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Rapid Urbanisation and Plight of Slums

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Why in News

Urbanisation in India has become an inescapable ordeal. With development of the services sector, the population pressure on cities has escalated.

Delhi is the sixth-largest metropolis in the world. And yet, a third of its residences are part of slums with no basic resources.

Slums

- Slums are **illegal urban settlements on public land and usually grow over a period of time in a constant and irregular manner**. Despite this fact, slums are **considered as an integral part of urbanization and as a manifestation of the overall socioeconomic policies and planning** in the urban sector.
- Slums may also be described as “a chaotically occupied, unsystematically developed and generally neglected area, which is overpopulated by persons and overcrowded with ill-repaired and neglected structures” (Indian Conference, 1957).
- The existence and rapid growth of slums have been noted as a **general urban phenomena common prevalent throughout the globe**.

Key Points

- **About:**

- Urbanization refers to **the population shift from rural to urban areas**, the corresponding decrease in the proportion of people living in rural areas, and the ways in which societies adapt to this change.
- Cities face the adverse outcomes of rapid urbanisation such as **overpopulation, acute shortage of housing and basic amenities, environment pollution, unemployment and social unrest.**
- The model of building a developed city comprises unplanned development, which only bolsters the dichotomy prevailing in urban cities between the rich and the poor.
- Also the **Covid-19 pandemic** has only exacerbated the misery of urban poor or Slum dwellers dependent on the people working in various sectors in cities.

- **Status of Slum:**

India has a population of 65.49 million people living in 13.7 million slum households across the country. As much as 65% of Indian cities have adjoining slums where people live in small houses adjacent to each other.

- Delhi slums are known to be the filthiest among all metropolitan cities in the country.
- Delhi had approximately 6,343 slums with more than a million households where 52% of its total population resided, according to a survey by National Service Scheme round (July 2012-December 2012).

- **Impact of Covid on Slum Dwellers:**

- **Financial insecurity:**

- Nearly 81% of India's population works in the informal sector. The sudden implementation of complete Covid lockdown has severely affected the ability of slum dwellers to earn their living.
- After the shutdown, Delhi witnessed a wave of **Reverse Migration**, when thousands of migrant workers headed back to their hometowns. Nearly 70% slum dwellers reported loss of employment; 1% pending dues from previous months; 10% reduction of wages and 8% other effects.

- **Public Distribution System & Social Sector Scheme Coverage:**

- A large section of rural residents could cushion the blow of pandemic-driven economic disruption due to foodgrain via the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**. The urban poor's access to such ration, however, was minimal.
- The social security schemes also had relatively better coverage among the rural poor as rural areas had better access to PDS rations.
- A larger proportion of households in urban areas did not have access to ration cards.

- **Unveiling Existing Inequalities:**

- The Covid-19 pandemic has now torn open the tapestry to reveal the ugly mess inside the slums. Washing hands and observing physical distancing was impossible to follow in slums.
- Nearly 21.8% of slum households in Delhi depend on shared water sources such as public taps.

- **Nutrition and Hunger:**

- A decline in nutritional quality and quantity was more among the urban respondents as was the need to borrow money for buying food.
- Overall, levels of hunger and food insecurity remained high, with little hope of the situation improving without measures specifically aimed at providing employment opportunities as well as food support.

- **Issues Arising from Neglecting Slum Development:**
 - **Vulnerable to Diseases:**

People living in slum areas are also prone to suffer from waterborne diseases such as **Typhoid and cholera, as well as from more fatal ones like Cancer and HIV/AIDS.**
 - **Victims of Social Evils:**
 - Also, women and children living in slums are prone to become victims of social evils like **prostitution, beggary and Child trafficking.**
 - Slum dwellers in general and regardless of gender, often become victims of such social evils.
 - **Incidence of Crime:**

Slum areas are also commonly believed to be places that **generate a high incidence of crime.** This is due to official neglect towards education, law and order, and government services in slum areas.
 - **Poverty:**

Then, the majority of slum dwellers in a developing country earn their living from the informal sector which neither provides them with financial security nor with enough earnings for a decent living, keeping them firmly within the vicious cycle of poverty.
- **Government Initiatives for Slum Dwellers/Urban Poor:**
- **Recommendations:**
 - Accelerating efficiency of welfare and relief schemes.
 - Ensuring access to free vaccines, food security and adequate shelter in the slums.
 - Improving sanitation and transportation facilities in slums.
 - Establishing clinics and healthcare facilities.
 - Aiding nonprofits and local support bodies who have better reach to these marginalised communities.

Way Forward

- The benefits reached only a small part of the intended beneficiaries. Most relief funds and benefits do not reach slum dwellers, mainly because these settlements are not officially recognised by the government.
- An absence of proper social security measures in India has come to the fore and has a huge impact on our ability to fight against the virus. Thus, new approaches to urban planning and effective governance are the need of the hour.
- Necessary actions should be taken to build sustainable, robust and inclusive infrastructure. Instead of a top-down approach, we need to adopt a bottom-up approach to better understand unique challenges faced by the urban poor.

Source: DTE