

Urbanization Trend in Nepal¹

Dinesh Raj Joshi

Abstract

Though urbanization is a symbol of modernization which brings changes in economy, division of labour, production of goods, availability of modern urban amenities, urban regions in Nepal are like rural in nature. This study has been carried out to analyze the trend of urbanization from the first scientific census 1952/054 to the latest one in 2021. This study is descriptive type and based on secondary data. Periodic census, CBS publications, Nepal urban development strategy 2017, world urbanization prospect 2018 and other scholarly articles have been used to prepare this paper. Data have been presented in tables, trend line graph, and bar graph. The 1952/054 census reveals that 2.9 percent population resides in 10 urban areas. After 50 years in 2001, urban population reached up to 13.9% with 6.65 percent urban growth rate during the year. Political decision and reclassification of urban areas increased urban population 27.2% by the year 2014; and 66.2% by the year 2021 with 293 urban areas. This dramatic change in the size of urban population lacks urban amenities set by local government operation act 2017. The urbanization level of Nepal is very low by all standards but growth has been rapid in recent years. Urban area of Nepal are facing deficiencies of basic urban infrastructures and facilities such as drinking water, solid waste management, sanitation, environmental pollution, housing, transportation facilities and shortage of energy. Further research might be conducted on this area focusing on the comparative study on urbanization and existing urban pre-requisites of urbanization as per the standard norms. This area attracts further research on providing urban amenities to rural areas as an alternative model of urbanization. This research reveals increasing urbanization trends of Nepal including recent census data and urban amenities which is different from other similar previous research studies.

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Dinesh Raj Joshi, Associate Professor, Ghodaghodi Multiple Campus, Kailali, Nepal

Email: joshidinesh305@gmail.com

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Introduction

Urbanization refers to the process of growth in proportion of population living in urban areas. It is a complex socio-economic process that transforms the rural into urban settlements; that also makes change in dominant occupations, life style, cultural and behavior change (UNDESA, 2018). In urbanization process because of the concentration of an increasing share of economic activities and innovations cities develop into hub, for the flow of transport, trade and information. Cities become the place where higher quality and basic services are accessible. Urbanization is a territorial response to structural changes in economy. A distinctive division of labor, technology in the production of goods, trade of variety of goods and services, high level of spatial and economic interaction and relatively high density/ diversity of population are basic tenets associated with urbanization (Sharma as cited in Joshi, 2018).

Natural increase, migration and reclassification are three basic components of urban growth (UNDESA, 2018). Natural increase of urban population is the result of excessive birth rate and low death rate. Fertility affects the birth rate and life expectancy of urban areas affects death of urban the difference between then affects the natural increase of urban population. Women living in urban areas have better education and health facilities along with access of modern methods of family planning in comparison to women living in rural areas. This results in low fertility in urban settlements. Because of young age population and low mortality in urban area an excess of birth over deaths have been seen (UNDESA, 2018). Migration from rural to urban areas and international migration are the components of urban growth in which in-migration of urban exceeds the out-migration. Reclassification is expected in the case of urbanization by the expansion of urban areas or redefinition of urban settlements.

During the intercensal period of Nepal 2001–2011 reclassification was the main component of urban growth; which contributed 38.8% share in urban growth. Government of Nepal declared 72 new municipalities on May 8, 2014 that added approximately 2.8 million population to the existing 4.4 million. Urban population reached 7.2 million. At the same time period migration contributed 22% of share in urbanization of Nepal (CBS, 2014)

Definition of urban area varies by country. Nepal largely practices criteria of population to declare urban areas but the definition of urban parameters have been

changing over times. The first scientific census of Nepal 1952/54 formally collected data regarding urban population in Nepal for the first time. It defined urban settlements on the basis of population size 5000 and above, the 10 prominent settlements were recognized as Sahar, the city. The 1961 census defined urban as population size 5000 above including other urban facilities such as high school, college, judicial and administrative offices, bazaar, communication facilities, mills, factories etc. (CBS, 1995). The Nagar Panchyat Act (1962) established designation of Nagar as a local level of urban administrative entry as proposed to local level rural administrative unit, according to the Act population of not less than 10,000 was usually essential prerequisite for locally to be granted municipal status but it was not sufficient (Sharma, as cited in Sapkota, 2022). Municipality Act 1992 redefined municipality as having population size 20,000 along with basic urban infrastructures, minimum one million annual revenue and semi urban environment. After the endorsement of local Self-government Act, 1999 urban areas were redefined as Mahanagarpalika (Metropolitan city), Upa-Mahanagarpalika (Sub-metropolitan city) and Nagarpalika (Municipality) on the basis of population size, annual revenue and other basic urban facilities (LGOA, 1999). Current definition of urban in Nepal is based on the Local Government Operation Act 2017. The Act has redefined urban in three categories, viz. (Metropolis, Sub-metropolis and Municipality) on the basis of population size, minimum five years average income criteria, other urban facilities taking consideration on geographical inequalities of population size and revenue for municipalities (MoFALD, 2017).

Nepal is one of the ten least urbanized counties in the world. However it is one of the top ten fastest urbanizing countries (Bakraniya, 2015). For the year 1990 to 2018 Nepal was listed among the fastest urbanizing countries with 2.9 percent growth rate of urbanization and also projected to remain the fastest urbanizing over the period 2018-2050 at 2 percent urban growth rate (UNDESA, 2018). The level of urbanization remains low but the pace of urbanization has remained faster and likely to remain so in the future (MoFALD, 2017). By the year 1952/54 total number of urban areas in Nepal were 10 with 2.9 percent of urban population which increased up to 33 urban areas with 9.2 percent urban population by the year 1991. Upto 2014, total urban areas in Nepal were 191 with 35.5% urban population and the latest census summarize report 2021 shows 293 total urban areas with 66.2% urban population (CBS, 2014, 2021). The scenario shows the fastest growing of urbanization in Nepal. Despite the fastest growth rate of urbanization do these urban areas meet the pre-requisites of urban amenities? What are the basic

problems faced by urban areas? These questions are to be answered in this paper. The objective of the paper is to analyze the trends of urbanization of Nepal

Methods and Materials

To analyze the urbanization trends of Nepal from the first scientific census 1952/54 to the latest census 2021 descriptive research design has been applied based on secondary data. Periodic census reports and monograph published by central bureau of statistics (CBS), Local government operation Act 2017, Local Self-government Act 1999, National Urban Development Strategy 2017, Summarized National Census Report 2021 and scholarly articles are the main sources of secondary data for this trends analysis of urbanization in Nepal. Descriptive statistical tools are used in this study. Data are presented by tabulation, line graph and bar graph. Pre-requisites of urbanization in Nepal according to Local Government Operation Act 2017 have been used to analyze the urban amenities in Nepal.

Pre-requisite of urbanization in Nepal

Trends of collecting urbanization data in Nepal formally started from the year 1952/54, the first scientific census of Nepal. The parameters of determining the urban population have been amended in course of time. Previously it was about ten thousand population and other requirements were mapped and different criteria have been set for the urbanization of Nepal in different times but in 2017 the government of Nepal passed the bill called Local Government Operation Act 2017 which requires the following pre-requisites for the urbanization of Nepal.

Table 1

Pre-requisite of urbanization in Nepal

Urban	Minimum population	Annual average income of last five years in Rupees	Minimum urban facilities
Municipality	10,000 for mountain districts 40,000 for hills; 50,000 for inner terai;	10,000,000 for mountain region 30,000,000 for other districts	Roads, drinking water, communication, waste management, open space, at least 25 bed hospital, bus park, bank, community buildings, market area, butchery house, cremation site, sports ground, urban master plan,

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	75,000 for terai; 100,000 for Kathmandu valley		
Sub-metropolis	200,000	250,000,000	200 bed hospital facilities at least 100 bed general hospital, waste processing and management, national level stadium, major roads in town blacktopped, high level educational and technical education, public park, town meeting hall, modern butchery site, disable friendly public utility places, tourist standard hotels resorts,
Metropolis	500,000	1,000,000,000	Bus park along with terminal, subway, pedestrian way, metro transport, disable friendly public transport service, at least 75% of total road length is concrete, post-graduate level educational institutions, specialized service hospital and at least five hundred bed hospital facility, managed vegetable and fruit sales center, shopping malls, international level stadium, airport, business exhibition center and hotel facilities, museum, protected heritage of special importance, sufficient entertainment centers, child park and elderly citizen entertainment sites, theater and creative gallery, urban greenery and beauty

Source: Local Government Operation Act, 2017

After the implementation of Local Government Operation Act 2017, many village development committees changed into municipalities which were able to meet the parameters of the municipalities, those which could not meet the parameters were kept in the rural municipalities. Some urban areas were merged in order to transform them into sub-municipalities and some promoted in metropolis.

Urbanization trend in Nepal

Since 1952/54 the urbanization process in Nepal is increasing continuously. Formally data regarding urbanization was collected from the census year 1952/54. The

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first urban population in the first scientific census was 2.9 percent kept increasing up to 66.2% by the census 2021. The complete data for urban population and average annual growth is presented in the given table.

Table 2

Trends of urbanization in Nepal 1952/54 – 2021

SN	Year	Number of urbancenters	Urban population %	Average annual urban growth %
1	1952/54	10	2.9	N/A
2	1961	16	3.6	1.65
3	1971	16	4	3.23
4	1981	23	6.4	7.55
5	1991	33	9.2	5.89
6	2001	58	13.9	6.65
7	2011	58	17.1	4.9
8	2014	130	27.2	8.0
9	2021	293	66.2	N/A

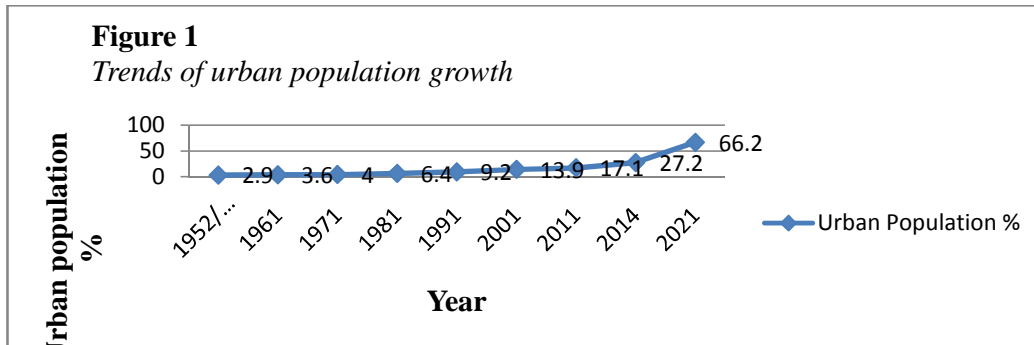
Source: CBS, 2014

Data regarding urban population was collected from the census year 1952/54. The above table shows the increasing rate of urban population over the years. For the year 1952/54, the first census which collected information regarding urbanization reveals 10 urban areas with 2.9 percent urban population. For the year 1961 and 1971 total urban areas were 16 with 3.6 and 4 percent population respectively with annual 3.23 percent urban growth rate, higher than the national population growth rate. The time series of urban population shows continuous growth of urban population over the years. By the year 2011 there were 58 urban areas with 17.1% urban population along with 6.65 percent annual urban growth rate. In the year 2014 government declared 72 more municipalities and the urban places reached 130 with 27.2% urban population the highest annual growth rate of urban was recorded in 2014 which was 8 percent. The political decision of government increasing urban areas in the successive years dramatically increased the number of urban centers and urban population in Nepal. After the reclassification of the state till the year 2021 there are 293 urban areas in Nepal with

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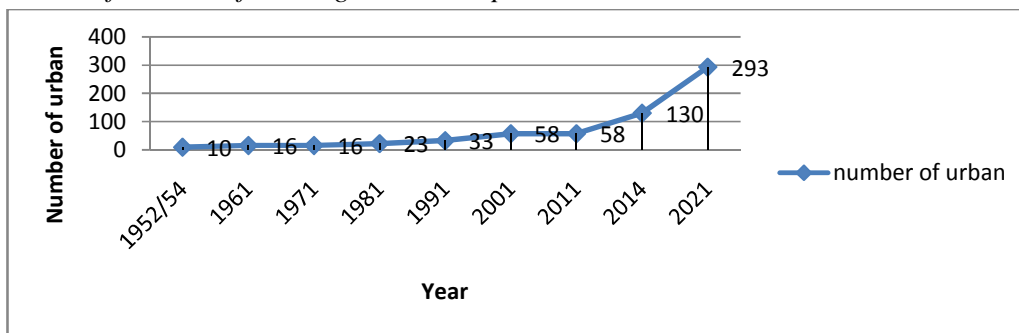
66.2% urban population but still lacking in the urban amenities as described in Local Government Operational Act 2017.

The trend of urban population growth is presented in the following time line graph.



Similarly, the growth of urban centers over the years 1952/54 to 2021 is presented here in the line graph.

Figure 2
Trends of number of urban growth in Nepal, 1952/54- 2021



The figures 1 and 2 show the growth rate of urban population percent and expansion on the number of urban areas in Nepal. Upto the year 2011 trend of urban population was in linear growth rate. For the year 2014 the percent of urban population increased by 10% more and reached to 27.2% from 17%. The dramatic changes are seen between the year 2014 to 2021 in which urban population increased more than double, 27.2% in 2014 and 66.2% in the year 2021. Likewise number of urban areas reached 293 from 130 during the same period.

Level of urbanization in Nepal by province, 2021

Constitutionally, Nepal is divided into seven provinces. According to the census report 2078 Bikram era, level of urbanization seems different by province. Out of total

29,164,578 population of Nepal 19,626,788 resides in defined municipalities, the urban areas of Nepal. Bagmati province has the highest urban population and Karnali has the least urban population in Nepal. The following table shows the level of urbanization by province of Nepal.

Table 3

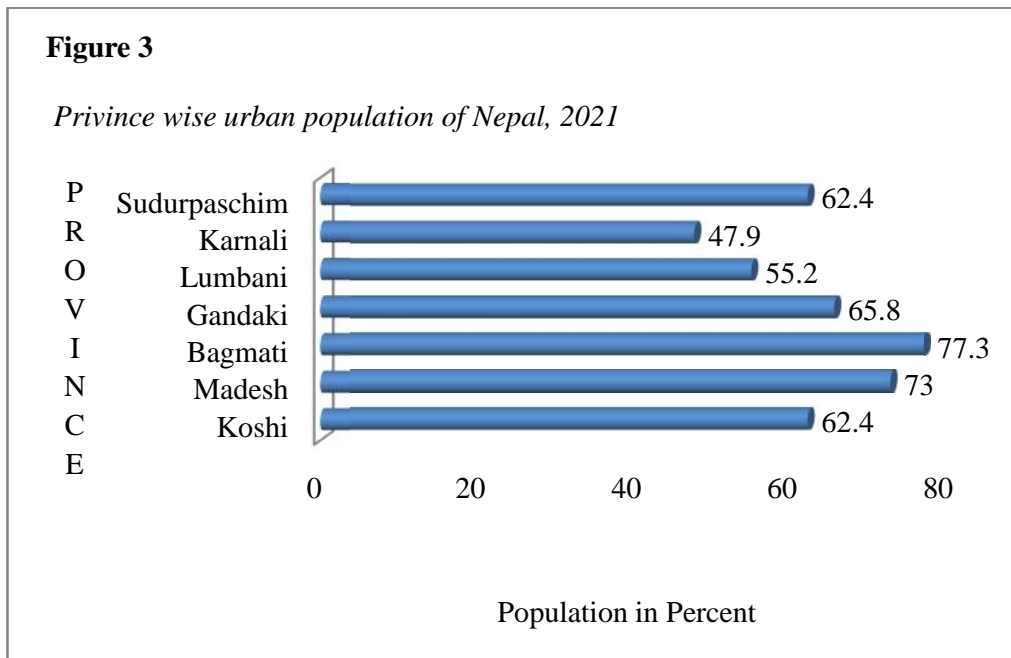
Level of urbanization by province of Nepal 2021

SN	Province	Number of Urban	Urban population %	Urban population	Total population
1	Koshi	49	62.4	3093489	4961412
2	Madesh	77	73	4460754	6114600
3	Bagmati	45	77.3	4731125	6116866
4	Gandaki	27	65.8	1621915	2466427
5	Lumbani	36	55.2	226588	5122078
6	Karnali	25	47.9	800339	1688412
7	Sudurpaschim	34	62.4	182578	2694783
8	Nepal	293	66.2	19626788	29164578

Source: CBS, 2021, Chapagain, 2018.

Table 3 reveals two third of total population of Nepal resides in urban areas but the level of urbanization differs by provinces. Out of 293 urban of Nepal Madesh province has the highest number of urban units (77) followed by Koshi province which accounts 49 urban areas, that is, municipalities. Though Gandaki province has the urban population near about the national average, the numbers of urban are only 27. Karnali province has the lowest number of urban units, that is, 25. The level of urbanization seems highest in Bagmati province followed by Madesh province which accounts 77.3% and 73% urbanization out of total province population respectively. The rate of urbanization of these two provinces is higher than the national average which accounts 66.2%. Karnali province has the lowest level urbanization which accounts 47.9% far below than the national average. All provinces have more than 60% urbanization, except Lumbani and karnali which is shown in following figure.

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Source: CBS,2021

The above bar diagram shows the province wise urban population of Nepal.

Top five municipalities with highest and lowest population size in Nepal, 2021

Urbanization in Nepal is dominated by a few large and medium cities with an excessive population concentrate in Kathmandu valley which is the only city with over one million people. The level of urbanization in Kathmandu valley and Pokhara valley come to 96.97 % and 79.52% respectively, while it is only 18.28% for the rest of hills. Similarly, inner tarai valleys have a level of urbanization of 41.97% compared to 38.94% for the rest of the tarai (NUDS, 2017). Spatial distribution of urban population varies by ecological zones; in mountain and hilly regions the size of urban population seems low. The following table shows the top five municipalities with highest and lowest urban population size in Nepal according to population census 2021.

Table 4

Top five municipalities with the highest and the lowest population size in Nepal, 2021

SN	Cities with highest	Population size	Cities with lowest population	Population

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population				
1	Kathmand	862400	Thuliveri, Dolpa	9861
2	Pokhara	513504	Tripurasundari, Dolpa	12233
3	Bharatpur	369268	Madi, Shankhusaba	13273
4	Lalitpur	294098	Laligurans, Terathum	15329
5	Birjung	273282	Dharmadevi, sankhuwasaba	16053

Source: CBS, 2021

Table 4 shows the top five highly urbanized cities in Nepal. Kathmandu valley seems to be a hub of urbanization of Nepal with more than eight lakh sixty thousand population followed by Pokhara metropolitan. The population figure of Thuliveri municipality, Dolpa is only 9861 which do not meet the pre-requisite of urbanization as set by Local Government Operational Act 2017.

Discussion

Municipalities in Nepal are de-facto urban areas. The municipal database is poor and system of regular data update and monitoring is yet to be institutionalized. Current urban conditions are reflected through basic data on urban infrastructure, environment, economy, governance, finance and investment (CBS, 2014). Though data reveals that 66.2% population resides in urban areas, many urban declared areas are rural in nature and not all 66 percent urban residents have access to minimum urban amenities. Population monograph of Nepal 2014 states the level of urbanization of Nepal is very low by all standards though in recent years growth has been rapid.

After the restructure of the nation the pace of urbanization seems to have grown dramatically. Political decision and immature decision regarding urban development has increased greater concern in urbanization of Nepal. Most of the urban areas in Nepal are rural in nature as they lacks various deficiencies even sometimes they donot meet the population size criteria. Thuliveri municipality, Dolpa is an example of this. The municipality has the urban population size less than 10,000 which is less than the pre-requisite size of population for municipalities. MoUD (2017) report states:

Deficiency of urban infrastructures and facilities are reflected by the situation of water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, housing, transportation and energy. Ecological disparity has been found in case of availabilities of urban amenities. The access of piped water supply is very poor in urban areas. Only

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32.9% households have access to piped water supply in urban terai compared to 81.2% households in urban hills. However, quality and quantity of drinking water is inadequate in urban regions. National urban development strategies 2017 shows the critical scenario of sanitation and urban waste management in urban areas, only 56.1% urban households have access to sanitation.

The urban area of Nepal are facing the deficiencies of basic urban infrastructures such as drinking water, solid waste management, sanitation, environmental pollution, housing, transportation, energy etc. Though demand of electricity is high in urban sectors and in industrialized areas the production cannot meet the energy demand of urban area (MoUD, 2017). The population census 2011 shows the urban poverty as the major issue, 15% urban population lives below the poverty line. As urban are the means of economic transformation. The HDI value for national average for the year 2011 was 0.490 whereas the HDI value for the urban was 0.579. Urban are the center for basic and higher educational opportunities, census report 2011 shows 30% female and 15% male are illiterate in urban areas. The scenario of urban amenities reveals the poor condition of urbanization in Nepal thus sustained policies for sustained urban development should be formulated by the government of Nepal.

Conclusion

This paper focuses on the urbanization trends in Nepal. Nepal has been ranked as the top ten fastest urbanizing country in the world. The trend of urbanization of Nepal seems to be slower in the beginning years of census and the pace of urbanization increased gradually. After the year 2014/15 the increasing rate of urbanization seems dramatic and unplanned. By the year 2014 the urban population was 27% which increased more than 2.5 times by the year 2021. The main cause of rapid urban growth is the reclassification of the country and municipalities according to the constitution of Nepal 2072. Other main reason of urban growth is internal migration of the country, the rural urban migration for the better opportunities and facilities. Though the rate of urbanization is very fast in the latest census year, urban areas of Nepal have been facing various deficiencies in urban amenities and unplanned urbanization. Increasing deficiencies of urban amenities should be the major concern of the government. Rural like urban areas should be linked by urban policies and facilities. So the priorities should be given to newly declared municipalities on the development of minimum pre-requisites.

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