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Urban Challenges for India and Revisiting Urban Planning

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THE UN Habitat Report "Planning Sustainable Cities" (2009) reviews the traditional approaches to urban planning and management. The Report examines how relevant current planning systems are to 21st Century urban challenges and the extent to which current approaches address the various goals of sustainable urbanization. It identifies innovative approaches as a basis for the reform of urban planning and explores future directions in urban planning to make urban planning more effective.

This Report is anchored on the concept of sustainable urban development. As countries rapidly urbanize, the issue of sustainable urbanization becomes crucial where planning plays a vital role. The goal of sustainable urbanization is to deliver environmentally livable, economically productive and socially inclusive cities and towns. As a multidimensional, dynamic process, sustainable urbanization captures a vision of inclusive growth that is people-centred, and includes environmental, social, economic and political-institutional aspects of sustainability. Achieving sustainable urbanization requires all aspects of sustainability to be addressed within the local context of opportunities and challenges posed by the urbanization.

Urbanisation as a Development Policy

The Report underlines the need to view urbanization as a positive phenomenon. A total of five million new urban dwellers are added to the population of developing countries each month. The task of providing basic services for such large numbers is quite daunting, but this should not form the basis of the negative disposition towards urbanization as observed in some countries. Rather, urbanization should be seen as a positive phenomenon and a precondition for improving access to services, economic and social opportunities and a better quality of life for a country's population. In most countries, cities generate over 60 per cent of the GDP and are the 'engines of economic growth' and centres of innovation. Although urban planning is a contextual activity as given below, report provides broad concentration, which India can adapt towards sustainable and innovative planning.

Urban India in terms of population has increased more than ten times during last 100 years – from 26 million in 1901 to 285 million in 2001, which is 28 per cent of the total population. By 2020, urban population will be 40 per cent of the total population and by 2050 the figure will be 50 per cent. The

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share of urban population has risen from 17.2 per cent in 1951 to 27.8 per cent in 2001. The number of cities with a population of more than one million has gone up from five in 1951 to 35 in 2001. Of these, eight cities have population between three million and five million and six cities: Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad, have a population of more than five million. These mega cities are the nodes of economic growth of India. By and large, the nature and extent of growth of Indian cities is unplanned and unanticipated and the provision of services is not proactive, but reactive. The demand for services such as transport, water, and sewerage continually outstrips supply, resulting in a situation of perpetual scarcity and shortage.

About 54 per cent of urban households do not have access to toilets and 64 per cent are not connected to the public sewerage system. Almost 50 per cent of solid waste remains uncollected.

Although 89 per cent of urban population is covered by treated water supply, water is supplied only for a few hours per day. City roads are clogged. Though vehicle population in India increased 80-folds in the last 40 years, road area increased by only five per cent. Only 17 of the largest cities have organized bus services, and only three cities – Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai – have a suburban rail system.

The Indian city is an amorphous manifestation of its cultural, socio-economic, political and demographic diversity. The built form is largely a derivation of resource view of urban land. The fundamental contradiction in urban planning has been between the requirements of livelihoods and lifestyles, between political and professional processes and between cultural values and market forces. The more complex the process, the more critical this contradiction becomes. Compounded with dynamics of change, population growth and land speculation, the resultant built-form has become complex, chaotic and amorphous. It no more reflects a coherent vision and ambience to its environmental context. As a consequence, the approach often is to adopt remedial solutions.

Despite significant progress in economic growth and poverty reduction, according to Tendulkar Committee (2009), India's 38 per cent population, i.e. 400 million, are living in poverty. One of the main reasons behind this is the lack of adequate job creation. Labour markets have hardly progressed relative to the country's economic gains. In many regions, the rate of unemployment has increased, although a few have witnessed some improvement. Under-employment and child labour continue to be issues of concerns. The country is confronting three specific issues – jobless growth, the working poor and youth unemployment. The overall progress marks wide disparities and stark contrasts.

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Urbanisation has to be viewed as a development policy. India had been predominantly a rural society and the urbanisation had been slow, characterized by rural push. The concentration of population and activities in large cities indicate the relationship between urbanisation and poverty reduction. It underscores the role of infrastructure development in planned urbanisation and a need to evolve a vision for India's urban future.

Mega cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata have tended to dominate the urban agenda in India. The revitalization of small towns needs concerted government-led action as recognised by recent developments under the JNNURM. The smaller cities can play a significant role in shaping the future urbanization trends in India, and can contribute to India's economy.

Cities are the hubs of production, consumption and waste generation. As cities grow, so does their environmental footprint. Evidence suggests that urban density and land use play important roles in determining a city's environmental impact. Density enables the compact services with lower transmission costs/losses and recycling of water and waste. It also allows efficiency in the provision of better public transport infrastructure which has a direct positive impact on the environment through reduced emissions and fuel use. The scale of the impending urbanisation in India and inherent energy crisis mandates a fundamental and drastic change in the land use , urban form and design. Such strategic interventions and innovative policy decisions in the current urbanisation trajectory, will help in the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability with the urbanisation. This means engineering an urban renaissance by reviewing and reforming archaic planning regulations and thus encourage innovative and multi-disciplinary approaches to urbanisation.

Need to Revisit Urban Planning

In India various policy changes have been initiated so that the Indian cities keep pace with the spirit of the democratic decentralisation and globalisation. An important opportunity to face the challenge of rapid urbanisation is presented by the surge towards decentralisation adopted by government. The government took a very significant step in 1992, by passing the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts thereby transferring many administrative and financial powers to Local Bodies. This makes Urban Local Bodies (ULB's) as most important functionary in the provision of the urban services.

As per the 12th Schedule of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 18 tasks have been defined as in the functional domain of the ULBs, which are:

1. Urban Planning including town planning;
2. Regulation of land-use and construction of buildings;

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3. Planning for economic and social development;
4. Roads and bridges;
5. Water supply for domestic, industrial and commercial purposes;
6. Public health, sanitation, conservancy and solid waste management;
7. Fire services;
8. Urban forestry, protection of the environment and promotion of ecological aspects;
9. Safeguarding the interests of weaker sections of society, including the handicapped etc.;
10. Slum improvement and upgradation;
11. Urban poverty alleviation;
12. Provision of urban amenities and facilities such as parks, gardens, playgrounds;
13. Promotion of cultural, educational and aesthetic aspects;
14. Burials and burial grounds; cremations, cremation grounds and electric crematoriums;
15. Cattle ponds: prevention of cruelty to animals;
16. Vital statistics including registration of births and deaths;
17. Public amenities including street lighting, parking lots, bus stops and public conveniences; and
18. Regulation of slaughter houses and tanneries.

These amendments encourage the preparation of district and metropolitan development plans, which integrate investments and their spatial implicaitons, and need a suitable plan making mechanism and techniques. This requires serious consideration so that the planning framework responds to the climate of new economic policies and democratic decentralisation. In order to enable the implementation of a new strategy, it would be necessary to restructure the local bodies and service departments and to equip them to the changing political set up. The challenge is to find ecologically sustainable, socially just, economically viable and culturally transferable technological and managerial innovations.

Local Planning and Governance

The state and city governments have been ambivalent about how to build our cities and how to invest in shaping them. It was believed that the

74th Amendment to the Constitution would provide the framework for governing our cities. After two decades of trying to implement the provisions of the 74th amendment, it is now clear that there needs to be further reforms in the form of legislative framework to have better participation, localisation and governance in urban planning and development. There is a need for basic structural changes in urban governance system.

India's diverse and multi-layered social, economic, and cultural realities make it impossible to have a homogenous model of urban development. It is necessary that disparate stakeholders work towards the creation of unique urbanisation models for India at its current formative stage of urbanisation. Revival of smaller towns, preservation of religious cities, regeneration of industrial cities, and planned growth of new state capitals are just a few examples of urban development models that can enable India's urban centres to become liveable, competitive and environmentally sustainable.

Various changes in the planning process, as given below, require that the traditional role of ULBs to change from 'Provider' to 'Facilitator':

Changes in Planning Process

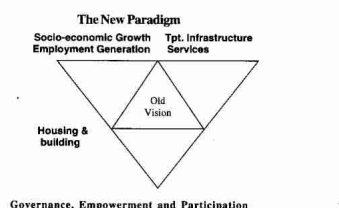| From	To
Focus on statutory planning	Performance orientated planning; focus on implementation
Government does all	Public-Community-Private Partnership, Corporatisation of Urban Local bodies, contracting out
Comprehensive planning	strategic and action planning
Focus on spatial and physical aspects	approaches incorporating institutional and financial aspects, planning for economic development
Meeting basic functional needs planning as a social function	emphasis on quality and innovative demand driven planning
Rigid legislation	legal reforms facilitating participatory planning & flexibility
Monopoly over urban information	new urban information systems, computerisation,telecommunication make cities computable and networked.

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A leveraging strategy should be adopted so as to encourage private sector to participate in infrastructure/city development for which there is an urgent need of intersectoral cooperation. It is necessary to explore the areas where the government can cooperate in partnership, with the private sector encouraging cooperation and competition in the critical areas of concern, such as:

- Land assembly and development.
- Transport services, clean technology and laws for environmental safeguards.
- Water, sanitation, drainage and waste management.
- Housing, alongwith community utilities, services, open space and facilities.
- Slum upgradation, rehabilitation and their city renewal.

Inclusive Planning and People's Participation

Urban planning, as an attempt to synthesise the diverse activities, perspectives, aspirations and resources into a composite whole is a complex and dynamic process. The process of planning depends upon the political, socio-economic, physical, infrastructural and administrative realities. During last decades the peoples' aspirations and focus of planning have become enlarged—from the local spatial, infrastructure, housing, architectonic and functional aspects, to global environmental, organizational, governance, conservation of heritage, urban, aesthetics, employment and poverty alleviation, human dignity, empowerment and participation.
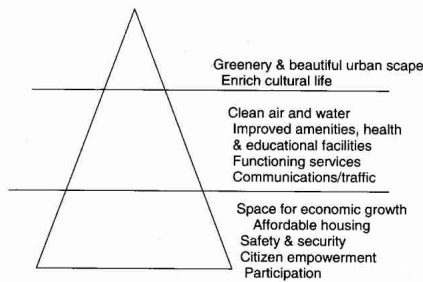
With people and resources in place, the city plan needs to set a strategic direction for growth in a manner acceptable and supported by the people. There must be a good match between the planner's perspective and the people's aspirations. This can be expressed from different perspectives which nevertheless converge to become an all-round set of shared values.

The New Paradigm

Greenery & beautiful urban scape
Enrich cultural life

Clean air and water
Improved amenities, health
& educational facilities
Functioning services
Communications/traffic

Space for economic growth
Affordable housing
Safety & security
Citizen empowerment
Participation

THE ASPIRATION PYRAMID

Effective participatory planning among all the stakeholders, mediation between competing or conflicting interests would help in bringing about change and lasting improvements to the living environment. To translate the sustainability principles by city design, the following six critical areas can be identified:

- **Jobs** : Job sites located within communities reduce time spent travelling to work.
- **Corridors** : High density commercial and residential corridors focus growth along transit routes.
- **Walkability** : Interconnected street systems link residents with the services they need.
- **Green Space** : Green Spaces provide recreation opportunities and connect people with natural systems.
- **Infrastructure** : Integrating natural systems based on the principles of conservation of natural resources and recycling that reduce infrastructure costs and environment impact.
- **Housing** : A range of housing types allows residents of differing economic situations to live in the same neighborhoods and have access to the same services.
- **Management and maintenance** aspects need to be given serious attention at the planning stage.

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This means using land optimally and to create a smart and compact city together with a new paradigm of land use and flexibility, which promote creation of jobs and reduce the need to commute.

Sustainable Development :Linking Green and Brown Agenda

Urban planning should essentially synthesise various components of sustainable development, such as :

- The potential carrying capacity, water conservation/supply and reducing ecological footprint of urban system for low carbon city development
- Economic development and poverty related challenges
- Energy, transportation and water resources constraints and opportunities
- Environment, pollution control and climate change related challenges
- Heritage and conservation potential
- Governance and institutional capacity

Water is the biggest crisis facing the world today. In India the water crisis in terms of spread and severity affects one in three people. As population grows rapidly and use of water per person rises, the demand for freshwater goes up. Besides, the supply of freshwater is threatened by pollution.

Degradation of the environment and widespread pollution, together with rapid pace of urbanization in India has led to drying up of traditional water sources like tanks and lakes. Water is intertwined and integrated to cultural, historical, political, economic and social development, which has bearings on the regional and international co-operation and stability. Therefore, it is imperative to not only initiate new projects and upgrade present water infrastructure, but also to promote water conservation.

Cities have been known by the rivers that flow nearby—London and Thames, Rome and the Travere, Paris and Seine, Banaras and Ganga. The increase of pollution, population and urban activity in the river watersheds are placing increasingly exigent demands upon its ecology. As a result the rivers are dying. The lands which were identified as floodplain now fall in the midst of dense urban development. These tempt the developers as the potential areas for the invasion of urban activities. In the absence of an integrated conservation strategy, the ecology and morphology of the rivers are undergoing severe degradation. A comprehensive study of ecological context together with human, cultural and political dimensions, would help to evolve a strategic framework for regeneration and cleaning of rivers and bringing them back to the people.

Disaster and development are the two sides of the human life.

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Unfortunately, in the surge of development, the aspect of human safety from disasters has remained a marginal issue. The Indian subcontinent is vulnerable to droughts, floods, cyclones and earthquakes. Landslides, avalanche and forest fires also occur frequently. Among the 32 States/Union Territories in the country, 22 are multi-disaster prone. As much as 40 million hectare of land in the country has been identified as flood prone, and on an average 18.6 million hectare of land is flooded annually. About 57 per cent of area of the country is vulnerable to seismic activity. 18 per cent of country's total area and about 68 per cent of total sown area is drought prone, affecting approximately 50 million people. India has a long coastline of 8040Km, which is exposed to tropical cyclones arising in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea in the ratio of 4:1. The Indian Ocean is one of the six major cyclone prone regions of the world. The Coromandal coastline is more cyclone prone, with about 80 per cent of the total cyclones generated in this region. Disaster reduction, preparedness and prevention involve various professionals, organizations and the community. By a scientific and systematic planning and management, it is possible to reduce the impact of disasters.

Livelihoods and Informal Sector: Many Indian cities experience extremes of wealth and poverty. Despite an impressive annual economic growth rate of over seven per cent, a large part of the population continues to exist in conditions of depravity, many of whom constitute the urban poor. The urban poor are often excluded and marginalised as stakeholders in a city. A socially conscious urban revitalisation strategy demands that the relationship between livelihoods and place of residence be adequately recognised. The inner cities and mixed use development can act as an enabling tool for social inclusion and development of vibrant communities.

The Planning Commission estimates an urban housing shortage of 26.5 million by 2012. Ninety-nine per cent of this shortfall affects economically weaker sections and low-income groups, which contributes to squatting and slum formation. There is an urgent need to provide for adequate, sustainable and affordable housing for these groups, in the larger context of social inclusion, city revitalisation, and economic development.

Physical and Social Infrastructure: The livability quotient of a city is dependent on several variables, such as urban services, transport systems, economic vibrancy, good governance, social inclusion, environmental quality, and availability of social and cultural infrastructure. The zero sum game of fragmented functionality has given rise to ugly developments, contradictory policies, neglected public spaces, civic apathy, and increased stress levels, lower productivity as well as a compromise on public health in the modern city. The city has been seen as an interactive, organic and integrated space which must negotiate conflicting demands of its constituents.

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India faces numerous challenges in its urban transport network and poor connectivity hampers its growth potential. There is a need to improve transportation grid of entire nation with an emphasis on Mass Transportation System. Transport networks are the lifeline of the nation's development. While there is a runaway growth of vehicles in the country, the available road capacities and transport infrastructure are grossly inadequate. Rapidly increasing demand for transport and the resulting traffic congestion are choking the economic development. The combined effect of runaway growth of traffic and transport, alongwith inadequate infrastructure, poses a considerable threat to the society in the form of time loss, economic stagnation, road accidents, pollution, noise, stress, etc. Emissions of carbon dioxide and nitrous oxides continue to endanger the human health. The building of new roads and widening of existing roads are reaching the level of saturation. It is becoming impossible to obtain land and remove encroachments for widening of the road network. The transport infrastructure should provide safe, seamless and sustainable access to people by 'green' modes of urban transport. These include public transport system, walking, bicycling, intermediate transport modes and trains.

As the urban planning provides spatial dimension to economic and social development, it is necessary that it is reoriented to become more inclusive, localised, participatory and pro-poor. Inclusive development should imply access for all for jobs, shelter, services and social infrastructure, like health facilities, education, recreation, socio-cultural, religious, sport facilities, communication, security and safety and places for social congregations.

India is at a juncture to decentralised urban planning process, financial resource generation and technical capability. This has positive implications and potentials for the introduction of new urban planning tools. There is a need to evolve a new set of urban policies and planning approach recognising the potential and needs, and to address urban development in a more dynamic and practical manner. This will strive for more effective linkages between social, economic and spatial planning, improvement of the efficiency of cities and their infrastructure, strengthened local governance and better institutional and inter-sectoral cooperation, as well as cost-effective forms of public-private partnerships. The professionals in the field of habitat have the responsibility to set a new direction and redirect the resources and power at their command to take a step towards a new era. It must involve transformation and innovation in the relationships among people, governments, and other players in urban planning and development. The success of this depends upon the planning process, which should be participatory and localised. The planning process should provide a holistic perspective and engage discussions on cross-cutting issues within the context of local communities and eco-systems. It should envision and embrace a new era of urban planning.