



## Towards Sustainable Urban Planning

This editorial is based on [“What does the World Bank report say about India’s cities?”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 08/07/2022. It talks about India’s Urban Space and challenges related to it.

**For Prelims:** 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act 1992, 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission, Atal Mission for Urban Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U), Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework 2.0, TULIP-The Urban Learning Internship Program, Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, Urban Heat Island, Urban Flooding, Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme.

**For Mains:** Major Challenges Related to India’s Urban Space, Recent Initiatives Related to Urban Development.

**India** is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and its **growth is propelled by its cities**. Studies have also shown that Indian cities are **likely to contribute to 70% of India’s GDP by 2030**. According to the [World Bank](#), India would need to invest USD 840 **billion over the next 15 years**, to meet the demands of its fast-growing urban population.

These findings are reflected in the exponential rate of [urbanisation](#) that the country is undergoing. While this is a turn towards great economic growth, it also comes with a **set of challenges with regards to liveability**. Delving deeper into those challenges reveal an inherent limitation within the framework of **urbanisation**.

**Urbanisation is not a problem in itself**, but **unsustainable and unplanned urbanisation** is bound to create socio-economic problems. **These problems need to be countered in a planned and scientific manner**.

### How India Recognises Urban Space as a Development Entity?

- India's first pan-Indian urban vision was articulated in the 1980s with the creation of the **National Commission on Urbanisation (1988)**.
- The Indian Constitution establishes a clear mandate for **Democratic Decentralization** (Municipality) in India's urban space through its [Directive Principles of State Policy](#) and [74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act 1992](#).
- Additionally, the [15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission](#) report on local bodies emphasised the need to empower city governance structures financially.

### What are the Recent Initiatives Related to Urban Development?

- [Atal Mission for Urban Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation \(AMRUT\)](#)

- [Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban \(PMAY-U\)](#)
- [Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework 2.0](#)
- [TULIP-The Urban Learning Internship Program](#)
- [Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan \(Self-Reliant India\)](#)

## What are the Major Challenges Related to India's Urban Space?

- **Lack of Efficient Transport:** People prefer to use **private transport more in the name of social status**. The dependency on cars has resulted in **overcrowding of roads, pollution, and the increase in travelling time** in cities.
  - Also, the growing number of vehicles in Indian cities is viewed as the **essential driver of [climate change](#)** due to high dependence on combustible fuel.
- **Slums and Squatter Settlements:** Urban areas tend to have a **high cost of living** but most of the people who move from rural to urban areas are not in a condition to afford such living. This situation leads to the **growth of slums** as safe havens for migrants.
  - According to the **World Bank**, the population living in slums in India was reported at **35.2 % of the total urban population**.
  - **Dharavi in Mumbai is considered the largest slum in Asia**.
- **Degradation of Environmental Quality:** Urbanisation is one of the major causes of environmental degradation. The **congestion of people in limited spaces reduces the quality of air and contaminates water**.
  - Destruction of **forests and agricultural land for the construction of buildings** and factories degrades the land quality.
  - **[Domestic waste, industrial effluents](#)**, and other wastes that were directly channelized to the rivers, **degrade the water quality**.
    - Also, **mountains of garbage outside the city** area have become the hallmark of any metropolitan city in India.
- **Sewerage Problems:** Rapid urbanisation leads to the **unplanned and haphazard growth of cities** and most of these cities are plagued with inefficient sewage facilities.
  - Most cities do not have **proper arrangements for treating the sewage waste**. According to GOI almost **78%** of the sewage generated in India remains untreated and is disposed of in rivers, lakes, or sea.
- **Urban Heat Island:** Urban areas are characterised by dense concentrations of pavement, buildings, and other surfaces that **absorb and retain heat**.
  - It increases **energy costs (e.g., for air conditioning), air pollution levels, and heat-related illness and mortality**.
- **Urban Flooding:** As a result of increasing land prices and limited land in city centres, new developments in Indian cities and towns are **occurring in low-lying areas, often encroaching on lakes, wetlands, and rivers**.
  - Natural drainage systems have become less effective, **resulting in [urban flooding](#)**.
  - A **lack of solid waste management** also contributes to **flooding and waterlogging** due to the blocking of storm water.
- **Ineffective Functioning of ULBs:** Although there is a **broad range of functions for [Urban Local Bodies](#) outlined by the Constitution**, the revenue required to deliver on those functions is dependent on the Centre and State.
  - The imbalance between the **powers, responsibilities and funds assigned to ULBs and lack of time bound audits results in their ineffective functioning**.

## What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Organised Urban Planning:** There is a need to align towards effective solutions for urban issues that can include **green infrastructure, mixed-use of public spaces and use of [alternative energy sources](#) such as solar and wind**.
  - **Organised urban planning** can help improve the **welfare of people** shaping **their urban areas and neighbourhoods into healthier, more efficient spaces**.
  - More innovative ideas should be evolved for affordable and better city management.

[Public-private partnerships](#) should also be invited.

- **Urban Employment Guarantee:** Urban areas need a **scheme similar to MGNREGA** to provide basic living standards to urban poor.
  - The [Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme](#) **has been rolled out in Rajasthan** is a good step in this direction.
- **Green Transport:** To achieve green mobility in India's urban space, public transport must be **rethought and rebuilt, including by introducing e-buses**, creating bus corridors, and **utilising bus rapid transit systems**.
- **Formalisation of the Informal Urban Economy:** The **data of migrants** needs to be compiled and used in city development activities in the interest of migrant workers.
  - In addition, the **Labour Ministry's** proposed **Unorganised Worker Index Number Card** would also help formalise the workforce.
- **Democratisation of Sustainable Development:** Prevailing preference of an **“economic” view of city development** has to be replaced by a **sustainable one**, which includes **ecological and social considerations**.
  - **Accordingly, Sustainable development** has to be democratised at the local level in India by citizen's participation in governance, such as **participative budgeting** should be used in every city, **selecting the locally most appropriate tools and targeting most urgent issues**.
    - **Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIA)** should be mandatory at local levels related to any developmental activity.

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

Discuss some major issues related to the existing urban space in India and how it can be reimagined.

## **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)**

### ***Prelims***

**Q. Local self-government can be best explained as an exercise in (2017)**

- (a) Federalism
- (b) Democratic decentralisation
- (c) Administrative delegation
- (d) Direct democracy

**Ans: (b)**

### ***Mains***

**Q. Do government's schemes for up-lifting vulnerable and backward communities by protecting required social resources for them, lead to their exclusion in establishing businesses in urban economies? (2014)**