

REGIONAL POPULATION DISTRIBUTION AND PATTERNS OF RURAL-URBAN GROWTH IN MONGOLIA

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This paper attempts to describe the rural-urban and regional population growth and distribution in Mongolia. It begins with a brief description of the country, and follows with an interpretation of the trends in population growth and distribution, patterns of internal population movements and salient features of the urbanization process in the country.

About 60 percent of the country's population lives in urban areas; Mongolia is relatively more urbanized than many developing countries. In fact, Mongolia is ranked 28th in terms of level of urbanization or percentage of urban to total population amongst low-income countries, and 60th among middle-income countries.

By Mongolian standards the capital city of Ulaanbaatar with a population density 161 persons sq.km(1000) has an extremely high population density. The country has urbanized rapidly over the past three decades, with the proportion of the population living in urban areas increasing from 21.6 per cent in 1956, to 44.0 per cent in 1969 and to 56.6 per cent in 2000. Urbanization in Mongolia has been rising in line with socio-economic development and rural-urban migration.

Mongolia is a landlocked country with a population of 2.4 million spread over a vast area of desert, mountains and steppes. It is one of the countries with an economy in transition and undergoing social structural adjustment. Until the beginning of 20th century Mongolia had the features of a colonial economy. For about 70 years, between 1921 and 1990 there was an economic system with a socialist label and central planning which many ways are indispensable characteristics of a command economy. Mongolia moved rapidly to a multiparty political system in 1990 with political, constitutional, and economic changes taking place.

According to the 2000 Population and Housing Census, the resident population of Mongolia stood at 2373.5 thousand, with 56.6 per cent of the population residing in the urban areas and the remaining 43.4 per cent in the rural areas.

In 2000, The Human Development Index value stood at 0.628. Average life expectancy at birth was 67 years, which is higher than in countries of similar GDP levels. Per Capita GDP was 264.6 thousand tugriks (at 1995 prices). About 33.4 per cent of Mongolia's GDP is from agriculture, 19.7 per cent from manufacturing, and 32.9 per cent from services. Sectoral employment distribution was divided as follows: agriculture 48.6 per cent, manufacturing 14.1 per cent, and services 37.3 per cent in the year 2000. The per capita income is only US\$450.

Population growth, distribution and Internal Migration

The growth rate of overall population increased from an average of 0.9 percent during 1944-1956 to 2.9 percent during 1969-1979 and decreased from 2.5 percent during 1979-1989 to 1.4 per cent during 1989-2000.

During the first half of this century, the population experienced very low rates of growth, mostly because of unusually high mortality, low fertility and wide prevalence of epidemic diseases resulting from several battles and wars that occurred in and outside the country during that time. Out-migration of many people during the revolution and internal conflict and loss of thousands of lives during the 1930s political repression were also some of the factors that had an effect on the low growth of population.

By the beginning of the 1950s, the population of Mongolia was growing at a relatively high rate. The inter-censal increase in population during the period between 1963 and 1989 was as high as 2.9 percent per annum. These rapid increases of the population growth rates were related to demographic and socio-economic developments in those days. The rate decreased to 2.5 percent and 1.4 percent for the periods 1979-89 and 1989-2000 respectively. This remarkable slackening in the rate of population growth was caused by the sharp decline in fertility brought about by, aside from social and economic factors, the process of socio-economic transition in Mongolia.

Mongolia is one of the countries with the lowest population densities in the world. The population density increased from 0.4 sqkm in 1918 to 1.5 sqkm in 2000. Mongolia has a total population of 2373.5 thousand in 2000 with an area of 1564.1 thousand square kilometers. The distribution of population varies with topography. The territory is divided into three natural and weather zones. 35 percent of the territory is plain forest, and 20 percent is plain, and 40 percent is Gobi desert. The Central and West regions (plain forest zone) of Mongolia have an area of 918.12 thousand square kilometers or 58.7 percent of the total. It contained 55.6 percent of the total population. The East region (plain zone), with 18.3 percent of the area, had 10.1 percent of the total population. The South (Gobi desert zone) has 22.7 percent of the area but had only 7.3 percent of the total population. Ulaanbaatar in the plain forest zone has only 4.7 square kilometers or 0.3 percent of the total area but contained approximately 30 percent of the total population in 2000.

Table 1. Population density by region and their Capitals, 2000

| Region | Population | | Area | | Persons per sq.km. |
|-------------|------------|-------|----------------|-------|--------------------|
| | '000 | % | Sq.kms. ('000) | % | |
| Total | 2373.5 | 100.0 | 1564.2 | 100.0 | 1.5 |
| Central | 743.3 | 31.3 | 386.8 | 24.7 | 1.9 |
| East | 202.5 | 8.5 | 286.2 | 18.3 | 0.7 |
| West | 506.4 | 21.3 | 531.3 | 34.0 | 1.0 |
| South | 161.2 | 6.8 | 355.1 | 22.7 | 0.5 |
| Ulaanbaatar | 760.1 | 32.0 | 4.7 | 0.3 | 161.7 |

Source: "2000 Population and Housing Census: The Main Results", NSO, Ulaanbaatar, 2000

By Mongolian standards the capital city of Ulaanbaatar has an extremely high population density. The population density of Ulaanbaatar is 116.7 persons per square kilometer. Generally, the Central and West regions of Mongolia had higher densities than the South and East regions.

According to the 1918 census 15-20 per cent of the total population lived in urban areas and 80 per cent in rural areas. The Establishment of industries and the introduction of crop farming in the valleys rivers dramatically accelerated the internal migration of population. During 1930-1945 cooperatives and communes were set up en mass. Monks were exempted from tax and military services while properties of the higher cast monks and the nobles were confiscated. As a consequence many nobles and laymen lost their livestock and had to move to the urban areas. This, no doubt, contributed to a significant increase of the urban population.

Industrialization, building of railroads and the expansion of crop farming since the 1950s had caused a visible change in the population's resettlement. Thousands of people from all corners of the country moved to and settled in newly established towns and small villages along the railroad. Aimag (=province) centers also grew larger. Small and medium towns and soums (=villages) with several thousand inhabitants were established. All of them developed into education, trade and administrative centers.

Table 2. The Percentage of the Urban and rural population by region and Capital, 1979, 1989 and 2000

| Region | Urban (%) | | | Rural (%) | | |
|-------------|-----------|-------|-------|-----------|------|------|
| | 1979 | 1989 | 2000 | 1979 | 1989 | 2000 |
| Total | 50.3 | 55.9 | 56.6 | 49.7 | 44.1 | 43.4 |
| Central | 36.8 | 44.8 | 39.3 | 63.2 | 55.2 | 60.7 |
| East | 38.0 | 41.6 | 41.8 | 62.0 | 58.4 | 58.2 |
| West | 27.3 | 31.6 | 28.6 | 72.7 | 68.4 | 71.4 |
| South | 39.7 | 50.8 | 39.0 | 60.3 | 49.2 | 61.0 |
| Ulaanbaatar | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - | - | - |

Source: "2000 Population and Housing Census: The Main Results", NSO, Ulaanbaatar, 2000

After the arrangement and fixing of the basic herd structure in the agricultural sector, labour became an excess and available to other sectors. The result was a major change in the population distribution. Thus, migration of the rural people to urban areas dramatically rose which in turn caused a deficiency of labor resource in the animal husbandry in the mid 1960s. The need emerged again to regulate the internal migration of the population. Between 1956-1969 the urban population increased three times while the rural population grew only by 10 per cent. In mid 1970s the urban population exceeded the rural population. A number of reforms during the 1960-70s permitted some types of migration, which led to rapid growth of urban populations. Between 1963 and 1979, most of the urban growth has been as a resume net internal migration.

Urbanization

Urbanization has been rapid and substantial in Mongolia. The country has urbanized rapidly over the past three decades, with the proportion of the population living in

urban areas increasing from 21.6 per cent in 1956, to 44.0 per cent in 1969 and to 56.6 per cent in 2000.

Table 3. Population distribution and density, Mongolia, 1956-2000

| Year | Population (`000) | % | | Persons per sq.km. |
|------|----------------------|-------|-------|-----------------------|
| | | Urban | Rural | |
| 1956 | 845.5 | 21.6 | 78.4 | 0.5 |
| 1963 | 1017.1 | 40.2 | 59.8 | 0.6 |
| 1969 | 1197.6 | 44.0 | 56.0 | 0.8 |
| 1979 | 1595.0 | 51.2 | 48.8 | 1.0 |
| 1989 | 2044.0 | 57.0 | 43.0 | 1.3 |
| 2000 | 2373.5 | 56.6 | 43.4 | 1.5 |

Source: "Mongolian Statistical Yearbook 2000", NSO, Ulaanbaatar, 2001

According to the 1956 census, Ulaanbaatar, the capital, was the only city with a population larger than 50,000 inhabitants. The 1963 census recorded 23 urban centers and the total population of these centers was 408.8 thousand or approximately 40 percent of the total population.

In 1973, a Mongolian Government resolution defined urban areas as those that had a minimum population of 6000; as a result 22 localities were listed. That resolution defined urban areas on the basis of the location of schools, government offices, industries, and cultural centers, legal and marketing facilities. During 1976-1989, urban classification was changed 2-3 times. According to the 1989 census, 57.0 per cent of the population is urban and, in addition to the capital, two more cities have more than 50,000 inhabitants.

Table 4. Urban and rural population by region and Capital, 2000

| Region | Urban | | | Rural | |
|-------------|----------------------------|--------|-------|--------|------|
| | Number of urban centers | `000 | % | `000 | % |
| Total | 44 | 1344.5 | 56.6 | 1029.0 | 43.4 |
| Central | 16 | 292.0 | 39.3 | 451.3 | 60.7 |
| East | 8 | 84.7 | 41.8 | 117.8 | 58.2 |
| West | 12 | 144.8 | 28.6 | 361.6 | 71.4 |
| South | 7 | 62.9 | 39.0 | 98.3 | 61.0 |
| Ulaanbaatar | 1 | 760.1 | 100.0 | - | - |

Source: "2000 Population and Housing Census: The Main Results", NSO, Ulaanbaatar, 2000

In 2000, the number of urban centers reached 44 and the minimum population size for a city was changed to 10000 inhabitants. By the beginning of that year, cities having a population of 15000-30000 had about 30 percent of the total urban population. Almost 60 percent of the total urban population lives in the Capital city, Ulaanbaatar. The urban population is concentrated in and around Ulaanbaatar, the population of which had reached about close to 0.8 million in 2000. This was about a third of the national population. Apart from Ulaanbaatar, the region with the highest proportion of urban population was the East, which was characterized by a low and sparsely distributed population. The West region, with a relatively bigger population, but less sparsely distributed population, shows by contrast the lowest rate of urbanization.

The urban population growth rate between 1969 and 2000 was 5.0 percent annually. The growth of urban population was mainly because of the increase in the rural-urban migration and reclassification of urban areas and towns. About 60 percent of the country's population live in urban areas, Mongolia is relatively more urbanized than many developing countries. In fact, Mongolia is ranked 28th in terms of level of urbanization or percentage of urban to total population amongst low-income countries, and 60th among middle income countries.

Summary

This paper examines the regional population distribution and rural-urban growth in Mongolia. The findings of this paper may be summarized as follows:

- The overall population distribution and internal migration, dramatically changed due to economic and development policies (i.e., local industrialization and the creation by thousands of commune centers) of the Government since 1930s.
- A number of reforms during the 1960-70s have permitted some types of migration and as a result urban populations have grown rapidly. Between 1960 and 1980, most of the urban growth has resulted from net migration.
- Population is unevenly spread in the Mongolian. There is dualid the distribution of the population with an urban population as well as a nomadic relying on livestock. The Central and West regions have higher densities than the South and East regions. The Capital city of Ulaanbaatar has a high population density.
- During the past 40 years, urbanization has been rising in Mongolia. The urban population increased 3 times, whereas rural population increased by only 10 per cent in three decades. The urban population annual growth rate has been recorded at more than the annual population growth rate since 1970s. The urban population has been concentrated in and around Ulaanbaatar, the population of which had reached almost 0.8 million in 2000, or about a third of the national population.

Population movements in Mongolia had greatly increased in scale and complexity. The range of socio-economic and cultural groups that had moved during the last three decades had also changed. Population mobility became an option to improve the lifes of a much wider group of people in the region. This phenomenon had not been witnessed before. This led to significant population redistribution within the country. This had also major social and economic implications.

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