regions continue to face inadequate infrastructure and limited economic opportunities.

The **Smart Cities Mission (2015)** has improved digital governance and urban services in selected cities, but its impact has been limited outside these areas due to differences in administrative capacity and citizen participation. Similarly, the **AMRUT Mission** has expanded access to water supply, sewage treatment, and waste management in urban centres, although it provides little direct support to rural infrastructure. **PM Gati Shakti (2021)** has enhanced infrastructure planning and connectivity by integrating transport and logistics networks, while **Make in India (2014)** has encouraged manufacturing investment and industrial growth. Nevertheless, these investments have largely remained concentrated in metropolitan and peri-urban regions.

Overall, these programmes have contributed to India's economic growth and urban modernization, but they have also widened regional disparities. Large cities have experienced faster development, higher productivity, and greater employment opportunities, whereas many rural and semi-urban areas continue to lag behind. This uneven pattern of urbanization has reinforced the urban–rural divide and remains a major challenge for achieving balanced and inclusive development.

Economic Effects of the Urban–Rural Divide

The urban–rural divide has significant implications for India's long-term economic development. Unequal access to employment, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and income opportunities has widened regional disparities and limited inclusive growth. As nearly **60–65%** of India's population resides in rural areas, their economic progress remains crucial for sustainable national development.

A major consequence of this divide is weak rural purchasing power, which restricts domestic demand. According to the **NSSO/NSO Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys**, rural households spend considerably less than urban households because a large share of their income is devoted to essential needs. Although nearly **half of India's workforce** is engaged in agriculture, the sector contributes only **15–18% of GDP**, resulting in low incomes and reduced consumption. Strengthening rural incomes would expand domestic demand and stimulate manufacturing and service sectors.

The urban–rural divide also drives large-scale rural-to-urban migration. More than **100 million** people migrate internally in India (World Bank), primarily in search of better employment, education, and living conditions. While migration supports industrial labour demand, it also increases pressure on urban housing, transport, water supply, sanitation, and other public services. Most migrants are employed in the informal sector with limited job security and social protection, while rural areas experience shortages of young workers, affecting agricultural productivity.

Human capital development is similarly affected. Rural areas continue to face inadequate educational and healthcare facilities, including shortages of qualified teachers, digital infrastructure, hospitals, and medical professionals. **ASER** reports consistently show lower learning outcomes in many rural districts than in urban areas. Limited access to quality education, skill development, and healthcare reduces labour productivity and weakens long-term economic competitiveness. The divide further deepens regional inequality, as investment, infrastructure, and employment remain concentrated in urban and industrial regions, while many rural districts continue to lag behind. **NITI Aayog** emphasises that reducing regional disparities through balanced regional development is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Overall, bridging the urban–rural divide by improving rural incomes, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities would strengthen domestic demand, enhance productivity, reduce migration pressures, and support India's long-term economic development.

Rural Transformation and Government Initiatives in India

Over the last decade, rural India has witnessed significant transformation through various government development programmes aimed at improving infrastructure, livelihoods, and access to essential services. These initiatives focus on reducing poverty, improving connectivity, promoting digital inclusion, and strengthening economic opportunities. Although challenges such as unemployment, regional disparities, and dependence on agriculture continue, these programmes have contributed to more inclusive and sustainable rural development.

The **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)** has played a crucial role in improving rural road connectivity by constructing and upgrading all-weather roads to previously unconnected villages. Improved transport has enabled farmers to access markets more easily, reduced post-harvest losses, improved access to healthcare and educational institutions, and increased employment opportunities by linking rural areas with nearby towns and regional markets.

The **Digital India Programme**, launched in 2015, has significantly reduced the digital divide between urban and rural India. Through the **BharatNet** project, high-speed internet connectivity is being extended to more than **2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats**. This has expanded access to online education, telemedicine, digital banking, UPI-based payments, and e-governance services through Common Service Centres (CSCs), leading to a rapid increase in internet usage across rural areas.

The **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)**, introduced in 2019, provides direct financial assistance of **₹6,000 annually** to eligible small and marginal farmers through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system. Benefiting over **11 crore farmers**, the scheme supports the purchase of agricultural inputs, reduces dependence on informal credit, enhances financial security during agricultural uncertainties, and increases rural consumption.

The **Jal Jeevan Mission**, launched in 2019, aims to provide functional tap water connections to every rural household. The programme has substantially improved access to safe drinking water, reduced waterborne diseases, saved time previously spent collecting water particularly for women and children—and strengthened rural water infrastructure through pipelines, storage facilities, and filtration systems. Although most rural households have gained tap water access, ensuring regular supply and maintenance remains an ongoing challenge. The **Skill India Mission**, implemented in 2015, seeks to improve employability by providing market-oriented skill training through programmes such as the **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana**

(PMKVY). Training in sectors including construction, healthcare, retail, information technology, and agriculture has promoted self-employment, entrepreneurship, and local employment opportunities while reducing migration from rural areas. However, issues related to training quality, job placement, and regional skill disparities continue to require policy attention.

Overall, these government initiatives have contributed significantly to rural transformation by improving infrastructure, promoting digital connectivity, enhancing agricultural income, ensuring access to safe drinking water, and developing human capital. Their combined impact has strengthened rural-urban linkages, improved access to healthcare, education, banking, and public services, and raised the overall standard of living in many rural communities. Nevertheless, long-term rural development still requires continued investment and policy reforms to address structural challenges such as underemployment, agricultural dependence, climate vulnerability, and regional inequalities.

Urbanization, Migration, and Social Challenges

Urbanization is not uniform across regions, particularly in developing countries where cities expand much faster than rural areas due to better employment opportunities, higher incomes, improved education, healthcare, and infrastructure. These differences encourage large-scale rural-to-urban migration, making it one of the most significant socio-economic changes in the modern world. According to the United Nations, more than half of the global population currently lives in urban areas, and this proportion is expected to reach nearly 70% by 2050. A major share of this increase is driven by internal migration rather than natural population growth.

Although migration improves employment prospects and living standards for many people, it also creates significant challenges for urban areas. The rapid inflow of migrants increases the demand for affordable housing, leading to housing shortages, rising rents, overcrowding, and informal rental arrangements. Many low-income migrants are unable to access formal housing and are forced to live in informal settlements or slums, which often lack essential services such as safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and proper waste management. According to UN-Habitat, more than one billion people worldwide currently live in slum-like conditions, and this number continues to rise with rapid urbanization.

Rapid urban population growth also places considerable pressure on public infrastructure and basic services. Transportation systems become overcrowded, traffic congestion increases, and public transport often fails to meet growing demand. Similarly, healthcare facilities and educational institutions experience excessive pressure, resulting in overcrowded hospitals, larger classroom sizes, and limited public resources. Basic utilities, including water supply and electricity, also become less reliable in rapidly expanding cities.

Urban expansion further creates serious environmental challenges. The conversion of agricultural land, forests, and wetlands into residential and industrial areas leads to habitat loss and ecological imbalance. Increased population density also contributes to higher levels of air and noise pollution, greater waste generation, water contamination, and excessive use of landfills. In addition, the growing use of vehicles and energy increases greenhouse gas emissions, thereby intensifying climate change at both local and global levels.

These challenges highlight the need for balanced and integrated development. Sustainable urbanization requires simultaneous investment in both rural and urban areas. Improving

employment opportunities, education, healthcare, and infrastructure in rural regions can reduce distress-driven migration, while better urban planning, affordable housing, efficient public transport, and stronger environmental policies can improve the quality of urban life. Therefore, coordinated regional planning that promotes balanced rural and urban development is essential for managing migration and ensuring sustainable and inclusive development.

Results and Analysis

The analysis indicates that India's urbanization has accelerated considerably over the last decade, supported by infrastructure expansion, digital transformation, industrial development, and urban renewal programmes. However, the benefits of this growth have not been distributed evenly across regions. Economic opportunities, quality public services, and infrastructure remain concentrated in metropolitan cities and industrial corridors, while many rural districts continue to experience lower levels of development. The findings therefore confirm that uneven urbanization remains a major structural challenge to inclusive economic development in India.

Rural–urban migration has intensified these disparities. Persistent differences in employment opportunities and public services continue to push workers from rural districts to urban centres. Migration has supported industrial labour supply and urban growth, but it has also increased pressure on housing, transport, and informal employment in cities while reducing the availability of productive young workers in several rural areas. This shows that migration is both a result of inequality and a mechanism through which inequality is reproduced.

Government programmes have produced measurable improvements, but their effects remain uneven. Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT have improved urban governance and infrastructure, PM Gati Shakti has strengthened connectivity, and Digital India has expanded digital access. At the same time, PMGSY, PM-KISAN, and Jal Jeevan Mission have improved rural connectivity, income support, and drinking water access. Yet differences in implementation capacity, institutional coordination, and local administrative conditions mean that these gains have not fully closed the rural–urban development gap. Overall, the evidence suggests that urbanization contributes strongly to growth, but its concentration in a limited number of regions weakens inclusiveness and reinforces spatial inequality. India's ambition to become a global economic superpower therefore depends on balanced regional development, stronger rural economies, better education and healthcare, more productive employment, and wider access to infrastructure and public services.

Policy Recommendations and Discussion.

Balanced regional development is essential for achieving inclusive economic growth in India. While metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad have experienced rapid development, many districts in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and the North-Eastern states continue to lag behind. Therefore, greater public investment in backward regions, aspirational districts, and small towns is necessary. The Aspirational Districts Programme has improved health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure, but stronger financial support, effective monitoring, and private sector participation are needed to reduce regional disparities and migration.

Strengthening rural infrastructure remains a priority. The **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)** has significantly improved all-weather road connectivity, reducing transport costs, increasing farmers' access to markets, and promoting rural enterprises. Future investments should also focus on cold storage, warehouses, and rural logistics to minimise the

10–15% post-harvest losses reported for major crops. Improving rural education through **Digital India**, **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**, and the **Skill India Mission** by expanding digital infrastructure, teacher training, and vocational education can enhance employment opportunities and reduce migration. Quality healthcare should be strengthened through **Ayushman Bharat–PM-JAY**, which provides health insurance coverage of **up to ₹5 lakh per family annually** and has expanded digital healthcare through the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)**. However, high out-of-pocket expenditure and unequal access to healthcare require stronger primary health services, better regulation of private hospitals, and wider telemedicine facilities. Rural industrialization should be promoted through **Make in India**, MSME development, agro-processing, food and dairy industries, manufacturing clusters, cold-chain infrastructure, entrepreneurship, and easier access to credit and skill development. Similarly, expanding **Digital India**, **BharatNet**, digital literacy, and affordable broadband connectivity will improve access to government services and economic opportunities.

Finally, the planned development of Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, including Lucknow, Indore, Coimbatore, Jaipur, and Bhubaneswar, through improved infrastructure, transport connectivity, and the **Smart Cities Mission**, can reduce pressure on metropolitan areas and promote balanced urbanization. Overall, programmes such as **PMGSY**, **Digital India**, and **Ayushman Bharat** have strengthened inclusive development, but future policies should prioritise service quality, effective implementation, and equitable regional growth.

Conclusion

This study examined the implications of uneven urbanization for India's ambition to emerge as a global economic superpower under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The findings indicate that although rapid urbanization has accelerated economic growth through infrastructure development, industrial expansion, digital transformation, and improved public services, its benefits remain unevenly distributed across regions. Persistent disparities in income, education, healthcare, employment, digital connectivity, and infrastructure continue to reinforce the rural–urban divide and hinder balanced regional development. The analysis further demonstrates that major government initiatives including the Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, PM Gati Shakti, Digital India, PMGSY, PM-KISAN, Jal Jeevan Mission, Ayushman Bharat, and Skill India—have made significant contributions to both urban and rural development. However, differences in implementation capacity, institutional coordination, and regional governance have limited their ability to achieve equitable outcomes across all regions. Overall, the study concludes that India's aspiration to become a leading global economic power depends not only on the growth of its cities but also on the sustainable transformation of its rural economy. Reducing regional inequalities through greater investment in education, healthcare, digital infrastructure, rural industrialization, employment generation, and institutional capacity will be essential for achieving inclusive and resilient economic development. Future research incorporating primary data, district-level case studies, and quantitative analysis would further strengthen the understanding of the relationship between uneven urbanization and India's long-term development goals.

Declarations

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Ethical Approval: *This study is based exclusively on secondary data obtained from publicly available sources. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.*

Informed Consent: *Not applicable.*

Data Availability Statement: *All data analysed during this study were obtained from publicly available government reports, international organisation publications, and peer-reviewed academic literature cited in the reference list. Additional information is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.*

Author Contributions

Anurag Yadav: *Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, data collection, analysis, writing original draft, and revision.*

Dr. Rais Ahmad: *Supervision, conceptual guidance, critical review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript.*

AI Disclosure Statement

The authors confirm that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools or generative AI technologies were used in the preparation, writing, editing, or revision of this manuscript. All research, analysis, interpretation, writing, and final review were carried out solely by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the content.

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