



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: 74th Amendment Act 1992, 15th 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 74th Amendment Act 1992](#).
- Additionally, the [15th 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)