Malda district- study area is socio-economically one of the lagged behind districts in the state of West Bengal. It is inflicted with dire socio-economic and cultural disparities at district and block level as well. However, the government has provided facilities for the development of agriculture, education, medical, transport and communication which are neither located at ideal settlement nor sufficient to keep pace with the alarming growth of population. Subsequently mass illiteracy, poverty, unemployment are common features of the region. The district lies within the latitudinal and longitudinal extension of $24^\circ40', 20''$ to $25^\circ32', 08''$ North and $87^\circ45', 50''$ to $88^\circ28', 10''$ East respectively. According to the census of India 2001, it accounts for a total population of 3,290,468 persons distributed among 1646 settlements including five urban centres.

The goal of micro-level planning is achieved by providing adequate facilities to the settlements at economically accessible, socially desirable and environmentally sustainable. Therefore, analysis of spatial organisation of settlements is important for the formulation of planning. The analysis of spatial organisation of settlement exhibits an uneven distribution of settlements in the district. Bamangola block has recorded highest density of settlements i.e., 6.8 settlements per 10 sq. km. but lowest average size of settlements i.e., 1.46 sq. km. per settlement. However, Manikchak block has recorded lowest density of settlements i.e., 2.3 settlements per 10 sq. km. but highest average size of settlements i.e., 4.39 sq. km per settlement. Therefore, an inverse relationship between density and average size of settlements has been observed in the study area.

Existing 45 socio-economic facilities have been taken into consideration for the study and have been classified into 12 main categories. Among them, each primary school serves 1730 persons. Gini’s coefficient ratio of 0.096 reveals that the settlements having electricity for domestic purpose are quite uniformly distributed among each size group of settlements in the district. However, Gini’s ratio of 0.978 of the distribution of soil testing centre, sub-division office and district headquarter indicate their disproportional concentration at single point or it reveals quite clustered distribution.

Wide regional disparities in socio-economic development have been recorded even within the administrative boundary of least developed block. In Harishchandrapur-II block, Sultan Nagar gram panchayat has attained lowest index of socio-economic development.
followed by Malior-2, while Bhaluka relatively stood at first position. In view of the ranking of blocks, first preference should be given to Harishchandrapur-II block for the formulation and implementation of planning model, however allocation of facilities should be started with Sultan Nagar gram panchayat. 

To overcome the above problems i.e., unplanned allocation of facilities in an unorganized manner among the size group of settlements and regional disparities in the levels of socio-economic development, and to achieve balanced regional development keeping pace with growth of population, Christaller’s Central Place concept (1933) has been adopted as a tool of planning.

On the basis of criteria for the identification of central places, 361 central places have been identified and they have been arranged into six hierarchical orders on the basis of their functional importance or centrality score. The analysis reveals that 274 central places with centrality score less than 236.09 are considered under first order i.e., lowest order of hierarchy, while 71 settlements are included in second order, 11 settlements in third order, 03 settlements in fourth order, 01 settlement in fifth order and rest 01 settlement in sixth order i.e., highest order of hierarchy. It has been observed that the centrality score of central place is positively correlated to their total population \( (r = 0.867) \). It accepts the hypothesis that, the centrality score of central places is directly correlated to its population and infers the fact that people are tend to concentrated at the central place where higher important facilities are exist.

The causal analysis reveals that, the centrality score of central places is positively correlated to their dependent population \( (r= 0.741) \) and dependent area \( (r= 0.742) \). It may be ascertained that, the central places of higher functional importance attract a large number of population from longer distance and it is contrary to the central places of lower functional importance.

The spatio-functional gaps of both first order and second order functions have been examined to be recorded till 2021 on the basis of projected population of each settlement in the pilot study area. The analysis reveals that, due to estimated growth of population the functional gap of each function is estimated to be increasing that suggests requirement of new more facilities in addition to existing number. The analysis also reveals that, due to less increase of estimated population in the complementary region than the average increase in the district till 2021, the functional gap is estimated to be reduced in 2021 than that in 2001. Such a condition is
estimated to have happened in the complementary region of five central places i.e., Sadlichak, Mashaldaha, Malipakar, Talbangrua and Talgachhi in the block.

To achieve a balanced regional socio-economic development, a diagnostic planning model has been proposed, which comprises two folds planning action i.e., first, estimation of required facilities to fill the functional gap, second, identification of optimal new location for proposed facilities.

The proposed plan has been formulated as a pragmatic model to eliminate the existing problems and problems likely to exist till 2021. If this model is adopted by the regional planners and policy makers, the areas would be developed in balanced form.

Regional planners, policy makers and government are suggested to adopt such a bottom-up approach planning for entire district in the same way and the same process to eliminate regional disparities that macro level planning approach could not achieve.