



World Habitat Day 2023 and India's Urban Landscape

For Prelims: [World Habitat Day](#), [United Nations](#), UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award, [Smart Cities](#), [AMRUT Mission](#), [Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban](#), [HRIDAY](#), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban, Aspirational district Programme

For Mains: Current Major Challenges Related to Urban Landscape in India, Role of Cities in Economic Recovery.

Source: [PIB](#)

Why in News?

In 2023, [World Habitat Day \(WHD\)](#), was celebrated on **2nd October**. This annual global observance has come a long way focusing on the **evolution of [urban development](#), sustainability**, and the role of cities in economic growth.

What is World Habitat Day?

- **About:** The [United Nations](#) designated the **first Monday of October** of every year as **World Habitat Day** to reflect on the state of our habitats, and on the basic right of all to adequate shelter.
 - The Day is also intended to remind the world that we all have the power and the responsibility to shape the future of **our cities and towns**.
- **Origin:** The origin of World Habitat Day can be traced back to **Nairobi, Kenya**, in **1986**. The theme of the first celebration was '**Shelter is my Right**,' addressing the acute problem of inadequate shelter in cities.
- **Theme 2023: Resilient urban economies. Cities as drivers of growth and recovery.**
 - 2023 has been a particularly challenging year for Urban Economies. The [global economy growth](#) itself is declining to about **2.5%** and, apart from the initial **Covid-19** crisis in 2020 and the global financial crisis in 2009, this is the **weakest growth experienced since 2001**.

Note: The **UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award** was launched by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in 1989. It is currently the most prestigious human settlements award in the world.

What is the Role of Cities in Economic Recovery?

- **Economic Engines:** Cities serve as economic engines, contributing significantly to a nation's GDP.
 - Urban areas are the productive hubs of economies, **generating more than 75 % of the world's GDP**, attracting businesses, talent, and investments, thereby stimulating

economic growth.

- **Employment Opportunities:** Cities **offer diverse job opportunities**, drawing in a skilled and diverse workforce.
 - In times of economic recovery, cities become **critical in [reducing unemployment rates](#)**, and improving the overall well-being of their residents.
- **Innovation and Technology Hubs:** Many cities are epicenters of **[innovation and technology](#)**.
 - They house **research centers, universities, and tech companies** that drive technological advancements, further fostering economic recovery through innovation-led growth.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Cities often receive substantial infrastructure investments during economic recovery phases.
 - These investments in **transportation, utilities, and public services** not only boost immediate job creation but also enhance long-term productivity and quality of life.
- **Cultural and Creative Industries:** Cultural and creative industries thrive in cities, contributing to the local economy through **tourism, arts, entertainment, and design**.
 - These sectors not only generate revenue but also **make cities attractive and competitive on a global scale**.

What is the Current Urban Landscape in India?

- **Status:**
 - India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and its growth is propelled by its cities.
 - Cities contribute **66% to the [national GDP](#)**, a number expected to rise to **80%** by **2050**.
- **Current Major Challenges:**
 - **Overpopulation and Rapid Urbanization:**
 - India is the world's most populous country, with a significant portion of the population **migrating from rural to urban areas**.
 - This rapid **[urbanization](#)** exerts immense pressure on urban resources and infrastructure.
 - **Inadequate Infrastructure:**
 - **Housing:** The shortage of **[affordable housing](#)** results in the growth of slums and informal settlements, where living conditions are often substandard.
 - **Water Supply and Sanitation:** Many Indian cities struggle to provide **clean and safe drinking water** and proper sanitation facilities to their residents.
 - This leads to health issues and the contamination of water bodies.
 - **Transportation: Congested roads** and lack of efficient public transportation systems contribute to traffic **congestion, [pollution](#), and increased travel time**.
 - **Environmental Degradation:**
 - **Air Pollution:** Many Indian cities suffer from **high levels of air pollution**, leading to respiratory diseases and reducing the quality of life for residents.
 - **Water Pollution: Industrial discharges, sewage, and [improper waste disposal](#) contaminate water bodies**, affecting public health and the environment.
 - **Inequality and Social Disparities:**
 - **Economic Disparities:** Urban areas in India witness **stark income inequality**, with a growing gap between the rich and poor.
 - **Access to Services:** Many urban residents **lack access to basic services like healthcare and education**, leading to disparities in well-being and quality of life.
 - **Inadequate Waste Management:** Urban India alone generates nearly **0.15 million tonnes per day of [Municipal Solid Waste](#)**.
 - According to GOI, almost **78% of the sewage generated in India remains untreated** and is disposed of in rivers, lakes, or sea.
 - The volume of waste is projected to reach **165 million tonnes by 2031 and 436 million tonnes by 2050**, if existing policies, programmes and management strategies are not adequately addressed.
 - **Water Scarcity: Urbanization and industrialization** are leading to the over-extraction of groundwater, causing water scarcity in many cities, especially during dry seasons.
 - **Climate Change Vulnerability:** Urban areas are particularly susceptible to the adverse

effects of climate change, such as **extreme temperatures, flooding, and intensified heat islands**, which can exacerbate environmental and health issues.

What are Government Initiatives Related to Urban Development?

- [Smart Cities](#)
- [AMRUT Mission](#)
- [Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban](#)
- [HRIDAY](#)
- [Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban](#)
- [Aspirational district Programme](#)

Way Forward

- **Integrated Urban Planning:** There is a need to develop **comprehensive urban plans that consider long-term sustainability**, resilience to climate change, and the balanced use of resources.
 - Also, promote mixed land use, efficient land management, and zoning regulations that encourage smart growth.
- **Innovative Financing for Urban Development:** Cities can explore innovative financing methods like **municipal bonds** for raising resources.
 - Through the [Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation \(AMRUT\)](#) mission, the government has encouraged cities to raise capital investment.
 - To date, 12 cities have raised more than **Rs. 4,384 crores through municipal bonds**.
- **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.
- **Proper Waste Management:** There is a need to emphasize **strict segregation of waste at the source** and promote formal recycling and composting practices.
 - Also, investing in **waste-to-energy technologies** and modern landfill management to reduce the environmental impact of waste disposal.
- **Inclusive Development:** There is a need to prioritize the needs of **marginalized and vulnerable populations** by providing them with access to basic services, quality healthcare, and education.
 - The **data of migrants needs to be compiled** and used in city development activities in the interest of migrant workers.
 - Also, promoting **social housing and slum redevelopment projects** to improve living conditions.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. With reference to the Indian economy after the 1991 economic liberalization, consider the following statements: (2020)

1. Worker productivity (Rs. per worker at 2004-05 prices) increased in urban areas while it decreased in rural areas.
2. The percentage share of rural areas in the workforce steadily increased.
3. In rural areas, the growth in the non-farm economy increased.
4. The growth rate in rural employment decreased.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 and 4 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 4 only

Ans: (b)

Q. As per the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 in India, which one of the following statements is correct? (2019)

- (a) Waste generators have to segregate waste into five categories.
- (b) The Rules are applicable to notified urban local bodies, notified towns and all industrial townships only
- (c) The Rules provide for exact and elaborate criteria for the identification of sites for landfills and waste processing facilities.
- (d) It is mandatory on the part of the waste generator that the waste generated in one district cannot be moved to another district.

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. The frequency of urban floods due to high intensity rainfall is increasing over the years. Discussing the reasons for urban floods, highlight the mechanisms for preparedness to reduce the risk during such events. **(2016)**

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)**

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