

Abstract

Urbanization is intrinsically linked with the development process as the degree of urbanization is a good indicator of the level of development in a region and provides the base for analyzing the quality of life in spatial perspective. The concept of development should be viewed not only in the context of the quantity of production but also in the context of distribution system as urban service delivery system is an integral part of urban development, the harmonized distribution of which can promote the growth and all-round development of a region on the one hand and its inequitable distribution can be the major cause for the biased development, deterioration and ultimate decline on the other. However, the role of urbanisation as a contributor of development has become questionable in recent years as along with the positive impact, its negative implication cannot be overlooked. Kurseong town is no exception and is not free from multifaceted problems associated with the process of urbanisation. Therefore, the present study attempts to find out whether the urbanization which is taking place in Kurseong town is at par with the level of development of its civic amenities because though urbanization is an integral part of the development process, one cannot deny the fact that besides opening vista for various opportunities and new possibilities, the process of urbanization is also associated with multifarious problems which are complex in nature. The present study is an endeavour to evaluate more precisely and scientifically the level of development and classifies different wards of Kurseong Municipality accordingly for the purpose of effective planning for optimum location and allocation of amenities and services to ensure better socio-economic life of the residents of Kurseong Municipality. Further, it aims to study spatial and temporal demographic change and identify different urban problems.

The study area is the administrative headquarter of Kurseong Sub-division situated at 26° 51'42" N to 26° 53'36" N latitude and 88° 15'12" E to 88° 17'32" E longitude in Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Kurseong Municipality, constituted in 1879 covers an area of 7.85 km² consisting of 20 wards with a total population of 42446 (2011 census). It accounts for 5.11% of the total urban area and 5.83% of the total urban population of the district.

The study is based on four major hypotheses - i) Rapid growth of population of Kurseong Municipality area has taken place due to migration from the surrounding rural areas, ii) The quality of life of the people varies in the C.B.D. and the peripheral area of the Kurseong Municipality, iii) Urban population growth has placed enormous burden on the

basic civic amenities through its increased exploitation and iv) There are spatial patterns of imbalance in the provision and requirement of basic amenities. The first hypothesis has been proved by the fact that the decades recording very high population growth rate also records high percentage of in-migrants in Kurseong Municipality. The number of in-migrants comprised a significant percentage of total population of Kurseong town during 1981 – 1991 (24.70%) and during 1991 – 2001 (24.28%) when the decadal growth of the town was very high i.e. 48.59% during 1981 – 1991 and 49.56% during 1991 – 2001. To test the remaining three hypotheses, two statistical techniques namely weight free Deprivation Index Method and Z-score Method have been applied taking 51 indices of social, economic and demographic indicators into consideration and different wards have been categorized into five groups namely very high, high, moderate, low and very low level of development. Further, a comparative analysis has been undertaken between the existing facilities and the recommended standards as per URDPFI Guidelines, in order to find out the current status of urban utility facilities and identify the service gaps. The existing urban facilities selected for the present study have been analysed by computing the population density map and influence zone maps of the available facilities in order to find out the number of people served by each facility.

The result and discussion reveals that Ward 15 falls under very high development category, the contributing factors being its location in the CBD well connected by roads and railway line, ranking 1st and 2nd in most of the indicators such as recreation, commercial establishments, transport and communication, housing standards, demography and basic amenities such as water connection from the municipality and sewage connected to the Central Sewage Pipeline. Ward 12 lies in the high development category. Being located in the CBD, it is in a better position in indicators of recreation, some of the civic amenities, commercial establishments and transport and communication and basic amenities of water supply and sewage. Wards 8, 11 and 13 fall under moderate development category and as many as fifteen wards falls under low and very low development category. These wards lack in most of the educational, health and recreational, civic amenities, commercial establishments and transportation and communication facilities. The provision of many existing civic amenities of Kurseong town varies from the recommended standards as per URDPFI Guidelines. These are concentrated in a few wards and at the same time are not proportional to the population size. The delimitation of the zone of influence for different urban utility facilities reveals that the centrally located wards exhibit fairly well position in

different facilities provided by the municipality, whereas wards located in the peripheral area lack in most of these facilities.

On the basis of the analysis, major problems of Kurseong Municipality have been identified. These include land use problem, problem associated with the pressure of population, socio-economic problems, environmental problem, financial problem and problems associated with spatial variation in the level of development and accordingly different proposals with a multidisciplinary approach have been put forward which will aid in reducing the spatial inequalities enabling the total well-being of the people and egalitarianism of the inhabitants in terms of level of development and quality of life and thus, ultimately fostering the sustainability and all-round development of Kurseong town.