

PIONEERING VISION FOR INDIA'S SMART CITIES-SDG 11

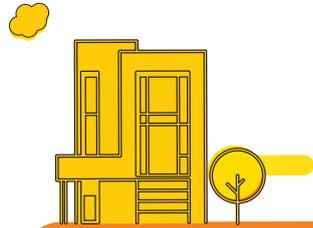
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In collaboration with



Indian Network on
Ethics & Climate Change



Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

India is expected to add 404 million people to urban dwellers from 2014 to 2050, which will be the largest addition to urban population from any single nation. Urbanisation is generally accompanied by increased consumption and increased waste generation. Thus, it poses a sustainability challenge, which will be felt most acutely in the rapidly urbanising India, due to its vulnerability to climate change and alarming levels of socio-economic inequity.

In India, urban development is impacted by policies and decisions at the levels of the central government, the state government and the urban local bodies such as municipalities. The central government - Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) and Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty

Alleviation (MoHUPA) - does exercise considerable say in the development planning and implementation at the local body level, through its control over the funding/finance of urban infrastructure projects.

JnNURM - Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission was the first overarching effort at the central government level to influence urban development policies across the country. From 2015, JnNURM has been replaced by the SMART City Mission and AMRUT - Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation. In addition, there are several policies of the central government that impact urban development in the country.



Current Status of India's policies relevant to SDG 11

11.1 To ensure access to adequate, safe and affordable housing, basic services for all and upgrade slums.



The few success stories in slum rehabilitation indicate that long term and sustained efforts in partnership with the slum dwellers is key. While housing has been made available, providing adequate basic services such as electricity, water, sanitation etc., have proved challenging. Furthermore, while there is a boom in the construction industry, it is targeted at the high and middle-income groups, while there is a dearth of housing for the low-income group.

11.2 To provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.



All Indian cities are plagued with inadequate and inefficient public transport systems. Road infrastructure being built focuses on easing the traffic for privately owned motorised vehicles. Even where a few thoughtfully designed pedestrian and cyclist friendly roads have proven to be popular, these are still exceptions rather than the norm in urban planning. Any systematic integration of various modes of public transport, existing and planned, seems to be lacking in most cities.

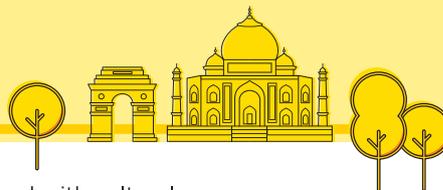


11.3 To enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.



The systems being set up such as the SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) for SMART City Mission are corporate bodies by nature answerable to funders and investors rather than to the citizens who they serve. The shift to e-governance systems has made it easier for citizens to access civic services in metro and large cities, while the lack of adequate IT infrastructure has hampered progress in smaller cities. Planning for the governance systems for the future expansion of the cities is severely lacking.

11.4 To strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.



The Indian policies are specifically concerned with cultural heritage. The Ministry of Culture policy is focused on preservation & restoration, and urban development policies for urban heritage are focused on economic development based on tourism. Neither of the policies address specific challenges faced by heritage structures situated in urban areas. Considering a biodiverse location as a natural heritage will require its preservation in its natural form as against preservation of the biodiversity by creating a gene bank or a 'mother plant nursery' or a zoological park. The natural heritage approach is totally lacking in heritage policies.

11.5 To significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected & substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.



Disaster management plans at various levels are mostly focused on preparedness, early warning and dealing with the aftermath. There isn't sufficient focus on prevention. For a variety of disaster types, the risk increases due to high population density, narrow roads, unauthorised constructions etc. Urban planning and implementation needs to address these issues with due seriousness. There is also not much importance being given to SMART infrastructure for data collection and information dissemination around potential disasters.

11.6 To reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality, municipal and other waste management.



Air pollution, pollution of rivers, lakes and other natural water bodies in the urban areas and solid waste management challenges are plaguing all Indian cities. This is a result of the combination of increasing population density on one hand and increasing levels of consumption in a wasteful and inefficient manner on the other hand. It is now important for cities to aim for a cap on their geographical expansion and population expansion through migration in the near future and plan for development within these limits. The limits will be dictated largely by the ecosystem considerations as well as climate vulnerability risks applicable for each city.

11.7 To provide universal access to safe, inclusive & accessible, green & public spaces, in particular for women & children, older persons and persons with disabilities.



The definition of 'green space' in urban planning context in India includes not just spaces covered with vegetation but also spaces such as play grounds, recreational or sports clubhouses etc. The actually 'green' spaces are mostly artificially created and consist of mostly exotic non-native species of plants. As a result, the biodiversity of the local ecosystems is under threat in most urban areas.

Reality check

Examining urban development and related policies and their implementation from the lens of the targets under SDG 11 shows that we are in general far away from the core principles of sustainability, inclusiveness, resilience and safety. Our ongoing and future urban development plans are typically based on the unrealistic and unsustainable scenario of perpetually increasing growth in economy, with no considerations of the carrying capacity of the city based on ecosystem considerations or of the need for social equity.



Suggestions and recommendations

Cities should prioritise efficient and clean use of resources available within their geographical limits and use of renewable resources to the best extent possible for meeting the daily needs of the citizens and as a basis of economic activity. Waste generation and pollution must be minimised through recycling, reuse and in general creating circular loops of material flows and energy recovery within the city. New industries and businesses that support this approach should get more impetus rather than conventional industries and businesses that are typically resource, energy intensive and polluting.

All the citizens must have access to basic civic services in an efficient and transparent manner and the 'survival' access for all should be prioritised over 'luxury' access for a few. All the demeaning tasks around handling of waste and waste management and very heavy labour intensive menial tasks must be eliminated through mechanisation and the individuals (mostly migrants) currently employed in such tasks must be reskilled for more dignified livelihood opportunities either in the city and its neighbourhood, or in their places of origin. The citizens should be constantly educated and encouraged to adopt low carbon, sustainable and inclusive lifestyles.

In this context, the main recommendations are:

- We must align urban development policies with the targets and indicators of SDG 11 and operationalise the principles of sustainability and inclusivity in their implementation
- Urban development challenge has cross-cutting linkages with other sectors (health, education, commerce, environment, information technology, energy etc.) and therefore an integrated approach must be adopted to achieve convergence. This will also improve the efficiency of government expenditure
- Urban planners must acknowledge that there are limits to the growth of a single human settlement, however efficiently designed, built and governed. A large number of smaller sustainable and inclusive settlements spread across the country may be a more prudent approach than focusing on creating a few technology-driven mega & metro cities. This will also automatically make the settlements more resilient to a variety of disasters including climate change impacts

Informed and involved citizenry is a key to success of this strategy. The civil society organisations working on urban issues need to focus their efforts on this aspect and function as watchdogs on behalf of the citizens by implementing independent and ongoing monitoring while evaluating the performance of the urban local bodies.



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