Economic Transformation-Urban Growth in India: Urban Planning, Implementation, Infrastructure Development

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Abstract:
India is the second largest urban system in the world with almost 11% of the total global urban population living in Indian cities. In absolute numbers, the urban population in India is more than highly urbanized countries/regions across the globe. The country has reached a turning point in its journey of its economic transformation where in half of the country would be 'urban' in a few decades.

Over the years, cities have expanded and become burdened by the stresses and strains of unplanned urbanization, the brunt of which is faced by the poor and the marginalized, the biodiversity and the economy. In fact, Covid-19 revealed the dire need for planning and management of our cities, with an emphasis on the health of citizens.

Issues like lack of availability of serviced land, traffic congestion, pressure on basic infrastructure, extreme air pollution, urban flooding, water scarcity and droughts are not merely a reflection of infrastructural shortcomings in the cities. These issues indicate a deep and substantial lack of adequate urban planning and governance frameworks.

Over the last few years, a lot of efforts has been made by the Centre and the State Governments in the urban sector. However, urban planning, which is the foundation for the integrated development of cities, citizens, and the environment, has not received adequate attention.

For this reason, as the State and city governments continue to solve urban issues in a fire fighting mode, urban areas struggle to achieve 'basic services for all'.
For long-term sustainable urban transformation, systemic issues need to be identified and addressed. India's urban story may be lauded globally or suffer irreversible damages in the next 10-15 years depending upon corrective policy measures and actions taken at the beginning of this decade.
Key words: Economic Transformation- Urban growth- urban planning, implementation, infrastructure development

Introduction:

This paper examines the global process of urbanization in general and India's own urban challenges in particular. It reviews India's policies of urban development over the years besides its various initiatives and preparedness to meet urban challenges and ensure urban transformation. In the process, the paper investigates whether the ubiquitous urban deficit in India is the outcome of the so-called 'reluctant urbanization' and can the current policy of creating hundred smart cities lead to urban transformation in India. This paper is based on the qualitative analysis of the available secondary data from various sources. By critically examining the available secondary data this paper explores whether India's urban deficit is a result of poor planning or lack of long term vision and strategy to meet the emerging urban challenges. This paper also critically looks into the emerging ICT-driven models and design of the 'smart cities' and analyzes the role of design, technology, and innovation in making the cities smart and future ready.

Several bottlenecks and impediments have been restricting urban planning capacity in the country. To begin with, a significant proportion of urbanization in the country is unacknowledged and unaddressed. Almost half of the 7933 'urban' settlements are census towns, that is, they continue to be governed as 'rural' entities. Small and medium towns face vulnerabilities due to rapid growth and inadequate planning.

Moreover, several studies have indicated that the current definitions of 'urban' are not reflective of the extent of urbanization that the country has already witnessed.

Urbanization through the Plan Period Though there were well-spelt policies of urban development throughout the plan period. But there was a kind of reluctance (Ahluwalia et al., 2014 & Tiwari et al., 2015) to accept the need for urban transformation. Lack of explicit constitutional status of cities and towns which people referred as anti-urban bias (Raheja, 1973) and absence of empathy regarding urban issues in the early years of the plan period in India was a kind of residual nationalist legacy of developing villages (Batra, 2012). The 1st Five Year Plan (1951-56) looked at urbanization from the perspective of "proliferation of labor camps caused by rural to urban migration". Hence, the shortage of housing and the inflationary nature of land prices were taken into consideration. This led to some significant initiatives such as creating the Ministry of Working and Housing, National Building Organization, Town & Country Planning Organization and Housing Board (Sharma, 2014). Consequently, during 1951-1960 several schemes to meet the housing demand viz. Subsidized Housing Scheme for Industrial Workers and Economically Weaker Section (1952), Low Income Group Housing Scheme (1954), Subsidized Housing Scheme for Plantation Workers (1956), Slum Clearance and Improvement Scheme (1956), Village Housing Project Scheme (1957), Middle Income Group Housing Scheme (1959) came into existence. The 2nd Plan (1956-61) noted and raised a concern about the rising price of urban land and the speculative buying besides high rentals particularly in big cities. The plan attributed it to the growing industrialization. To counter the problem the theme of regional plan and emphasis on preparing urban master plan was introduced for the first time under the 2nd plan period. To make up the deficit of urban housing scheme for construction of housing for the low-income group was proposed. The Slums Area (Improvement and Clearance) Act was

passed in 1956. It recognized slums as any area where houses are unfit for living, where buildings are dilapidated, the area is overcrowded and their arrangement and design is faulty. In short, habitats which are "detrimental, to safety, health or morals." The concern for the marginalized and need for the development of the roadmap for future development was obvious in this plan.

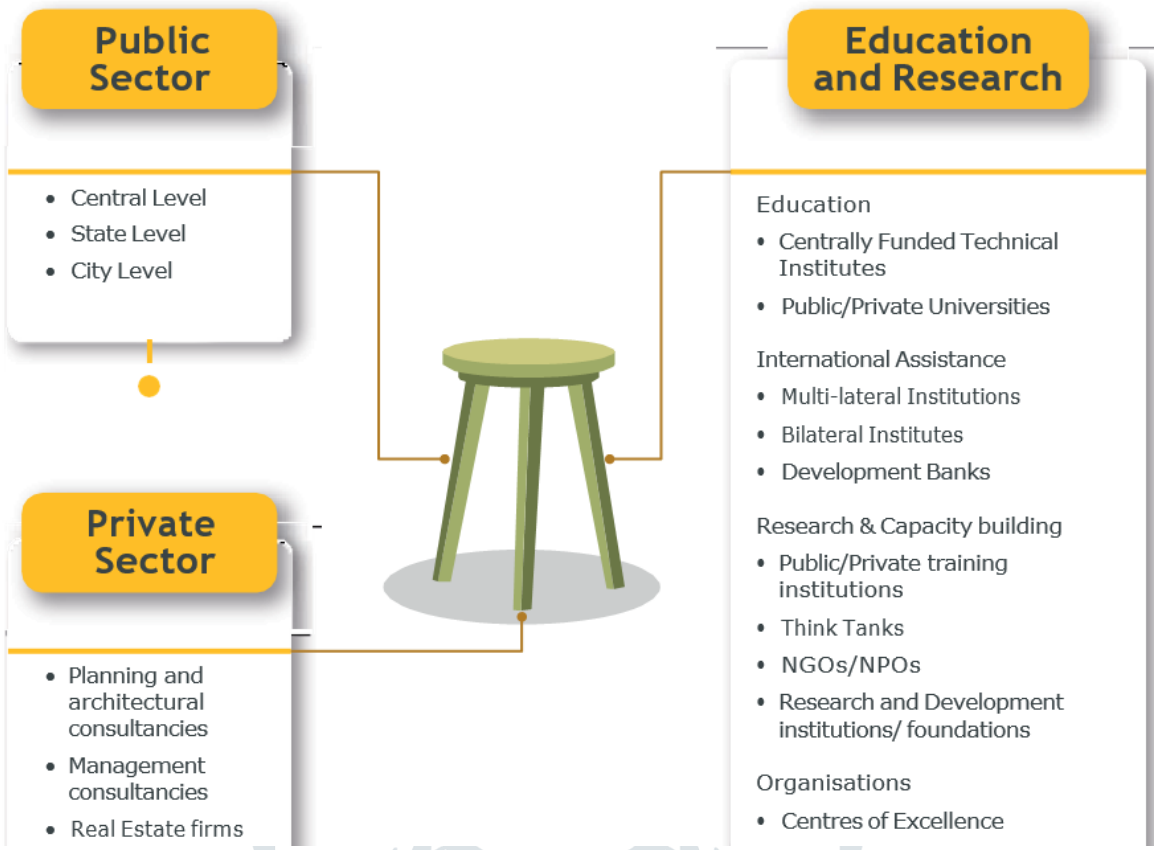
Secondly, the transfer of the urban planning function from States/UTs to elected urban local governments did not happen as was envisaged through the Constitutional (Seventy-Fourth amendment) Act 1992. Many agencies are involved in urban planning, implementation, infrastructure development at the city as well as State levels. The existing framework has become complex, which often leads to overlapping of functions, lack of accountability and coordination, time delays, resource wastage, etc.

Master plans are statutory instruments to guide and regulate the development of cities and are critical for managing urbanization as well as 'spatial sustainability'. However, 65% of the 7933 urban settlements do not have any master plan. This leads to piece meal interventions, haphazard constructions, urban sprawl, and environmental pollution, which can further aggravate issues such as traffic congestion, flooding, etc. Various shortcomings in the approaches of city planning and bottlenecks in plan implementation too need to be resolved.

Urbanizable/developable land is costly as well as limited in supply. City governments guide and regulate development through planning regulations and building bye-laws. In many cities, development control regulations were formulated several decades ago and have been updated arbitrarily without sufficient empirical evidence on their impacts. Recently, most States/UTs have revised their respective bye-laws based on the Model Building Bye Laws 2016 (MoHUA, 2016). It is imperative that the city governments adapt the model regulations and as per their context and economic growth drivers. Also, there is a need to shift from text-based to form-based regulations to ensure the optimum use of urban land and enable development based on a suitable urban form.

In urban areas, land is confronted with competing uses due to market forces, social necessities, as well as environmental concerns. If the land use plan of a city diverges from the status of land records, it may not get implemented on ground. Moreover, such divergences become a potential cause of unnecessary and time-consuming disputes and litigations. Accurate cadastral maps and clarity about property rights are very important for successful planning. Such maps do not exist with the city functionaries or in the public domain for most Indian cities. This a big impediment in the planning process.

Components of Cumulative Capacity of Urban Planning in India



Massive capacities for problem-solving, innovation, and ideation are required to address the present and future challenges in the planning and management of cities, towns, villages and their infrastructure. It may not be feasible to create such capacities inthe public sector given the size and scale of urbanization in India. Over the years, many private sector companies developed in India in the domains of architecture, civil engineering and construction. However, the ecosystem of the private sector in urban planning domain has remained under-developed.

Human resource is indispensable to strengthen the urban planning capacity in the country. A study conducted by TCPO and NIUA for NITI Aayog indicates that over 12,000 posts for town planners are required in the State town and country planning departments. This is in stark contrast to the present situation. There are fewer than 4000 sanctioned positions for 'town planners' in these departments, half of which are lying vacant. An inadequate number of urban planners in the State planning machineries and lack of multi-disciplinary teams are serious issues. Also, in several States, ironically, a qualification in town planning is not even an essential criterion for such jobs.

The country has been producing graduates with degrees such as Bachelor of Planning since more than 3 decades and Master of Planning since early 1950s. However, so far, the urban planning profession has not yet gained a strong and unique identity of its own. As a result, prospective employers, unaware of these courses and skill sets of available graduates, end up hiring professionals from other disciplines to undertake the tasks of planning, thereby creating a negative feedback loop. This restrains the growth of urban-planning capacity in the country in terms of quantity of fresh

graduates as well as the quality of work being delivered in this sector.

The supply of urban planners needs to be supported with adequate job demand and not just the perceived need for planners or planning of cities. Planners must be organized in private sector companies to be able to deliver services or entrusted with roles of planning in public sector organisations. Till this doesn't happen, this workforce will remain unutilized and demand–supply will be disconnected.

There are 49 educational institutions across India that provide degree programmes in urban planning and allied specializations and nomenclatures like Environmental Planning, Transportation planning, Housing, Infrastructure planning, and so on. These are distributed across the country, barring the North-Eastern States (except Assam), Western Himalayas and UTs(except New Delhi). Multiple nomenclatures of degrees

Re-engineering of urban governance: There is a need to bring in more institutional clarity and also multi-disciplinary expertise to solve urban challenges. The Advisory Committee recommends the constitution of a high-powered committee to re-engineer the present urban-planning governance structure. The key aspects that would need to be addressed in this effort would be: i) clear division of roles and responsibilities among various authorities, appropriate revision of rules and regulations, etc., ii) creation of a more dynamic organizational structure, standardization of the job descriptions of town planners and other experts, and iii) extensive adoption of technology for enabling public participation and inter-agency coordination.

Revision of Town and Country Planning Acts: Most States have enacted the Town and Country Planning Act, which enables them to prepare and notify master plans for implementation. These Acts provide a fundamental basis to transform cities, regions, and their character. However, many need to be reviewed and upgraded to the latest advancements in technology, urban and regional planning approaches and policies. Therefore, the formation of an apex committee at the State level is recommended to undertake a regular review of planning legislations (including town and country planning or urban and regional development acts or other relevant acts).

De-mystifying planning and involving citizens: Due to the planning process being highly technocratic in nature, the public's participation in it is limited. While it is important to maintain the master plans' technical rigour, it is equally important to demystify them for enabling citizen participation at relevantstages. Therefore, the Advisory Committee strongly recommends a 'citizen outreach Campaign' for demystifying and making urban planning more accessible.

Building local leadership: It is important to enlighten the city leadership about the significance of urban planning and public policy to achieve integrated development, mobilize finances, ensure affordable housing, and make cities more economically productive, live able as well as inclusive.

Therefore, the Advisory Committee recommends a 'short-term training programme for city-level elected officials on the economic and social benefits of urban planning'

Steps for strengthening the urban planning education system:

- History of human settlements in the Indian subcontinent must be taught to all young planners in a more exhaustive and analytical manner. Educational institutions must also focus on teaching economics to future planners in a way that equips them to understand its applications in urbanization, urban development and policy.
- The Central universities and technical institutions in all the States/UTs of the Indian Himalayan Region may be encouraged to establish a 'department of planning and public policy' and offer postgraduate degree programmes (M.Tech.) with specializations in 'hill area planning', 'environmental planning', 'regional planning', and 'rural area planning'. Also, the Central universities and technical institutions in all the other States/UTs may be encouraged to offer postgraduate degree programmes (M.Tech. Planning) to cater to the requirement of planners in the country in a phased manner.
- The Advisory Committee also recommends that all such institutions may synergize with the Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Panchayati Raj and respective state rural development departments/directorates and develop demand-driven short-term programmes on rural area planning.

Role of Urban Planners

Across different sectors and scales of interventions, an urban planner may been gaged in public, private or education sectors. Various roles include town planning official, technical expert, project manager, advisor, consultant, faculty etc. Some of the key functions of urban planners(including but not limited to) are:

a. Technical and Analytical:

- Conducting feasibility studies, undertaking survey, research and analysis, documentation, preparation of plans, detailed project reports, financial modelling, implementation, and monitoring,
- Analysis, drafting, preparation, implementation, and monitoring of spatial plans
- Conducting research and developing strategies, supporting policies, programmes and key projects of the government at various levels
- Contributing to the field through research and innovations
- Developing innovative approaches to solve complex urban and regional challenges pertaining to housing, basic services, transportation,
- Incorporating considerations pertaining to gender, child, universal access, climate change, safety and sustainability
- Executing techno-legal roles, including building permissions and plan enforcement

functions

- Developing strategies for regional development
- Developing policy frameworks for environment-sensitive development
- Implementing development projects and closely monitoring the impacts for mid-course corrections, if any.

b. Consensus building and moderation:

- Engaging actively with different stakeholders
- Enabling the balance among stall relevant interests and competing land uses so as to solve conflicting demands on space and development
- Engaging with citizens and ensuring effective public participation at various levels of planning processes

CONCLUSIONS

Successive urban plans in India largely look like an immediate response to the emerging urban needs of the day. They no doubt succeeded in solving the problems to an extent. However, they didn't envision the future of urbanization nor could they design long term strategic interventions to achieve urban transformation. While the nature of initial urban plans was more reactive as they addressed the immediate problems, the vision of the smart city looks more proactive and futuristic. India might have woken up to its urban challenges and imperatives a little late in the day, but it woke up at a time when its economic growth, technological competence, skills and experience in urban management are much improved as compared to the initial days of the plan period. So changes can be expected at a much faster pace. Transformation is a long arduous process, no matter whether it's socio-economic, political or urban. The complexity of the society is what often hinders and delays the process. Bertolini (2015) observes "Achieving transformative change in the face of complexity is a difficult and seemingly paradoxical task. Development in each component of the system both enable and constraint development in other components." Urban transformation in India is also experiencing teething problems. However, shifting from the centralized era of planned development to the decentralized, even localized era of participatory development itself is a major transformative process in India's urbanization. Now, it's also being backed by various design and technological interventions. Nevertheless, it's interesting to see how Indian cities are identifying their own problems and developing solutions with the appropriate use of technology design and innovation.

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) for example has provided app-based solution (My GHMC) to locate nearest public toilets. For monitoring cleanliness of the public toilets, it's timing, garbage collection at open spaces and sweeping, etc. GHMC has developed a Daily Monitoring Tool (DMT) app. Delhi Metro's DMRC app helps commuters find seamless connections between different routes of Metro. Online payment of electricity bills, house taxes, even generation of traffic offense fines through the monitoring cameras, in cities like Delhi, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and many more is becoming part of urban governance. Connecting urban management with Digital India Programme meant to spearhead digital transformation is also playing a major role in improving urban public service delivery in recent years. The New Delhi Municipal

Corporation app NDMC 311 besides connecting to other services also facilitates online registration for availing healthcare services at public hospitals. Identifying the nature of the problem and providing solutions thereof through simple user-interface is being made possible by creating a synergy between technology, design, and innovation.

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