

# Assessing Regional Disparity: Comparing Development in Small and Medium Towns

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**Abstract**— Regional disparity, marked by stark differences in economic development, infrastructure, and living standards between urban centers and rural areas, remains a persistent challenge worldwide. This research seeks for addressing issue through focusing on role of small and medium towns (SMTs) as potential catalysts for reducing regional disparities. The study employs a multi-disciplinary approach, combining economic, social, and environmental analyses to investigate the impact of SMTs on regional development. Utilizing a combination of quantitative data and qualitative case studies, the research explores how SMTs can enhance access to basic services, promote employment opportunities, and foster inclusive growth. Additionally, the study delves into the factors influencing the successful transformation of SMTs into regional hubs, considering governance, infrastructure, and community engagement. Our findings suggest that strategically developing and investing in Small and Medium Towns can mitigate regional disparities, fostering balanced regional growth and improving the quality of life for residents in underserved areas. This research aims to provide policymakers and urban planners with valuable insights to guide decision-making, fostering more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous regions. By bridging the gap through Small and Medium Towns, a path towards more balanced and harmonious regional development can be achieved.

**Index Terms:** Regional Disparity, Small and Medium Towns, Regional Development, Economic Growth, Social Equity, Sustainable Urbanization.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Regional disparities in India have been widening, despite numerous government initiatives aimed at developing backward areas. A benefit of high growth has not been distributed across the country regions leading to increased regional imbalance. Disparities in social, economic development, employment, and infrastructure amenities persist across both and within region. This growing inequality poses a significant challenge to policymakers and economists, who struggle to create effective solutions to address these imbalances (Jose, A., March 2019)

Regional Disparity refers to the differences in economic development and achievements across various geographical regions. Key indicators including per capita income, proportion of population below poverty line, percentage of urban population and distribution of workforce between agriculture and industries. It also encompasses the level of infrastructural development in different areas. Regional Disparity highlights the coexistence of developed and economically depressed regions, both within and between states, resulting in regional imbalances. (Khan, S. S. A., 2011)

Regional disparities refer to significant differences between region in terms of per capita income, literacy rate, access to health & education services, levels of industrialization and infrastructural facilities. These imbalances highlight the uneven distribution of economic and social resources. Addressing these disparities is crucial for equitable development. Reducing gaps can lead to more balanced and inclusive growth. (Khan, S. S. A., 2011)

Development strategies in most developing countries face several challenges. Benefits are often concentrated in specific geographical areas, with one or a few urban centers dominating the national economy. This concentration overshadows other areas in the spatial system. Development planning tends to be urban-oriented, resulting in larger cities receiving a disproportionate share of national investment in physical infrastructure, commercial, and social services. This creates enclaves of urban modernization, leaving rural and smaller urban areas underdeveloped. Scholars have frequently observed the dualistic nature of economic growth in these countries, where significant disparities exist between urban and rural development. The focus on urban areas exacerbates inequality, hindering balanced national development. Addressing these issues requires more inclusive planning that considers the needs of all regions to promote equitable growth. (Arishi, A. M., 1991)

Despite significant populations residing in rural areas, small towns—acting as the interface between rural and urban zones—have been largely overlooked until recently. This neglect has hindered the distribution of social and economic activities to these centers. Moreover, the development of major urban areas has not been synchronized with the growth of agricultural rural regions. Addressing these challenges necessitates local-level planning, with a focus on enhancing small towns. By providing essential services, facilities, and economic opportunities, small towns can drive both rural and regional development. This integrated approach ensures balanced progress, benefiting both urban and rural communities. Promoting infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic initiatives in small towns can foster

growth and reduce urban-rural disparities. Prioritizing small towns in development plans can also create employment opportunities, improve living standards, and stimulate local economies. By bridging gap between urban and rural areas, a cohesive and sustainable development model can be achieved.

The spatial disparity between urban and rural areas is significant but in many cases it is increasing rapidly. The development policy goal is not to eliminate these differences, as that is likely impossible, but to reduce them and prevent further widening. To address this, we must first understand the theoretical models explaining spatial disparities and urban polarization. One key approach to reducing these disparities involves examining various development strategies that can balance growth across regions. Policies promoting infrastructure development, improving access to education and healthcare, and fostering economic opportunities in rural areas are essential. Additionally, encouraging sustainable urbanization and equitable resource distribution can help mitigate these differences. Another crucial aspect understands the underlying factors driving urban polarization, such as migration patterns, economic opportunities, and investment flows. By addressing these factors through targeted interventions, it is possible to create more balanced and inclusive regional development. Ultimately, the goal is to implement strategies that not only reduce existing disparities but also prevent new ones from emerging, fostering a more equitable and sustainable future for all regions. (Johnson (1976, p162) (Arishi, A. M., 1991).

Regional economic disparities within a country are evident, but measuring them precisely is challenging. The main difficulty lies in selecting appropriate indicators and determining their relative importance. Per capita income is commonly used to highlight differences between states, but it's not the only indicator. Other factors such as industrial growth, agricultural output, literacy rates, poverty levels, the proportion of industrial workers, total road length, and infant mortality rates also play crucial roles in assessing development. Combining these indicators can provide a more comprehensive view of economic disparities across regions.

## II. CONCEPT OF RURBAN CLUSTER (SMALL & MEDIUM TOWN LINKAGES)

The concept of "Rurban Cluster" refers to a model of development that integrates rural and urban characteristics to create sustainable, self-sufficient communities. This concept aims to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas leveraging strength of both to enhance quality of life, economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability. Key aspects of Rurban clusters include:

### A. Economic Synergy:

**Agriculture and Industry Integration:** Promoting agro-based industries and local manufacturing that can benefit from proximity to agricultural resources.

**Local Markets:** Encouraging local markets and supply chains to reduce transportation costs and carbon footprint.

### B. Infrastructure and Services:

**Smart Infrastructure:** Implementing smart infrastructure for water, energy, waste management, and transportation.

**Education and Healthcare:** Ensuring access to quality education and healthcare facilities, blending urban amenities with rural accessibility.

### C. Sustainable Practices:

**Green Technology:** Using renewable energy sources, sustainable farming practices, and green building techniques.

**Resource Management:** Efficient use of natural resources including water conservation and waste recycling.

### D. Community and Governance:

**Participatory Governance:** Involving local communities in decision-making processes to ensure that development meets their needs and preferences.

**Social Cohesion:** Fostering a sense of community and shared identity among residents.

### E. Environmental Balance:

**Biodiversity Conservation:** Protecting and promoting local biodiversity through green spaces and conservation initiatives.

**Pollution Control:** Reducing air, water, and soil pollution through strict regulations and sustainable practices.

### F. Innovation and Technology:

**ICT Integration:** Utilizing information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance connectivity and access to services.

**Research and Development:** Encouraging innovation through research centers, startups, and collaboration with academic institutions.

## III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DISTRICT

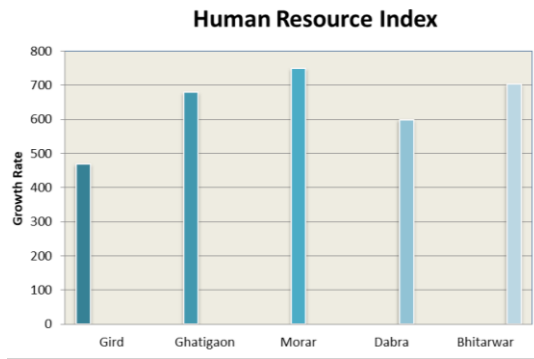
### A. Human Resources

The distribution of human resources significantly impacts urban services in different areas. A study was conducted in Gird, Dabra, Ghatigaon, and Morar regions of the Gwalior district in Madhya Pradesh. According to table given below, the economic status of the Bhitwar block is higher as compared to other four blocks.

The Gird region exhibits the lowest human resources among the areas studied, indicating a need for increased focus and development efforts. In contrast, the Ghatigaon region shows a marginally higher level of human resources than Gird, although it remains lower than Bhitwar.

Morar and Ghatigaon regions have comparable human resource levels, but both experience relatively low growth. The Dabra region, similarly, mirrors the human resource levels found in Ghatigaon and Morar.

Bhitarwar stands out with the highest human resource availability, reflecting a well-distributed population of workers, cultivators, and literate individuals. This suggests that Bhitarwar is better positioned in terms of economic and social development compared to the other four regions.



**Figure 01**

**B. Economic Resources**

In recent decades, Gwalior city has seen a shift from manufacturing to commerce, with industrial growth within

the city limits slowing down. The rise in trade and commerce is notable, and many industrial workers have moved to nearby towns like Morena and Bhind. Gwalior's current economic base is largely commercial, supported by a significant service sector including tourism and education. However, city's tourist infrastructure is insufficient given its potential, presenting an opportunity for growth in a sector.

Industries are now been established in planned integrated industrial estate managed by independent development corporations. Gwalior's strategic location and its role as a countermagnet to National Capital Region highlight the importance of boosting industrial development to counterbalance Delhi's influence.

The study covers Gird, Dabra, Ghatigaon and Morar areas in Gwalior district of Madhya Pradesh. Economic data indicates that Gird block is relatively prosperous compared to others. Although there was a minor increase in economic resources in 2022-23, subsequent years showed no significant improvement. There is a pressing need to enhance economic resources through industries, infrastructure, and other developments to improve living standards.

**Table 01**

ECONOMIC RESOURCES									
Tehsil / Blocks	Population - 2022			Small Scale Industries		Middle Industries		Post Offices	
	Male	Female	Total	No.	Weightage	No.	Weightage	No.	Weightage
Gird	998747	862707	1861454	385	78.61	8	95	5	100
Ghatigaon	2978	3960	6938	120	36.8	0	0	1	51
Morar	44513	38449	82962	35	11.8	1	21	2	70
Dabra	44307	40693	85000	43	18	2	35	3	82
Bhitarwar	58239	50487	108726	40	15	0	0	2	70
Total Population	2145080								

**C. SOCIAL Resources**

Social resources are closely linked to the availability of educational and healthcare facilities in a given area. In this study, we focused on the Gird, Dabra, Ghatigaon, and Morar regions of Gwalior district in Madhya Pradesh. Educational status was assessed based on the number of schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions present in these areas. Knowledge was measured using the adult literacy rate, which was given a two-thirds weight, and the combined gross enrollment ratio for primary, secondary, and tertiary

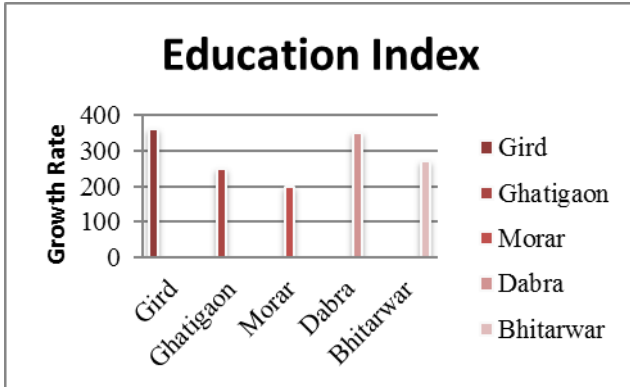
education, which was given a one-third weight. The table below shows the status of social resources of these five regions.

- In year 2022 social resources were very low and became maximum in year 2023.
- Growth of social resources fell down in year 2023-2025.
- Year 2025-2026 social resources shows a bit rise but not as much as 2023.

**Table 02**

SOCIAL RESOURCES						
Year	Primary School		Middle School		High School	
	No.	Weightage	No.	Weightage	No.	Weightage
2022-23	2847	84	1285	90.32	166	74.26
2023-24	3032	88	1380	95.84	175	77.63

2024-25	2697	79	1400	97.8	186	79.78
2025-26	2752	81	1445	88.3	189	82.38



**IV. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

The methodology for this study must be explained thoroughly. It is essential to recognize that labeling a region as underdeveloped or having 'inadequate' infrastructure is an oversimplification. Economic development encompasses multiple dimensions, and a region may exhibit strengths in some areas while lacking in others. Similarly, although a region may be deficient in certain infrastructural services, it might still have a robust supply of others. Therefore, to provide a comprehensive analysis, both Development and Infrastructure are broken down into their respective components. This approach ensures a nuanced understanding of the region's economic and infrastructural status, reflecting its diverse attributes and capabilities.

**V. DISCUSSION**

Regional disparities between small and medium towns can have significant implications for economic development, social equity, and public policy. Research papers on this topic often focus on various dimensions such as economic performance, access to services, infrastructure, and quality of life. Key findings typically highlight that medium towns, due to their size and economic base, often have better access to resources, services, and employment opportunities compared to smaller towns. This disparity can lead to a concentration of population and investment in medium towns, further exacerbating the divide.

Factors contributing to these disparities include differences in local governance, investment in infrastructure, availability of skilled labor, and connectivity to major economic centers. Small towns may struggle with limited financial resources, lower levels of private investment, and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder their growth potential. Additionally, policies favoring urban agglomerations often neglect the unique needs of smaller towns, contributing to a cycle of underdevelopment. Addressing regional disparities requires targeted policy interventions aimed at improving infrastructure, enhancing

local governance capacities, and incentivizing private investment in smaller towns. Encouraging entrepreneurship, improving education and healthcare facilities, and fostering connectivity between towns can help reduce these disparities. Comparative studies between different regions can provide insights into effective strategies for mitigating regional inequalities and promoting balanced regional development.

**VI. CONCLUSION**

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