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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. There has been a shift in poverty trends in India from rural to urban areas.

Comment. (150 words)

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Approach

- Substantiate the given statement with the help of relevant data and information
- You can also enumerate the reasons for shifting of locus of poverty from rural to urban areas

Introduction

- India has witnessed tremendous growth over the last two decades. The proportion of people below the poverty line has dropped from 45% to 22% between 1994 and 2012.
- However, a considerable proportion of the Indian population still continues to remain below the poverty line. As more and more people migrate to the cities in search of better economic opportunities, the locus of poverty in India is shifting to cities as well.

Body

Urban Areas as Locus of Poverty:

- Urban poverty in India is over 25%, some 81 million people live in urban areas on incomes that are below the poverty line. Although rural poverty remains higher than urban poverty, the gap is closing, i.e. locus of poverty is shifting to urban areas.
- Today, one in every six of India's urban households live in slums, a number forecast to rise exponentially over the coming years.
- The Rangarajan committee (2012) estimated that the number of poor was 19% higher in rural areas and a whopping 41% more in urban areas than those of the previous estimates.
- The data suggest that the rate of urban poverty has been coming down. However, the absolute numbers of urban poor remain extremely large, at more than 76 million.
- Moreover, there is no standard definition of slums and the massive lack of research provides no account of the lives of the urban poor.

Few prominent reasons for shifting of locus of poverty from rural to urban India are:

- **Push-Pull factors:** In India, the causes of urban poverty can be linked to the lack of infrastructure in rural areas (push factor), forcing inhabitants of these regions to seek out work in India's mega-cities (pull factor). The urban poor is largely the overflow of the rural poor who migrate to urban areas in search of alternative employment and livelihood.

- **Lack of skills:** Most of the poor are not able to participate in the emerging employment opportunities in different sectors of the urban economy as they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to do so.
- **Indebtedness:** Unemployment or underemployment and the casual and intermittent nature of work in urban areas lead to indebtedness, that in turn, reinforces poverty.
- **Inflation:** A steep rise in the price of food grains and other essential goods further intensifies the hardship and deprivation of lower-income groups.
- **Unequal distribution:** The unequal distribution of income and assets has also led to the persistence of poverty in urban India.
- **Unsatisfactory growth:** The overall growth of agriculture and industry have not been impressive. The gap between poor and rich has actually widened.
- **Asymmetrical development:** The green revolution exacerbated the disparities regionally and between large and small farmers. There was unwillingness and inability to redistribute land. The benefits of economic growth have largely not trickled down to the poor.

Conclusion

India needs a systemic policy to deal with haphazard and unplanned rural-urban migration with participative planning at its heart. The government needs to strengthen the health, education and physical infrastructure to enhance the capabilities of individuals residing in urban areas, thereby addressing the root cause of urban poverty.