

City Systems in South Asian Urbanization and Growth

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1. Introduction and Objective:

A well-managed urbanization process is crucial for the sustainable economic growth and development in an economic system. The pattern of urbanization in South Asia in comparison to other economic regions, such as south-east Asia or Latin America has typically remained uneven both in terms of its degree and pace (World Urbanization Prospects-UN 2014, Ellis and Roberts 2016). Recent reports have typified city growth in many south Asian countries as ‘a messy affair’, where population growth had put unsustainable pressures on infrastructure, basic services and environment. A major element of the urbanization growth in the region has also been the disproportionate rise of urban population and the wide disparity between the growth rates of secondary and primary cities across various economies in the region. According to analysts, these elements have hampered the region’s potential benefits from the urbanization process to economic growth.

It may however be noted that the character of city systems in the south-Asian region, viz., the relative growth of primary and secondary cities and its interactions with the economic growth process has rarely been attempted in the literature. In this backdrop, the main objective of this paper would be to examine the comparative growth of secondary and primary cities among major economies of south-Asia and subsequently examine whether the system of city growth bear any implication for the divergences in regional economic growth.

2. Methodology and Plan of Study:

With the main objective set to survey the relative growth of secondary and primary cities among the major south-Asian economies and subsequently examine whether the systems of city growth bear any implication for the divergences in economic growth of the region, the remaining part of this paper would (tentatively) be structured as follows. In section 2, we would examine the pattern of urbanization in each of the major economies of south-Asia, viz., Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Srilanka. Section 3 would provide a comparative picture of growth in primary and secondary cities in the region. In section 4, we would discuss how the system of cities impact on the urbanization and economic growth process. Section 5 would provide the empirical analysis that contains the structure of the econometric model, the data description, and comments on the estimation results. The empirical analyses would be performed using country-specific cross-sectional data on 10 points of time at 5-years of interval during the period 1970-2015 from these 7 economies. Section 6 would summarize and conclude on the main findings.

3. Data Source: The two main data sources of this analyses are the ‘World Urbanization Prospects, 2014 Revision’, (Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

United Nations) and the 'National Accounts Statistics, Version 2016' (Economic and Social Development, Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations).