



India Towards Next-Gen Cities

This editorial is based on "[The urban vision: Creating next-gen cities across India](#)" Which was published in Hindustan Times on 13/12/2022. It talks about Urban development vision for India's next-gen cities.

For Prelims: Gross Domestic Product (GDP), National Commission on Urbanisation (1988), Democratic Decentralization, 15th Finance Commission report, Smart Cities, AMRUT Mission, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, Unorganised Worker Index Number Card, Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme.

For Mains: Major Issues Related to Indian Cities, Recent Government Initiatives Related to Urban Development.

India's Urban Population contributes **63%** to the **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**, which is expected to rise to **75% by 2030**. Despite this huge contribution, **growth has not been equitable across cities, creating extreme pressure on megacities**.

Our mega-cities are witnessing **growth of informal sector in form of slums and unorganised economic activities**, overcrowding, **deterioration of quality of civic infrastructure**, traffic and transportation inadequacies, **climate change**, and an **increasing disconnect with our culture and heritage**.

While the economic revolution of the last 25 years moved **India towards a paradigm that focuses on urban economic development**, it is now evident that India must develop solutions that prioritise more **equitable and sustainable growth for its next-gen cities**.



How India Recognises the Need of Urban Development?

- 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 74th Amendment Act 1992.
- Additionally, the [**15th Finance Commission report**](#) on local bodies emphasised the need to empower city governance structures financially.
- Recent Government Initiatives:
 - [**Smart Cities**](#)
 - [**AMRUT Mission**](#)
 - [**Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban**](#)
 - [**Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana**](#)
 - [**Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan \(self-reliant India\)**](#)

What are the Major Issues Related to Indian Cities?

- **Lack of Robust City Planning:** India faces a **lack of robust and uniform city planning**, which according to a [**UNEP report**](#), **may be costing us up to 3% of our GDP every year**.
 - It includes the absence of **uniform urban design standards for crucial public utilities**, such as **urban roads and footpaths**.
 - **Most of the town planning authorities** face a lack of modern and eco-friendly techniques, which results in **infrastructural ineffectiveness**.
- **Accountability Mismatch:** City governments are led by the city **Mayor/Council**. This model, which is the common governance mechanism in most cities.
 - However, they are managed by a spectrum of **disorganised government bodies and parastatals (such as water, transport and development authorities)** run by the **state government through which they often influence city affairs and policy**.
 - This **leads to accountability mismatch and collision of responsibilities**.
- **Absence of Citizen Centrism:** There are **no structured platforms for citizen participation (ward committees and area sabhas)**, no coherent participatory processes (**such as participatory budgeting**), **weak citizen grievance redressal mechanisms** and low levels of transparency in finances and operations, adds to the problem.
 - An absence of a strong component of **transparency, accountability and participation** have resulted in **weak levels of engagement between citizens and governments**, therefore leads to **low levels of trust** and in general **tarnished democratic values of a city**.
- **Unauthorised Settlements and Slums:** People who [**migrate from rural to urban areas**](#) cannot afford the high cost of living in urban areas, which 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.
- **Inefficient Sewage Facilities:** Rapid urbanisation leads to haphazard and unplanned growth of cities, **most of which suffer from inadequate sewage systems**.
 - According to GOI **almost 78% of the sewage generated in India remains untreated** and is disposed of in rivers, lakes, or sea.
- **Inefficient Transport and Climate Change:** Many city dwellers **use private transport** more often for maintaining social status. This has led to **overcrowding of roads, pollution, and increased travel times**.
 - 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.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Centre-State Collaboration in City Development:** **Central government** can lead the way by framing **city model laws and policies**.

- State governments must **hold the beacon for driving institutional reforms in spatial planning**, [fiscal decentralisation](#), overhauling cadre and recruitment rules for municipalities, **empowering mayors and municipal councils, and instituting decentralised platforms for citizen participation**.
 - Also, Indian cities can devise a [common digital GIS base-map of different wards](#), shared among the plethora of agencies involved in delivering services.
- **Organising the Informal Urban Economy:** It is important to gather data on migrants for use in city development **activities benefiting migrants**.
- The **Labour Ministry's proposed Unorganised Worker Index Number Card** would also help formalise the workforce.
- **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**.
- **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
- **Towards Green Transition:** There is a need to align towards effective solutions for urban issues that can include [blue-green infrastructure](#), **mixed-use of public spaces and use of alternative energy** sources such as solar and wind.
- **Public-private partnerships** should also be invited for the [green transition of cities](#).

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss major loopholes in urban planning in India. Also, suggest how India can move towards sustainable urban development.

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)