



## 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.

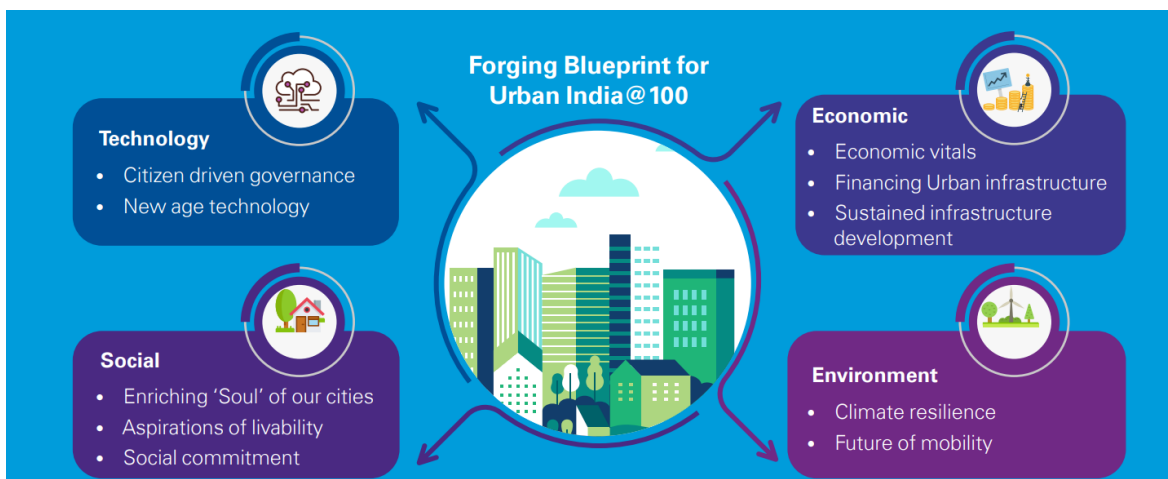
**For Prelims:** Gross Domestic Product (GDP), National Commission on Urbanisation (1988), Democratic Decentralization, 15th Finance Commission report, Smart Cities, AMRUT Mission, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, Unorganised Worker Index Number Card, Indira Gandhi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