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SPATIALITY OF DISPARITIES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF VIDARBHA REGION, MAHARASHTRA

Komal L. Turkar, Yogesh P. Badhe, Ravindra G. Jaybhaye*

Department of Geography, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune-411007, India

*Corresponding author email: jaybhayerg@gmail.com

Abstract

Regional disparity is one of the major contemporary problems at various scales, such as global, national and state levels. Despite the prosperous state of India, Maharashtra has pronounced intra-state disparity. Vidarbha is one of the geographical regions of Maharashtra, identified as a backwards region by various committees appointed by the government. Although Vidarbha is identified as backwards in the state, the region has intra-regional disparity. Hence, the paper attempts to assess the spatial pattern of regional disparities in socio-economic development within the Vidarbha region. The assessment is based on block-level data. To measure the socio-economic development of each block, 30 indicators have been considered based on demographic, economic, social and infrastructural dimensions of development. The outcome revealed different degrees of development, ranging from very high to low levels of development. The results of the analysis corroborated with Friedman's core-periphery model. The highly developed blocks are characterised by good quality of social and infrastructural facilities. These blocks encompass commercial centres and district headquarters, with a high rate of urbanisation, and the blocks perform as the core of the region. The less developed blocks are mainly situated in remote areas characterised by forests and dominant tribal belts. These blocks require focused attention to enhance infrastructural and social facilities to achieve balanced regional development. The study may be helpful for policymakers and development practitioners to plan and minimise spatial disparities.

Keywords: Regional Disparity, Regional Development, Spatial Disparities, Urbanization.

1. Introduction

As a developing country, India exhibits the uneven distribution of spatial contours of development that leads to inter- and intra-regional disparities. Regional disparities refer to uneven development across geographical scales and are influenced by a broad spectrum of social, economic, and spatial phenomena (Milek, 2018). These disparities hinder the holistic development of the country, posing challenges to national integration and political stability (Ahmad and Rahman, 2022). Disparities are a multiscale phenomenon (Wei, 2015), as their extents differ from country to country and region to region. In the contemporary era, the persistence of regional disparities has become a crucial problem as the majority of

countries of the world are confronting today, specifically in developing countries, where lack of pertinent planning, haphazard urban growth, spatially selective agglomeration of economic activities and uncontrolled population growth causes intensifying regional disparities (Zali et al., 2013).

Since the inception of India's planning system, balanced regional development has been one of the main objectives to achieve the overall development of the country. Despite concerted efforts, regional disparity in the context of economic and social development has been persisting at the national and regional levels. These disparities, stemming from a range of factors, including unequal allocation of resources and differences across various sections of society, have driven the adoption of different developmental programmes (Kurian, 2007). The country's economic growth trajectory, while positive, has further perpetuated the inter-sectoral and inter-regional disparities (Papola, 2006); it poses a significant challenge for academicians and policymakers. Despite the plethora of development programmes, regional disparity persists over time.

Maharashtra is described as one of the most developed and economically affluent states in India. Despite its overall progress, the problem of regional disparities has been a characteristic feature of Maharashtra and its persisting date back to the time of the formation of the state (Kamdar, 2009) In contemplation to measure the regional imbalance in the state, the Government of Maharashtra formed two major committees, i.e. Dandekar (1984) and Kelkar (2013). These committees have underscored the issue of regional imbalance in the state and identified that the Vidarbha region is comparatively more backwards, emphasising the need for targeted development strategies. However, despite policy recommendations and resource allocation, the cycle of underdevelopment persists in the region.

The Vidarbha, a primarily agrarian region, faces adverse experiences that have contributed to its underdevelopment. The region experiences agrarian distress and economic risks as a result of its reliance on cotton farming, irregular rainfall patterns, and insufficient irrigation infrastructure. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure, limited industrialisation, and lack of economic opportunities further exacerbate the challenges for development. The region comprises 11 districts and 120 blocks; some blocks are likely to be very highly developed, and some blocks are less developed. Therefore, it is essential to assess the socioeconomic development at the block level, from which the intra-regional disparities can be traced at the block level (Narain et al., 2002). The present paper attempts to assess socio-economic development through different dimensions in the Vidarbha region. The research seeks to suggest some measures to reduce regional disparities. The study will be helpful for local administrators and policymakers in planning to reduce spatial disparities.

2. Study Area

Vidarbha is one of the geographical regions located in the eastern part of Maharashtra and holds a distinctive position within the state, both geographically and socio-

economically. Geographically, it extends from 18^0 42′ N to 21^0 44′ N latitude and 76^0 00′ E to 80^0 55′ E longitude, including the Nagpur and Amravati administrative divisions (Figure 1). Vidarbha is bordered by Madhya Pradesh to the north and northeast, and by Chhattisgarh to the east and southeast, Telangana to the south, and the Jalgaon and Aurangabad districts of Maharashtra to the west. The region covers an area of 97404 sq. km. It represents 31.6% of the total geographical area of Maharashtra and is home to 21.3% of the total population of the state. A total of 11 districts, i.e., Amaravati, Yavatmal, Buldhana, Akola, Washim, Nagpur, Wardha, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Gondia and 120 blocks are included in the region.

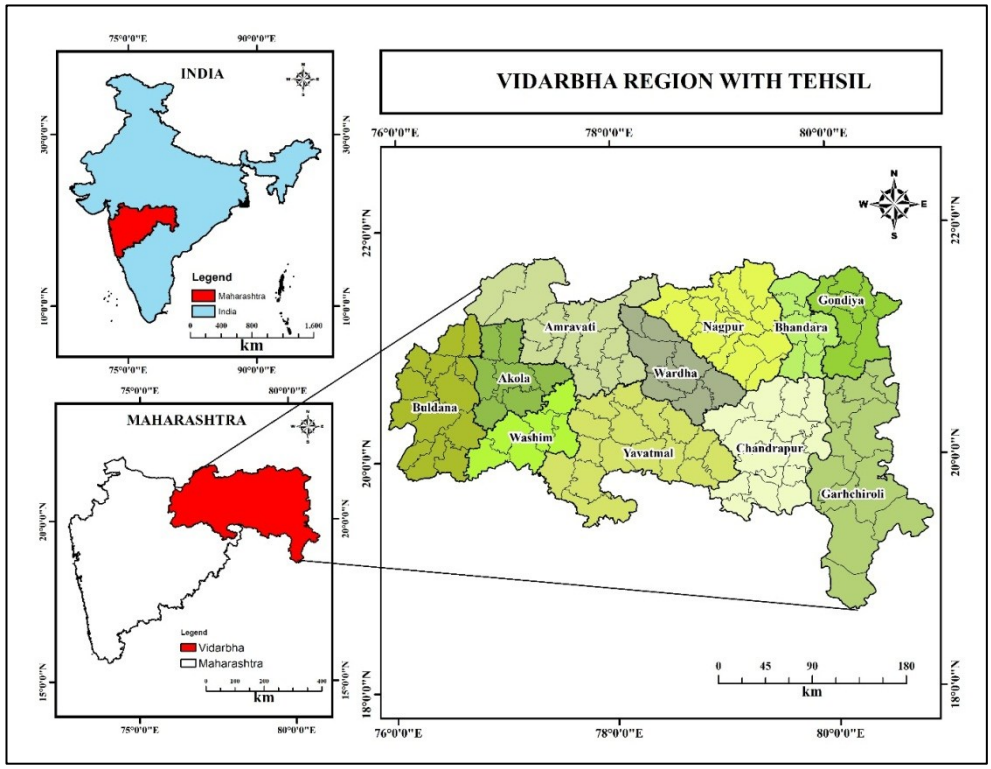

Figure 1. Location Map of Vidarbha

The most distinguishing characteristic of Vidarbha is its richness of natural resources, specifically minerals, as it holds approximately 60% of the mineral resources of Maharashtra. Despite this abundance, the development of the region has lagged behind other parts of the state, with significant disparities in socio-economic parameters. These disparities are further exacerbated by the agrarian crisis, as agriculture dominates the economy. The region suffers different challenges, including agrarian distress, as it is marked by high rates of farmer suicides, limited industrial development and infrastructural gaps. These issues interplay complex roles, along with socio-political factors, leading to chronic underdevelopment. Vidarbha is unique for its socio-cultural fabric and the regional issues that have persisted from the formation of the state. One of the most pressing

challenges is inadequate irrigation facilities, which limit agricultural productivity and impede development (Kelkar, 2013). The reliance on rain-fed agriculture makes it highly vulnerable to erratic weather patterns and further intensifies agrarian distress. Furthermore, gaps in education, healthcare, and employment opportunities hinder the region's overall progress. While Vidarbha has considerable potential for development, especially in sectors such as agriculture and mining, these opportunities have yet to be fully realised due to governance and policy shortcomings.

Understanding the dynamics of socio-economic development in Vidarbha is crucial to formulating targeted policies and interventions to address these challenges and promote inclusive growth and development. By addressing the intra-regional disparities in the region, the study seeks to contribute to the discourse on balanced regional development.

3. Database and Methodology

The present study is based on secondary data, and sources are the District Census Handbook, 2011 and the District Socio-economic Review, 2023, Maharashtra. The study attempts to measure the status of development based on various indicators, as Nizamuddin (2014) has pointed out, development is a multidimensional process, and a single indicator cannot fully capture its impact. In conformity with the focus of the study on socio-economic development, regional disparities have been examined in the context of various dimensions such as (i) Demographic, (ii) Economic, (iii) Social, and (iv) Infrastructural. The demographic and social dimensions encompass social progress, and the economic and infrastructural dimensions encompass the region's economic well-being. The socio-economic development was measured for each block, considering 30 indicators based on demographic, economic, social, and infrastructural dimensions of development (Figure 2).

All four dimensions of the index are independently calculated with the help of the Z-score method (Equation 1) to understand disparities in different dimensions of development, based on studies done by Sharma and Mishra (2016), Raj et al. (2019), and Ahmed and Rahman (2022). According to Kar (2021), the method is apt to get a composite score of socio-economic development involving a large number of positive or negative indicators. The formula is as follows:

$$Z_{ij} = \frac{X_{ij} - \bar{X}_j}{\sigma_j} \qquad \text{Equation (1)}$$

Where,

Z_{ij} = Z-score for the variable X_{ij} in block ith

X_{ij} = Actual value of the indicator from block ith

$\bar{X}_j$ = Mean of the indicator values across all blocks

σ_j = Standard deviation of the indicator values across all blocks

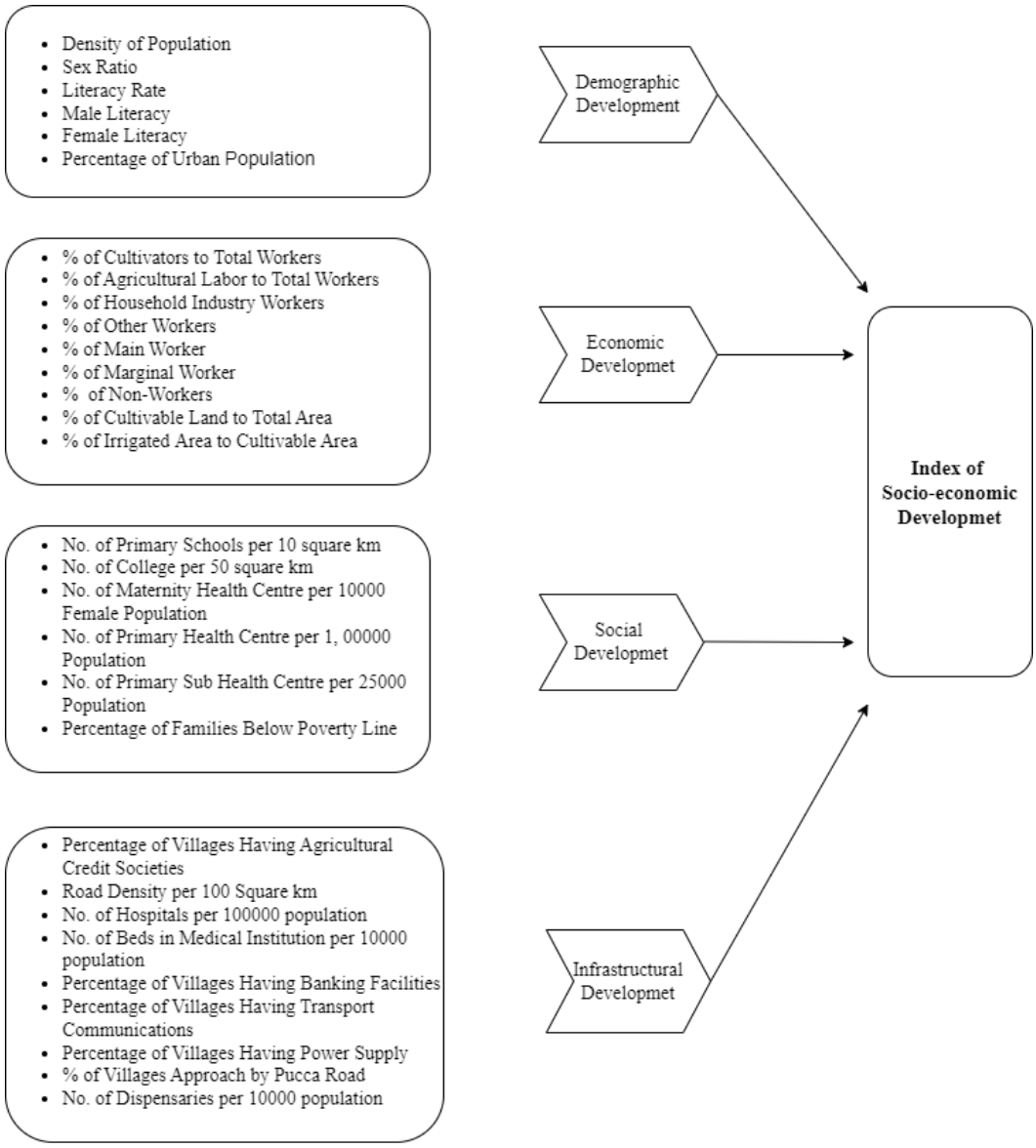

Figure 2. Indicators, Dimensions and Subsequent Stages for Formulation of the Index of Socio-economic Development

The composite index (dimension index) for each dimension has been calculated using Equation 2. The resulting dimension index provides a standardised composite z-score for each block, reflecting the summation of performance across different indicators.

$$Dimension\ Index = \sum_{j=1}^{n} Z_{ij} \qquad \text{Equation (2)}$$

Where,

Z_{ij}= denotes the z-score of the jth indicator for the ith block

i = denotes the blocks

j = denotes the indicators (e.g., literacy, urbanisation, sex ratio)

n = denotes the total number of indicators used in that particular dimension.

Further, the dimension index was used to get an integrated picture of socio-economic development using equation 3.

$$Index\ of\ Socio-economic\ Development = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{d=1}^{n} D_{id} \quad \text{Equation (3)}$$

Where,

D_{id} = denotes the dimension index of the jth dimension for the ith block

i = denotes the blocks

d = denotes the dimensions (demographic, Economic, Social, infrastructural)

n = denotes the total number of dimensions.

The index has been categorised into four development groups by applying an equal interval classification method, i.e., very highly developed, highly developed, medium developed, and less developed, and spatial disparities are represented on the Arc Map 10.3 platform.

4. Results and Discussion

Regional disparities stem from unequal regional development, which varies across regions based on social, economic, and demographic characteristics (Kundu and Mondal, 2012). The study assesses the regional disparities in terms of demographic, economic, social and infrastructural dimensions, as these play fundamental roles in regional development.

4.1 Demographic Development

The demographic dimension of development significantly influences the pace and structure of socio-economic development, as it reflects the composition and distribution of the population, which in turn may affect various spheres of development, such as the social, economic, infrastructural, etc. Changes in demographic indicators often lead to fundamental shifts in social structure, with urbanisation, literacy rates, population density, and sex ratios as key markers of development. These demographic indicators are particularly relevant in the context of regional disparities, as they shape the socio-economic landscape of different areas.

The Vidarbha region has 120 blocks out of which 10 blocks are identified as very highly developed (6.66 to 15.75). These are Nagpur Urban, Nagpur Rural, Kamtee,

Amravati, Akola, Wardha, Chandrapur, Yavatmal, Bhandara and Gondia (Figure 3). In all these blocks, the higher rates of urbanisation, elevated literacy levels, and dense populations contribute to the high demographic development. The Nagpur urban block has the highest composite score because of the best performance of selected indicators, like 100 per cent urbanisation and the highest population density. The 74 blocks come under the category of highly developed (-2.46 to 6.65), mainly from Nagpur, Amravati, Akola, Gondia and Wardha, based on better performance in different parameters of development. Out of 120 blocks, 31 belong to the medium developed (-11.58 to -2.47) category of development. It exists in Amravati, Buldhana, Washim, Yavatmal, Nagpur, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts. The remaining five blocks belong to less developed (-20.70 to -11.59). It includes Gondpipri, Jiwati in Chandrapur and Etapalli, Sironcha, and Bhamragad in Gadchiroli. Sparse population densities, low rates of urbanisation, and low literacy levels are key contributing factors to their slower pace of development. These blocks need exceptional attention levels up to literacy sex ratio.

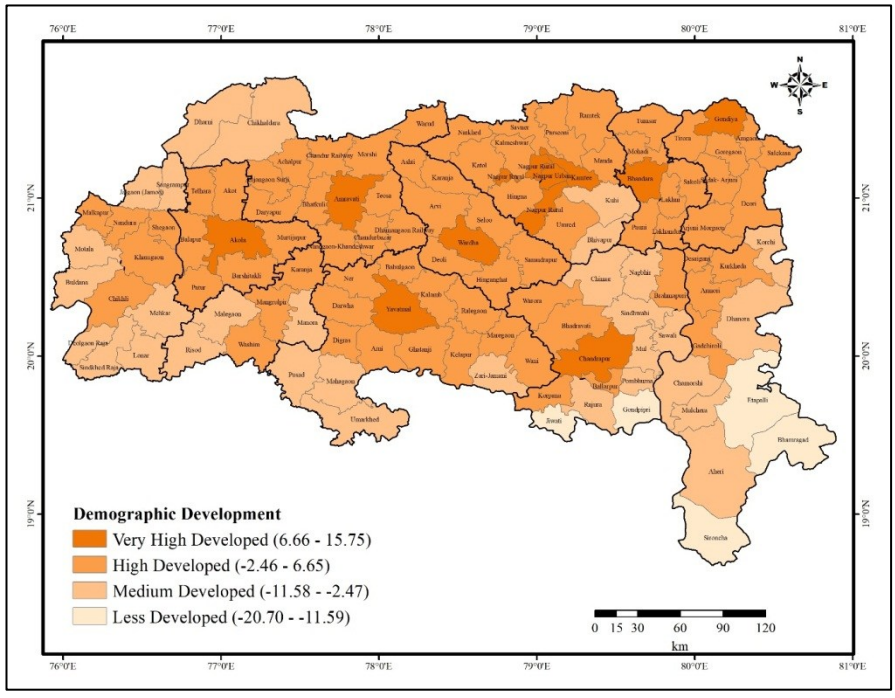

Figure 3. Status of Demographic Development in Vidarbha

4.2 Economic Development

The uneven distribution of economic opportunities among the regions is referred to as regional disparities in economic development. Economic development is the keystone of overall development. It lays the foundation for holistic societal progress, creating a synergy that propels the standard of living. The research incorporates various indicators for the assessment; those are available at the block level.

In the study area, Nagpur Urban and Amravati blocks are identified as highly developed (3.29 - 6.11) as the blocks perform well in economic indicators like the percentage of main workers and very low percentages of marginal workers (Figure 4). Highly developed (0.47-3.28) includes 19 blocks. These are Akola, Gondia, Bhandara, Wardha, Chandrapur, Chamorshi, Hingna, Gadchiroli, Narkhed, Nagpur Rural, Katol, Mauda, Bhivapur, Kalmeshwar, Washim, Buldhana, Karanja and Warora. A larger percentage of arable and irrigated land boosts the block's prosperity. There are 80 blocks belonging to the medium developed (-2.35 - 0.46**)** category of development. Out of that, a larger number of blocks belong to Bhandara, Chandrapur, Yavatmal, Buldhana and Washim districts. Less developed (-5.17 to -2.36) blocks belong to Amravati (Anjangaon Surji, Daryapur, Bhatkuli, Chandurbazar, Chikhaldara, Dharni), Gondia (Sadak Arjuni, Deori, Arjuni Morgaon), Chadrapur (Nagbhir), Gadchiroli (Etapalli, Mulchera, Bhamragad), Yavatmal (Digras, Maregaon), Buldhana (Lonar, Deolgaon Raja), and Akola (Murtijapur, Patur) districts. The performance of selected economic indicators is poor. In these blocks, the percentage of non-workers and marginal workers is high, and the other indicators moderately affect the level of development.

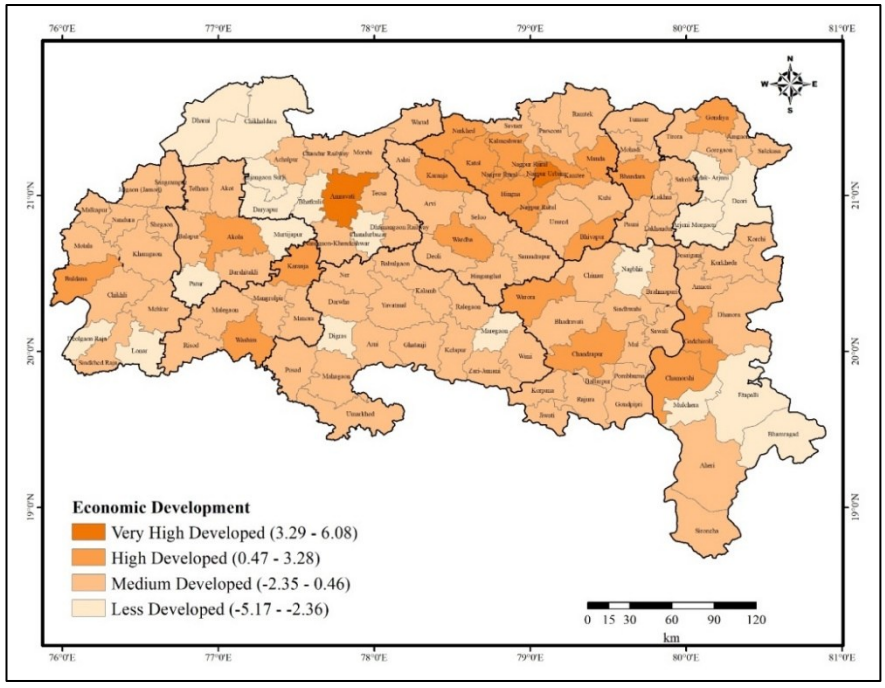

Figure 4. Status of Economic Development in Vidarbha

4.3 Social Development

Social development is a crucial dimension of overall development (Sharma 2014); it encompasses housing, social security, health, education, and individual social services (Pratiwi and Susiyanto 2021). It is the process of uprising that improves the ability of the

society to fulfil its ambitions. It implies a qualitative change in the way the society shapes itself and carries out its activities.

There are two blocks belonging to the very highly developed (4.53-8.15) category of social development. These blocks are Nagpur Urban and Amravati due to good health and educational facilities, performing well in social development (Figure 5). The 12 blocks, namely Umred, Savner, Gondia, Bhandara, Akola, Kalmeshwar, Nagpur Rural, Katol, Kalmeshwar, Hingna, Buldhana, Kamtee, and Kuhi, belong to highly developed (0.90-4.52). The number of blocks mainly comes from the Nagpur district. Medium developed (-2.73-0.89) category includes 83 blocks. The maximum number comes mainly from Wardha, Gondia, Chandrapur, Amravati, and Buldhana. There are 23 blocks belonging to the less developed (-6.36 to - 2.74) category of social development. The blocks majorly come from Gadchiroli, Yavatmal, Amravati, Chandrapur, Washim and Bhandara. The blocks have a higher percentage of below-poverty-line population due to a lack of health, education and communication facilities.

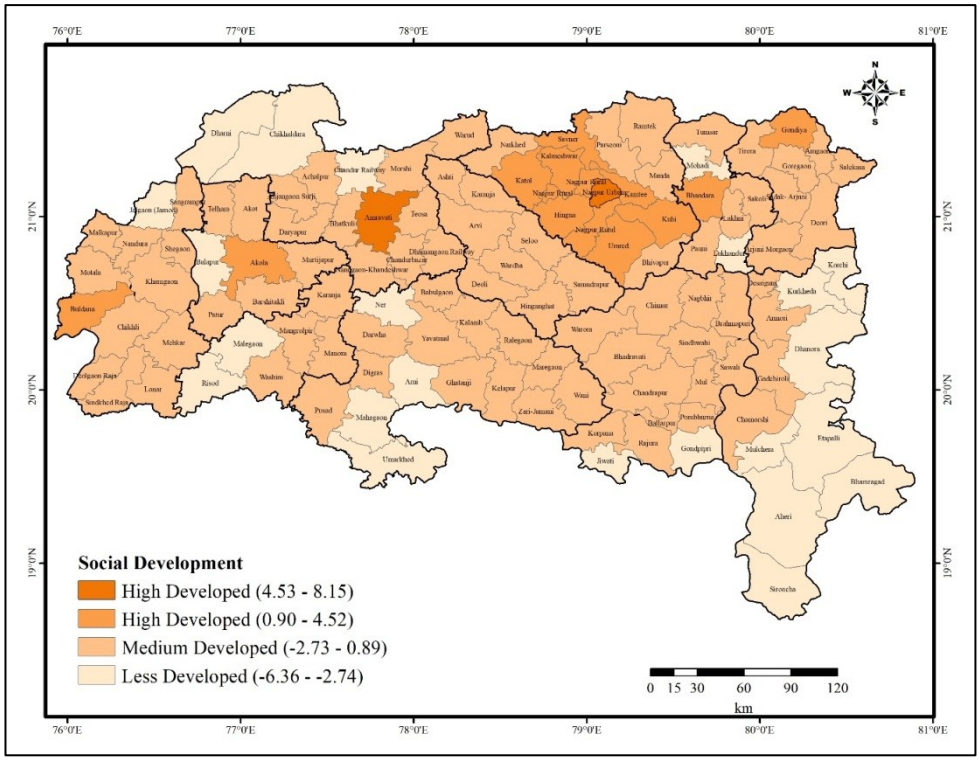

Figure 5. Status of Social Development in Vidarbha

4.4 Infrastructural development

Infrastructure facilities are considered vehicles of regional development, as they fast-track economic development (Olufemi et al., 2013). Infrastructure plays a multifaceted role in regional development by providing the physical backbone necessary for economic

growth, social progress, and the well-being of communities. Strategic investment in infrastructure can unlock the potential of regions, enhance quality of life and create equal development opportunities.

There are three blocks, namely, Nagpur Urban, Amravati and Akola, that are very highly developed (11.85 – 22.22). These blocks have well-developed infrastructural facilities like transport and health facilities. Out of 120 blocks, 19 blocks are included in the highly developed (1.47 - 11.84) category of infrastructural development. Out of 19 blocks of highly developed areas, nine blocks come from the Nagpur district. These blocks incorporate dense road connectivity, and people have easy access to all educational and health facilities. Medium Developed (-8.29-1.46) includes 87 blocks from all districts of Vidarbha. Most of the blocks come from Wardha, Bhandara, Yavatmal, Washim, Buldhana and Amravati. 11 blocks fall under the category of less developed (-19.29 to -8.92). The blocks belong to Gondia, Gadchiroli, Buldhana, Chandrapur and Amravati (Figure 6).

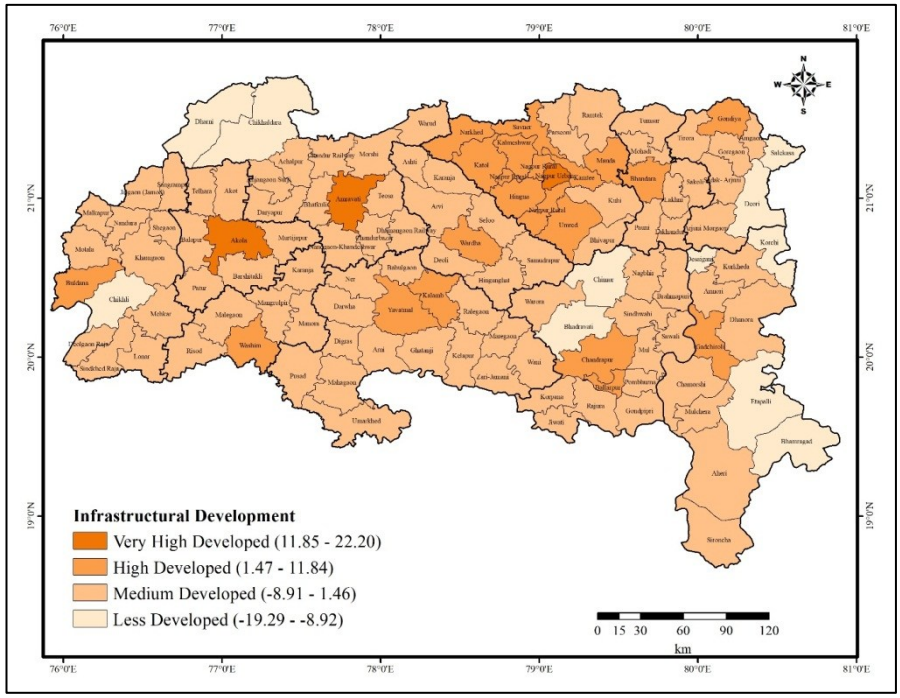

Figure 6. Status of Infrastructural Development in Vidarbha

4.5 Socio-economic Development

The concept of development is central to any issue about change in the socio-economic domain (Chojnicki, 2010). It is an outcome of the socio-economic system and its process (Minocha 1983), which carries progress through the process of social and economic transformation within the region. It encompasses a multifaceted approach to improving the overall well-being and quality of life within society, addressing various

interrelated spheres such as demographic dynamics, economic prosperity, social equity, and infrastructural advancements.

The spatial pattern of regional disparities in overall development can be discerned by representing the level of development (Figure 7). There are three blocks, namely Nagpur Urban, Amravati and Akola, identified as very high development (6.76 – 13.08). The blocks likely exhibit significant economic development because of the presence of industrial and commercial centres. The blocks perform excellently in each dimension of development and typically have well-established infrastructure such as roads, transportation networks, utilities (electricity, sanitation), and communication facilities. This infrastructure supports the functioning of various economic and social activities within the region. Highly Developed (0.43 – 6.75) includes 28 blocks. Most of them come from the Nagpur district; these are performing well in all demographic, economic and infrastructural indicators like literacy, sex ratio, urbanisation, percentage of main workers, road density, etc. Other blocks include the district commercial centres and comparatively good social and infrastructural facilities. There are 84 blocks identified as medium developed (-5.90 – 0.42). The majority of blocks come from Gondia, Yavatmal, Buldhana, Akola, Bhandara, and Chandrapur. The remaining five blocks fall under the less developed (-12.23 to -5.91) category of socio-economic development. Less developed blocks exhibit deprivation in socio-economic facilities. The blocks come from the Gadchiroli (3) and Amrawati (2) districts. These blocks are situated in peripheral areas of the region, having a higher percentage of tribal population, and they depend on primary economic activity. Sironcha, Etapalli, Bhamragad (Gadchiroli), Chikhaldara, Dharni (Amrawati) blocks.

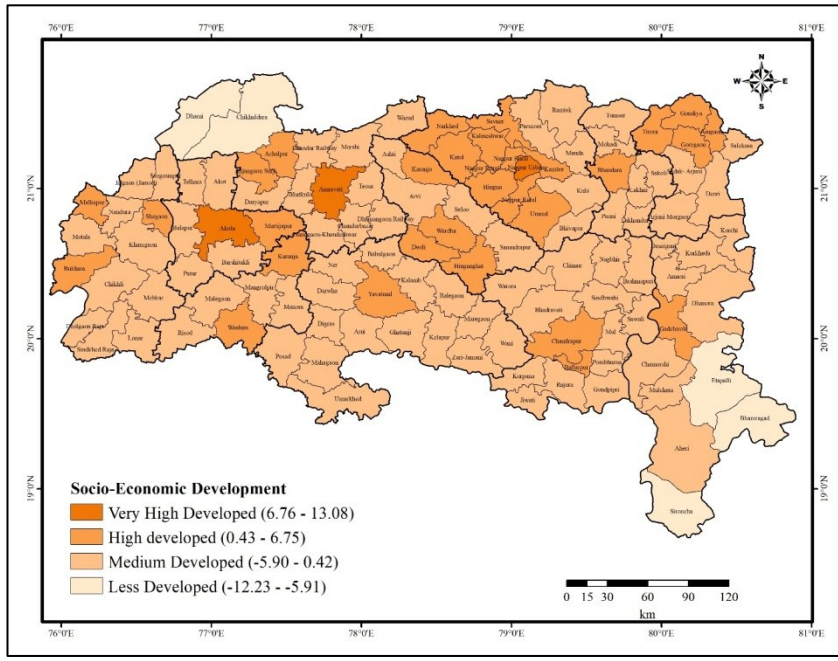

Figure 7. Status of Socio-economic Development in Vidarbha

The result of the study aligns with the 'core' and 'periphery' characteristics of Friedman's (1966) core-periphery model. The model describes that the core is an important location having a higher level of economic development, urbanisation, and well-developed infrastructure, the blocks identified as very highly developed exhibit similar characteristics of the 'core' concept and the blocks identified as the medium and less developed exhibits accordingly more or less same characteristics of semi-periphery and peripheral area of the model. These blocks have limited urbanisation, a low level of infrastructural development and a high poverty level.

The results have been validated with NITI Aayog's Aspirational Block Programme (https://abp.championsofchange.gov.in/). The programme has identified 27 blocks as aspirational in Maharashtra, of which 10 are located in the Vidarbha region. The research work identifies that out of those 10 blocks, six blocks are Jiwati (Chandrapur), Aheri (Gadchiroli), and Karnja (Wardha), which come under the medium developed category, and the remaining four blocks are Bhamragad, Sironcha (Gadchiroli), Dharni, and Chikhaldara (Amravati) are categorised under the less developed category. The result highlights the pressing need for concerted efforts to bridge the development gap within the region.

The number of blocks is categorised in terms of all the dimensions of development; there are relatively fewer blocks in the "Very High" and "High Developed" categories across the different dimensions (Table 1). This implies that there is room for improvement and targeted interventions to enhance development levels in the region, particularly in the economic, social, and infrastructural dimensions.

Table 1. Dimension-wise Number of Blocks in Different Levels of Development

Dimensions	Very Highly Developed	High Developed	Medium Developed	Less Developed
Demographic	10	74	31	5
Economic	2	19	80	19
Social	2	12	83	23
Infrastructural	3	19	87	11
Socio-economic Development	3	27	85	5

4.6 Inter-Relationship Among Different Dimensions of Development

All spheres (dimensions) of development must flourish simultaneously for the inclusive and balanced development of the region. The Pearson correlation matrix displays the correlation coefficients between the various development dimensions (Table 2). A perfect negative correlation is denoted by a correlation coefficient of -1, no correlation is shown by a correlation value of 0, and a perfect positive correlation is denoted by 1. The correlation coefficient between Demographic and Socio-Economic dimensions is 0.865, indicating a strong positive correlation. This suggests that as the demographic indicators (such as literacy, urbanisation, sex ratio, etc.) improve, the overall socio-economic

conditions also tend to improve. The correlation coefficient between Infrastructural and Socio-Economic dimensions is 0.886, which is the highest correlation in the matrix. This strong positive correlation suggests that better infrastructure (e.g., transportation, communication, utilities) is closely associated with better socio-economic conditions. The correlation coefficient between Economic and Social dimensions is 0.615, indicating a moderate positive correlation. This implies that economic development and social factors (such as education, health, and quality of life) tend to be interrelated, but other factors influence their relationship. Improvements in one dimension are often associated with positive changes in other dimensions, particularly for infrastructure and socio-economic conditions.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Different Dimensions of Development

Dimensions of Development	Demographic	Economic	Social	Infrastructural	**Socio-Economic**
Demographic	1.000				
Economic	0.485	1.000			
Social	0.582	0.615	1.000		
Infrastructural	0.581	0.643	0.636	1.000	
Socio-Economic	0.865	0.730	0.783	0.886	1.000

Correlation is significant at a 5 % level. (p-value < 0.05)

5 Conclusion

Assessing regional disparities in the study area underscores significant spatial variations and uneven development patterns. The highly developed blocks have characteristics of the ‘core’ area, such as good quality social, economic and infrastructural facilities. All the less developed blocks are situated in peripheral areas, some of which are tribal-dominated, characterised by low social and economic status and fewer infrastructural facilities. In addition, lack of economic opportunities, inadequate human capital development, and poor connectivity hinder the ability to attract investment and foster sustainable development. These blocks need distinct attention to improve infrastructural and social facilities and achieve the well-being of people to attain balanced regional development. Accordingly, development measures must be prioritised in medium and less-developed blocks in the region. Through the lens of the Core-periphery model, it becomes evident that the disparities in development between the core and peripheral areas are starkly apparent. The Nagpur urban, Amravati, and Akola areas act as the ‘core’ by attracting investments, infrastructure, and economic activities as very highly developed blocks. The less developed blocks, such as Etapalli, Bhamragad, Sironcha (Gadchiroli), Dharni, and Chikhaldara (Amravati), are peripheral and highlight the pronounced lower socio-economic development. This distribution signifies a concentration of resources, infrastructure, and economic activities in blocks of the core areas and the blocks in the peripheral areas face significant challenges in overall development that corroborate the

concept of spatial inequality within the region. By prioritising less developed blocks and implementing targeted, context-specific strategies, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards ensuring more equitable and inclusive development, ultimately contributing to the overall socio-economic progress of the region and its people.

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