



Reimagining India's Urban Space

This editorial is based on [“Why our urban spaces need to be reimagined”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 24/09/2022. It talks about the necessity of reforms for the development of India's urban space.

For Prelims: India's Urban Space, 74th Amendment of the Constitution, Atal Mission for Urban Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U), Urban Heat Island, Urban Flooding, Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme, Sustainable Development Goals

For Mains: Provisions Related to Urban Governance in India, Current Major Challenges Related to Urban Space in India, Recent Initiatives Related to Urban Development

[Urban Space](#) is a **breathing entity**, it is ever-growing and evolving. Urbanisation in India is taking place at a fast pace; it is projected to have about **35%** of India's population living in urban areas by the end of **2022**.

However, **unsustainable urban planning** is a huge limiting factor to achieving the real economic potentials of urbanisation as **urban challenges have changed and require different approaches considering the current scenario**.

As **India is approaching the tipping point in its transition from rural to urban society**, it is imperative that all sections of society have the best opportunities for economic growth.

What are Provisions Related to Urban Governance in India?

- A **pan-India** vision for the urban area was first articulated in the 1980s with the creation of the **National Commission on Urbanisation (1988)**.
- Through the [Directive Principles of State Policy](#) and the [74th Amendment Act 1992](#), the Indian Constitution imposes a clear mandate for **Democratic Decentralisation (Municipality)** in India's Urban Space.
- The [15th Finance Commission](#) report on local bodies also emphasised the city governance structures and the need for their **financial empowerment**.

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](#)

What are the Current Major Challenges Related to Urban Space in India?

- **Purse, Purpose and Politicisation of the ULBs:** In view of **inadequate finances**, the **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** have been unable to fulfil their obligatory functions.
 - The **functions of ULBs are often overlapped with special purpose agencies** resulting in accountability mismatch.
 - In addition, urban local governments are seen more as **platforms for political mobilisation** than as effective tools for development.
- **Urban Heat Island:** Natural land cover is reduced with dense **concentrations of pavement, buildings**, and other surfaces in urban areas that absorb and retain heat leading to the formation of **urban heat island**.
 - It **increases energy costs** (e.g., for air conditioning), **air pollution** levels, and **heat-related illness** and mortality.
- **Critical Infrastructure Shortages:** Infrastructures are one of the layers that form a city. Majority of cities in India **lack physical and cyber-based systems** essential to the minimum operations of the **local economy and local governance**.
 - Lack of critical infrastructure like access to **safe housing, clean water and sanitation, waste management, timely health care, digital infrastructure and education** affects the upward mobility of urban residents and the city as a whole.
- **Inefficient Water Resource Management:** Due to an **increase in land prices** and the **lack of available land in city** centres, new developments in Indian cities and towns are taking place in low-lying areas, often as **encroachments on lakes, wetlands and rivers**.
 - As a result, the natural drainage systems have become less effective, resulting in **urban flooding**.
 - Also, **poor solid waste management** is causing blockage to storm water that is leading to **waterlogging and flooding**.
- **Weak Urban Transport:** The **supply and demand of public transportation in urban areas are out of balance**, so private vehicles are increasing, **leading to congestion** as the most prevalent issue of urban transport.
 - 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.
- **Urban Poverty:** The urban poor is largely the **overflow of the rural poor who migrate to urban areas** in search of alternative employment and livelihood. This creates overcrowding in the already packed urban infrastructure.
 - Due to the informal nature of work, **migrants have no social security**, causing them to be in fear of being expelled at any time as seen at the time of **Covid-19**.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Sustainable Urban Planning:** There is a need to align towards **sustainable 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.
 - Good sustainable urban planning can help improve the welfare of people shaping their urban areas and neighbourhoods into **healthier, more efficient spaces**.
 - It will also help India to achieve **Sustainable Development Goals** specifically **Goal 11 (making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable)**.
- **Local E-Governance:** Urban local bodies should maximise **e-participation** and include various social categories and in decision-making and **bottom-up approach** in policy-making through the use of new technologies such as social networks.
- **Urban Employment Guarantee:** A **replica of MGNREGA scheme** is needed in urban areas to provide a basic standard of living to the urban poor. Social security measures for migrants and unorganised sector workers are also necessary.
 - The **Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme** has been rolled out in **Rajasthan** with the objective of providing **economic support to the poor** and needy families **living in the cities** through work to be provided on demand for **100 days in a year**.
- **Towards Green Mobility:** **Public transport** needs to be rethought and rebuilt, including by adopting **e-buses**, creating **bus corridors**, and using **bus rapid transit systems** to achieve

green mobility in India's urban space.

- **Special Cultural and Environment Zones:** Indian cities can create Special Cultural and Environment Zones with **zero-exploitation of that area** and "**Our City Our Culture**" centres as a means to **promote cultural values**.
 - **City Tourism** can be promoted in cities and included in **school activities (especially government schools)** that will strengthen **people's emotional attachment with their cities**, as well as **create jobs** for the newly urbanised Indian population.

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Drishti Mains Question

“Unsustainable urban planning is a huge limiting factor to achieving the real economic potentials of Urban space in India.” Comment

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)