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REAPING INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Demography of the World - Growth of Population

Students paint a wall at Kannagi Nagar, Thoraipakkam, Chennai. | Photo Credit: KARUNAKARAN M.

A nation's growth requires the productive contribution of all segments of society, particularly the children and the youth, who need to be provided opportunities for self-expression. Household and national investments in children and youth yield long-term returns in terms of high productivity of the economically active population till they enter the elderly cohort.

As fertility declines, the share of the young population falls and that of the older, dependent population rises. If the fertility decline is rapid, the increase in the population of working ages is substantial yielding the 'demographic dividend'. The smaller share of children in the population enables higher investment per child. Therefore, the future entrants in the labour force can have better productivity and thus boost income. With the passage of time, the share of the older population rises and that of the working age population begins to fall and hence the dividend is available for a period of time, 'the window of demographic opportunity'.

The big opportunity

However, realisation of the benefits of potential demographic dividend is not automatic and thus presents many challenges. Without proper policies, the increase in the working-age population may lead to rising unemployment, fueling economic and social risks. This calls for forward-looking policies incorporating population dynamics, education and skills, healthcare, gender sensitivity, and providing rights and choices to the younger generation.

With falling fertility (currently 2.0), rising median age (from 24 years in 2011, 29 years now and expected to be 36 years by 2036), a falling dependency ratio (expected to decrease from 65% to 54% in the coming decade taking 15-59 years as the working age population), India is in the middle of a demographic transition. This provides a window of opportunity towards faster economic growth. India has already begun to get the dividend. In India, the benefit to the GDP from demographic transition has been lower than its peers in Asia and is already tapering. Hence, there is an urgency to take appropriate policy measures.

Countries like Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea have already shown us how demographic dividend can be reaped to achieve incredible economic growth by adopting forward-looking policies and programmes to empower the youth in terms of their education, skills and health choices. There are important lessons from these countries for India.

Tapping on the potential of the youth

The first is to undertake an updated National Transfer Accounts (NTA) assessment. Using NTA methodologies by Lee and Chen (2011-12) and M.R. Narayana (2021), we find that India's per capita consumption pattern is way lower than that of other Asian countries. A child in India consumes around 60% of the consumption by an adult aged between 20 and 64, while a child in China consumes about 85% of a prime-age adult's consumption. The NTA data for India needs to be updated to capture the progress made on such investments since 2011-12. State-specific NTAs need to be calculated every year and States need to be ranked for investing in the youth.

The second is to invest more in children and adolescents. India ranks poorly in Asia in terms of

private and public human capital spending. It needs to invest more in children and adolescents, particularly in nutrition and learning during early childhood. Given that India's workforce starts at a younger age, a greater focus needs to be on transitioning from secondary education to universal skiling and entrepreneurship, as done in South Korea.

India's population data and a tale of two projections

The third is to make health investments. Health spending has not kept pace with India's economic growth. The public spending on health has remained flat at around 1% of GDP. Evidence suggests that better health facilitates improved economic production. Hence, it is important to draft policies to promote health during the demographic dividend. We need more finance for health as well as better health facilities from the available funding.

The fourth is to make reproductive healthcare services accessible on a rights-based approach. We need to provide universal access to high-quality primary education and basic healthcare. The unmet need for family planning in India at 9.4% as per the latest National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) is high as compared to 3.3% in China and 6.6% in South Korea, which needs to be bridged.

Fifth, education is an enabler to bridge gender differentials. The gender inequality of education is a concern. In India, boys are more likely to be enrolled in secondary and tertiary school than girls. In the Philippines, China and Thailand, it is the reverse. In Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia, the gender differences are rather minimal. This needs to be reversed.

Youth can be a clear advantage for India

Sixth, India needs to increase female workforce participation in the economy. As of 2019, 20.3% of women were working or looking for work, down from 34.1% in 2003-04. New skills and opportunities for women and girls befitting their participation in a $3 trillion economy is urgently needed. For example, a girl who passes Class 10 needs more choices to learn skills that will help her find appropriate work. She will need safe transport to travel to work. Finding work will likely delay her age of marriage and make her participate in the economy more productively, as also exercise her rights and choices. South Korea's female workforce participation rate of 50% has been built on i) legally compulsory gender budgeting to analyse gender disaggregated data and its impact on policies, ii) increasing childcare benefits, and iii) boosting tax incentives for part-time work. It is predicted that if all women engaged in domestic duties in India who are willing to work had a job, female labour force participation would increase by about 20%.

Seventh, India needs to address the diversity between States. While India is a young country, the status and pace of population ageing vary among States. Southern States, which are advanced in demographic transition, already have a higher percentage of older people. These differences in age structure reflect differences in economic development and health – and remind us of States' very different starting points at the outset of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. But this also offers boundless opportunities for States to work together, especially on demographic transition, with the north-central region as the reservoir of India's workforce.

Why India's most aspirational generation — its millennials — is quickly becoming its most anxious one

Eight, a new federal approach to governance reforms for demographic dividend will need to be put in place for policy coordination between States on various emerging population issues such as migration, ageing, skiling, female workforce participation and urbanisation. Inter-ministerial

coordination for strategic planning, investment, monitoring and course correction should be an important feature of this governance arrangement.

Rakesh Sarwal is a civil servant and has a Doctorate in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University; Sriram Haridass is UNFPA Representative India and Country Director Bhutan a.i. Views are personal

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An integrated perspective is necessary as social and environmental problems cannot be addressed in isolation anymore

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TSUNAMI ALERT IN US WEST COAST, ALASKA, HAWAII AS VOLCANO ERUPTS IN TONGA. WATCH

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Important Geophysical Phenomenon - Tropical Cyclones

A large underwater volcanic eruption happened near Tonga, a Polynesian kingdom of over 170 South Pacific islands, which has triggered Tsunami waves crashing across shores. Following this, a Tsunami alert was issued in much of the US West Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii has reported sea waves slamming ashore a meter in Nawiliwili, Kauai. Tonga is home to about 1.05 lakh people. Some videos posted on social media also showed giant waves swirling ashore in coastal areas.

As per the US National Weather Service, a Pacific Basin-wide Tsunami advisory was issued after a violent undersea volcanic eruption in the Tongas at 11:30 pm ET on Friday night. NWS (National Weather Service) Honolulu also shared satellite imagery of “large volcanic eruption near Tonga (Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano)."

1.14.2022: (correction on date) Large volcanic eruption near Tonga (Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano) today as seen from outer space. Shown on visible imagery using the Himawari satellite. #hiwx #tsunami #earthquake pic.twitter.com/Y18W7wvXl9

Satellite images show a huge undersea explosion raising a plume of ash, steam and gas in the sky above the blue Pacific.

The volcano eruption was captured from outer space by the Himawari satellite, which shows a gigantic volcano explosion in the pacific ocean.

The possible impact of the volcano eruption may include inundation of low lying areas, coastal flooding, and strong rip currents, US weather authorities said. The Tsunami waves are already pushing boats up in the docks in Hawaii, suggest media reports.

#TsunamiAdvisory remains in effect for much of the U.S. West Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii. Impacts may include inundation of low lying areas, coastal flooding, and strong rip currents. See https://t.co/QoZe9fEjyD for the latest details.

So far, no reports of injuries or damage to the property have been reported, though internet connectivity in Tonga was lost around 6:40 pm local time. Notably, Tonga's internet is connected via undersea cables from Suva, Fiji.

NWS Seattle has also issued an advisory, saying “do not go out to the beaches to look at tsunami waves. Dangerous wave and strong currents are expected. Stay out of the water and move well away from shore".

Do not go out to the beaches to look at tsunami waves. Dangerous wave and strong currents are expected. Stay out of the water and move well away from shore. #wawx https://t.co/imHJRKDI71

Meanwhile, Russia and Japan have also issued tsunami warnings after a massive undersea volcanic eruption in the island country of Tonga caused a wave surge in the Pacific, reported Sputnik.

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VOLCANO CAUSED ‘SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE’

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena - Earthquakes, Tsunamis & Volcanoes

Taking stock:A couple looking at a damaged boat in a marina at Tutukaka, New Zealand, on Sunday.AP

A massive volcanic eruption in Tonga that triggered tsunami waves around the Pacific caused “significant damage” to the island nation’s capital and smothered it in dust, but the full extent was not apparent with communications still cut off on Sunday.

The eruption on Saturday was so powerful it was recorded around the world, triggering a tsunami that flooded Pacific coastlines from Japan to the United States.

The capital Nuku’alofa suffered “significant” damage, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said, adding there had been no reports of injury or death but a full assessment was not yet possible with communication lines down.

There has been no word on damage in the outer islands and New Zealand will send an air force reconnaissance aircraft “as soon as atmospheric conditions allow”, the country’s Defence Force tweeted.

Tonga has also accepted Canberra’s offer to send a surveillance flight, Australia’s foreign office said, adding it is also immediately prepared to supply “critical humanitarian supplies”.

The United States was “deeply concerned for the people of Tonga”, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, pledging support for the island nation. In California, the city of Santa Cruz was hit by flooding due to a tidal surge by the tsunami.

Peru closed 22 ports as a precaution while waves of around 1.2 metres hit along Japan’s Pacific coast.

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STORM WARNINGS OF A MEGACITY COLLAPSE

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Indian Climate including Monsoons

The unpredicted spell of staggering rain over Chennai on December 30, 2021 capped a season of repeated monsoon inundation and urban paralysis, coming as a stark reminder to political leaders that they are underestimating the risk of urban collapse due to extreme weather events.

Tamil Nadu's capital, with an international airport and a major seaport, was gridlocked after heavy rain at the tail end of the northeast monsoon, presenting a dystopian picture of ambulance sirens wailing in still traffic, people deserting vehicles to walk to rail terminals in blinding rain and workers unable to return home until late in the night. The nightmare revived memories of the great deluge of 2015, although the death toll was not comparable. Suburban gated communities on the city's IT corridor and inner city residents alike were affected, and COVID-19 was momentarily forgotten, as rail and Metro lines were quickly overwhelmed.

The cloudburst of December 30: The surprises on the ground

The catastrophic 2015 flood, an unprecedented event, raised expectations of a major shift in priorities for urban development. That deluge was akin to the great flood of 2005 in Mumbai, which too raised hopes that policies would be redrawn. In spite of immense community support and active mobilisation for change, both cities witnessed a regression, as informality remained dominant, laws were just on paper, and unsustainable changes were made to the urban environment. Permanent, elite constructions were favoured at the cost of ecology.

The monsoon of 2021 in Chennai, with its black swan evening of 24 cm rain, raises a question: would urban development be more sustainable and equitable if the guiding principle is climate change? This new approach would prioritise ecological and sustainability concerns over aesthetics, and reject market-oriented 'fantasy plans', as some scholars describe an increasingly flashy vision of urbanisation. While green roofs, electric vehicles and solar power would be welcome, they would not replace conservation of natural flood plains, rivers, mangroves, marshes and gardens. It would be the future-proofing that India's cities need, to avert sudden dysfunction caused by climate events.

In its report on *Reforms in Urban Planning Capacity in India* (September 2021), NITI Aayog cites the COVID-19 pandemic as a revelatory moment that underscores the dire need for all cities to become healthy cities by 2030. Climate impacts are certain to affect cities even more fundamentally and permanently.

No melting glaciers, but climate change is at the door

Consistent with the approach of the present Central government, NITI Aayog recommends 500 priority cities to be included in a competitive framework, adopting participatory planning tools, surveys and focus group discussions to assess the needs and aspirations of citizens. There is considerable importance given to technological tools, private sector talent and mapping strategies to identify a city's assets and to plan spatially. What is needed is a central role for democratically-elected local governments, to ensure greater inclusion and a sense of community. In Tamil Nadu, urban local bodies have not had elections for a decade, while the long coastline of the State has been hit by cyclones that have crippled Chennai and other towns.

All dimensions of a city's growth, starting with affordable housing, play a central role in adapting to future climate change. They can lower carbon emissions growth even during infrastructure

creation if biophilic design and green materials are used. A large volume of new housing stock is being created in the 7,933 urban settlements in the country today, of which the bulk is in a small number of million-plus cities.

Less than half of all cities have master plans, and even these are ruled by informality, since both influential elites and the poor encroach upon commons such as wetlands and river banks, as Chennai and Mumbai have witnessed. After a catastrophic flood, the emphasis is on encroachment removal directed almost entirely at the less affluent.

Rain, rain; no drain

A top-level department for climate change adaptation is best suited to serve as a unifier, bringing all relevant departments in a State, such as housing and urban development, transport, water supply, energy, land use, public works and irrigation to work with elected local governments that set priorities and become accountable. Neglect of municipal councils, lack of empowerment and failure to build capacity among municipal authorities have produced frequent urban paralysis in extreme weather. In Chennai, the focus after every flood has been on the storm water drain network, while commercial encroachment of the vast marshland in Pallikaranai, a natural sponge for the city, gets insufficient attention. This experience echoes the fate of encroachments along Mumbai's Mithi river, where the Mithi River Development and Protection Authority, after the 2005 flood, favoured removal of dwellings, while sparing 'permanent structures' that were too big to touch.

The encroachment of important commons reflects the extreme dependence on market forces to supply affordable urban houses. In Chennai, speculative values have outpriced the middle class and young workers aspiring for their first home, sending them out of the city to relatively cheaper suburbs. Most of these suburban investments do not reflect their true value, even if they are layouts 'approved' by the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, because outlying town panchayats have little capacity or funds to create even basic infrastructure such as water supply, sanitation and roads.

Data | How the Chennai rainfall occurred

For many residents, monsoon 2021 was no different from others before it. They may live in gated towers along the IT corridor but they struggled to stay afloat, using boats or trucks to get supplies and to travel. Such images rarely get media play, as they represent the unflattering reality of high house prices. Suburban home buyers would gladly transfer some part of the price for infrastructure building, rather than let it be cornered solely by speculators. Now that Chennai is working on a new master plan and a climate action plan, with planned investments in infrastructure including Metro rail links to the western and southern suburbs, it should introduce regulation to ensure value capture.

Loose metropolitan boundaries with little control over neighbouring local governments produce amorphous building regulations. In Chennai's case, unplanned densification is occurring in three neighbouring districts which are linked to the core city by local transport and are hence part of a larger metropolitan area. Here, traditional natural assets such as wetlands, reservoirs and watercourses are being lost rapidly. This is typical of other major Indian cities as well, where population growth at the peripheries has been accelerated by anomalous land and housing price increases at the core and absence of adequate good rental housing.

Chennai receives 5.5 times more rainfall than normal

India's cities will continue to be drivers of economic growth with significant production and

consumption, but that sunrise story is threatened by unsustainable urban development in the era of climate change. The experiences of Mumbai earlier and Chennai recently are storm warnings, and greater centralisation of governance can do little to address this. The need today is not for flashy retrofitted ‘smart’ urban enclaves but sound, functional metropolitan cities that can handle floods, heat waves, pollution and mass mobility to keep the engines of the economy running. Urban India would otherwise turn into a subprime investment.

G. Ananthakrishnan is a Chennai-based journalist

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BASE METAL SHINE TO AID THE NON-FERROUS SECTOR

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Distribution of key natural resources - Land Resources incl. Land conservation in world & India

Aluminium has begun 2022 on a strong note, with prices rising about 7% so far. Soaring energy costs badly hit aluminium output, boosting prices. The base metal had gained as much as 42% in calendar year 2021.

Analysts reckon favourable demand-supply dynamics have improved the prospects of other base metals such as copper, zinc and lead with prices rising 18-32% in 2021 on the London Metal Exchange.

Even so, slowdown in demand from China and the spread of Omicron variant have emerged as concerns in recent months. But higher and sustained prices augur well for earnings prospects of Indian non-ferrous companies. Analysts continue to maintain a positive stance on base metal prices.

Rating agency ICRA Ltd said absolute prices will stay at a comfortable level for the domestic non-ferrous metals industry. “Price buoyancy is expected to continue in CY2022, even as downside price risks, including from the rising spread of Omicron globally, cannot be ruled out, low visible inventories and steady demand may insulate against any sharp price corrections," said ICRA analysts.

Note that the demand-supply situation remains tight for aluminium and other base metals compared with steel. Chinese steel demand is subdued owing to the real estate crisis in that country and its efforts to decarbonize. This would keep pressure on international steel prices and limit gains for Indian steelmakers, too.

For base metals, though, structural changes in China’s demand patterns are expected to aid. Analysts at Jefferies India Pvt. Ltd said Chinese demand is shifting from urbanization and industrial development to new economy infrastructure such as renewables. This should drive a shift from steel and coal to copper, aluminium and other “energy transition" metals in 2022. Jefferies is most bullish on copper and aluminium for this year.

As such, better copper realizations would lift revenues of companies with smelters. But TcRc (treatment and refining charges) margins have remained soft and must improve to boost profitability.

For aluminium, it helps that there is no near-term major capacity addition outside China, which will also see restricted supplies as production is controlled to cut carbon emissions. These factors should support aluminium prices, and benefit Hindalco Industries Ltd and National Aluminium Co. Ltd (Nalco), hugely.

Firm global aluminium prices benefit Hindalco, whose domestic operations have reported stronger profitability in the past few quarters. Edelweiss Securities Ltd estimates Hindalco’s aluminium business Ebitda per tonne in FY22 at 67,370, up 140% year-on-year. It expects some more improvement in FY23. Further, Novelis contributes more than half to Hindalco’s operating profits and has lower earnings risk. Novelis is a convertor of metals and, hence, is insulated from aluminium prices’ volatility.

Nalco, in turn, may benefit from firm alumina prices. It is among the lowest cost bauxite and alumina producers globally and a major exporter of alumina and aluminium. While Vedanta Ltd's earnings depend on segments such as crude oil, iron-ore, steel and power, the company stands to benefit from the rise in aluminium and zinc prices. The zinc market is also expected to remain in deficit after a few European smelters decided to cut output in October. Favourable demand and firm realization outlook helps Hindustan Zinc Ltd.

Meanwhile, the sharp run up in base metal prices has supported stock performances. Shares of Vedanta, Nalco and Hindalco rose in the range of 91-147% in the past year, suggesting investors are capturing a good portion of the optimism into the price.

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SOLVING THE STERLITE PROBLEM

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Distribution of key Natural Resources - Mineral & Oil Resources of India

Distrust of Sterlite is so much that many people now credit good rains to the shuttering of the plant. File | Photo Credit: N. RAJESH

Sterlite Copper of Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu has become a moral issue after the police firing on protesters resulted in the deaths of 13 people in May 2018. Over some 20 years of plant operation, the company had violated many pollution regulations and faced at least two major allegations of excessive emissions. It also faced consistent protests against pollution from the plant. It had been ordered shut many times only to reopen and expand capacity.

Residents around Sterlite say that when the plant was operating, there would be release of gas at 3 a.m. every day. They would wake up short of breath and to a foul smell. Even cattle were refusing to drink groundwater since it was contaminated by Sterlite effluents, they say. Now, the air is cleaner, they contend. The business community complains that Sterlite did not employ enough local people and did not give enough contracts for local businessmen. It was a high-handed management that talked down to them.

Also read | Plea to reopen Sterlite Copper plant

Though Sterlite has constructed toilets, water tanks and community centers, it has not invested much in serving the educational or health needs of the local population.

Distrust of Sterlite is so much that many people now credit good rains to the shuttering of the plant. During the 2018 protests, WhatsApp videos of a grieving widow of a cancer patient demanding shutting of Sterlite went viral. There has not been any study to link cancer with Sterlite emissions. But people were only eager to believe the talk. Sterlite representatives have faulted protesters for spreading rumours and serving hostile vested interests. But the company's record has not been above board. It is unapologetic about the 13 deaths in firing.

Sterlite's product, copper, is a strategic metal. Important applications are energy, electrical equipment and electronics. Nations are switching more and more to wind and solar. This means new projects and transmission lines. There is a push for electrical vehicles. Globally, and in India, copper demand is only set to ramp up. Imports can cause supply bottlenecks. End consumers such as electrical equipment manufacturers sometimes pay a high premium as a result.

Also read | Sterlite says 'external forces' were responsible for copper plant woes

There are more than 120 copper smelters across the world. All major copper-consuming countries have copper smelters within their country. Copper production provides strategic balance and price stability. The shuttering of the Sterlite plant quickly made India, a copper exporter, an importer. Domestic copper price is typically higher than the landed price of imported copper, increasing forex outgo. India now imports copper at the rate of 3 lakh of tonnes a year and the figure is only likely to grow. Volatile global copper prices are now at least 50% more than what they were when the plant shut.

A copper smelter would serve India well. The only other major smelter in India is Hindalco. Thousands of jobs were lost when Sterlite shut. Real estate and local businesses serving the employees were hit. Imports through the Thoothukudi port fell by 25% the year Sterlite was shut

and have only slid further since then. The port lost some 120 calls of vessels every year carrying copper concentrate. Port dues, berth charges, wharfage, etc. took a hit. In 2018-19, the operating income of the port fell by 15% and operating surplus reduced by 20% compared to the previous year. Without Sterlite's copper exports, the port's container terminal has been struggling. The business of some 20 stevedores and 100 clearing and forwarding agents came to zero. On average, 5,000 lorry trips were needed to transport the concentrate import from each ship to the plant. A whole lorry ecosystem had developed in Thoothukudi sustaining thousands of families. In 2020, the Madras High Court, while upholding the 2018 State government order closing the plant, said, "when economy is pitted against the environment, environment will reign supreme." Sterlite has gone on appeal to the Supreme Court.

'Political parties have fooled themselves by giving nod for Sterlite Copper's oxygen plant operation'

While the economic and national interest case for a copper smelter is proven, the trust deficit between Vedanta and the people of Thoothukudi needs to be bridged if the smelter has to restart. The framework for a solution could focus on adherence to norms and creating harmony between the company, government and the people. Sterlite presents an opportunity for the people of Thoothukudi to move forward in national and local economic interest. It is an opportunity for a corporate group to act responsibly and take people along while conducting its business. The process, however, needs someone who can help bridge the trust deficit. An assurance from him, her or an agency should guarantee any settlement. And it's not something governments can do.

M. Kalyanaraman is founding editor of inmathi.com

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The Indo-Pacific, with India as its centrepiece, features prominently in Germany's foreign policy outreach

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