



Reshaping the Development of Cities

This editorial is based on [“It’s Time to Revisit, Rethink, Reshape Indian Cities”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 09/12/2021. It talks about the significance of development of cities and issues such as unplanned development, poor land use decisions and ULB related issues.

India has been among the fastest growing economies in the world for close to two decades, and aspires to be among the **top three largest economies in the world by 2047** — the 100th year of its Independence.

In this economic development of India, its cities have a major role to play. **Cities are India’s economic powerhouses** and a magnet for a large rural population seeking a better life. In the recent few years, a number of schemes have been launched specifically for the development of cities and the urban dwellers.

However, with reference to the efforts made for developing cities, the results have been dismal. The major cause for the same can be attributed to **poor planning, infrastructural shortcomings and the plight of [Urban Local Bodies \(ULBs\)](#)**.

Urban Development in India

- **Pace of Urbanisation:** In 2019, the **National Commission on Population** estimated that India’s population is expected to increase from 1,211 million to 1,518 million during 2011-2036. Urban growth is expected to contribute to over 73% of the rise in the population.
 - The [United Nations](#) has projected that, by 2050, India will be 50% urbanised.
- **Contribution of Urban India in Economy:** Cities constitute only about 3% of the country’s land, but **contribute to over 70% of the [Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#)** indicating a high level of economic productivity that they offer.
- **Government Initiatives for Urban Development:** The government has begun various initiatives to provide basic amenities to every household and also enable technology to solve urban issues. Some of these include:
 - Schemes/Programmes Related to Urban Development:
 - [Smart Cities](#)
 - [AMRUT Mission](#)
 - [Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban](#)
 - [HRIDAY](#)
 - [Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban](#)
 - Government Initiatives for [Slum Dwellers](#)/Urban Poor:
 - [Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana](#)
 - [Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan \(self-reliant India\)](#)

Challenges to Development of Cities

- **City-Centric Issues:** Several city-centric issues such as [air pollution](#), [urban flooding](#), and [droughts](#) exist as **obstacles in holistic development of urban India** all of which point to **infrastructural shortcomings and inadequate planning**.

- **Land-use decisions** are often **made without an adequate empirical assessment of the consequences** which disrupt the local ecology, and in turn, the economy.
- **Erroneous Classification of Urban Areas:** A foundational challenge is the way of defining what is “urban” and what is “rural” in India.
 - Out of 7,933 towns that are counted as urban, almost half have the status of Census towns and **continue to be governed as rural entities** which adds to the vulnerability of unplanned **urbanisation**.
- **Unplanned Development of Statutory Towns:** Even those urban settlements that have the status of “statutory towns” do not necessarily grow in a planned manner. About **52% of statutory towns in India lack any kind of master plan**.
 - Most of the **focus of planned development leans towards metropolitan cities (Class 1 towns)**.
 - The small and medium sized towns (Class 2, 3 and 4 towns), which together house 26% of the total population and need at least equal, if not more, **attention remain untapped**.
- **Issues Faced by Urban Local Bodies:** The ULBs do not have a thorough know-how of the value of their assets.
 - A pervasive issue is the **lack of adequate capacity of ULBs in taking innovative measures** to overcome their financial limitations.
 - They also **fall short in collecting sufficient property taxes** in terms of rates and coverage.
- **Issues of Urban Transport:** India’s ratio of **buses to population is a low 1.2 per 1,000 people**, compared to 8.6 in Thailand and 6.5 in South Africa.
 - State governments, which retain effective control over urban development have **failed to operationalise the umbrella authorities to regulate transport**.
 - The existing paradigm makes **metro and bus services expensive for the majority**, particularly those forced to live in the suburbs due to housing costs.

Way Forward

- **Integration for Inclusive Urban Development:** Enhanced ambition requires the Central government to work with State governments to **integrate key areas with its transport vision**, such as **affordable inner-city housing**, including rental projects, **access to civic services and health care**, and enhanced sustainability, greenery and walkability.
 - All these are covered by Central budgetary schemes for cities. Only integration can bring about inclusive urbanisation.
- **Rethinking the Approach for City Development:** For India to accomplish its **Sustainable Development Goals** and the **United Nations’ New Urban Agenda**, the government has to revisit, rethink, and reshape the way it plans and manages the country’s settlements and the connecting networks among them.
 - Cities need to be **viewed as markets, places of several cultures and generators of employment opportunities** and the **natural environments within and surrounding them need to be protected too**.
- **Overcoming Planning and Infrastructural Shortcomings:** There is a need to build capacities in the country so that cities reap the fruit of urbanisation and generate the economic momentum needed to build a \$5-trillion economy.
 - In this spirit, many cycles must be broken and plugged with **reforms in urban planning, management, and finance**.
 - Also, these structures should be built on the back of **cost-efficient public transport infrastructure that ensures last-mile connectivity**.
- **Role of Startups and Technology:** Domestic private sector companies that are well aware of the organic growth and culture of urban India need to be nourished and built to **generate solutions for India from Indian minds**.
 - **Startups** need to be mentored and encouraged to cautiously **bridge the gap between innovations and urban concerns**.
 - **Technology** needs to be made a **mainstay in urban planning education** to ensure integrated planning.
- **Involvement of Citizenry:** Citizens must be made stakeholders in city-making through **awareness programmes** about urban planning processes being made available to them and their elected leaders.

- **City leadership must also be enlightened** and aware of how to make cities both liveable and inclusive.
- **Role of State Governments:** State governments must **develop a “state urbanisation strategy”** which should **stitch together the imperatives of all sectoral policies** from industry and tourism to agriculture and the environment.
 - Unless this integration happens, coherence between spatial and economic policy will remain unconquered.

Conclusion

Cities experience constant evolution, they are not just drivers of economic growth, but are magnets of global knowledge exchanges and playgrounds for innovation. However, to enable them to fulfill their purpose, it is important to reshape the planning of the cities which is also inclusive of the components such land-use, housing, transportation etc.

Drishti Mains Question

Explain the significance of cities in the economic development of India and discuss the challenges associated with the development of cities.

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