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Central fund to meet urban challenges

BHUBANESWAR: Major problems of urban poor in city are likely to be solved soon under 'challenge fund' project, a programme launched by Union ministry of housing and urban poverty alleviation last year. The Centre has identified Bhubaneswar and Bhawanipatna among 40 cities in India under the programme to improve socio-economic condition of urban poor. Official sources said the ministry has allocated approximately Rs 51.30 crore under the project.

The challenge fund would help the cities address major constraints in urban development and specifically focus on capacity building for successful urban management and poverty reduction. Technical and financial support will also be extended to urban local bodies (ULB) for adopting and replicating good practices.

Beneficiaries under the fund will be urban poor and other marginalised groups, including women, socially- excluded and disadvantageous groups, pavement-dwellers, disabled and children.

"Urban local bodies of Bhubaneswar and Bhawanipatna would identify areas and issues of the urban poor, which need

to be addressed under the scheme. Beneficiary cities can get support for adopting or replicating around four to five good practices," housing and urban development (H&UD) department deputy secretary Anjana Panda told TOI.

Sources said the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) plans to utilize the funds for giving facelift to street vending in the city. "Since the fund would support best practices of urban local bodies, we want to utilize it for streamlining street vending," said a senior BMC officer. "Besides, we will also prepare a plan seeking funds for improving health and sanitation in slums," the officer said.

The beneficiary cities have been asked to rope in civil society groups, research and academic institutions and private sector in taking up innovative poverty alleviation projects. The project proposals should be innovative in nature, where innovativeness is defined as an initiative, which may either be a totally new concept or may have a new approach towards an existing solution, said another H&UD department officer.

The challenge fund will be operational till June, 2016. The Centre has formed a core management unit for overall management of the fund.