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DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

Urban Transformation Strategies: A Holistic Approach

URBAN TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Context

- Recent Budget has recognised cities as the growth hubs and offered many options and opportunities for the planned development and the growth of cities, as the ever-growing pace of urbanisation in India calls for sustained investments, with a vision and determination.

Recognizing the Urban Imperative

- India's urban landscape is undergoing a profound shift. With approximately 50 crore people residing in cities — accounting for about 36% of the country's population — the need for thoughtful planning, investment, and vision has never been more critical.

Challenges and Related Solutions in Urban Transformation Strategies in India

- **Rapid Urbanisation:** India's urban population has been growing steadily at a rate of **2% to 2.5% annually.** As more people move to cities, managing this rapid urbanisation becomes a critical challenge.
  - Balancing infrastructure development, housing, and services to meet the needs of a burgeoning population is no small feat.
- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Many Indian cities grapple with inadequate infrastructure—be it water supply, sanitation, roads, or public transport. The core infrastructure requirements—water supply, sewerage systems, and roads—are essential for sustainable urban growth.
  - Initiatives like the **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)** aim to address these gaps, but sustained investment and efficient execution are crucial.
- **Housing Shortages:** Providing affordable housing remains a persistent challenge. The PMAY has made significant strides, but the demand still outstrips supply.
- **Slums and Informal Settlements:** A significant portion of the urban population lives in slums and informal settlements. These areas lack basic amenities and often face issues related to health, safety, and sanitation.
  - Transforming these settlements into sustainable neighbourhoods is a formidable task.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Urbanisation puts immense pressure on natural resources and ecosystems.
- **Governance and Institutional Challenges:** Effective urban governance requires coordination among multiple agencies—local bodies, state governments, and central authorities.
  - Strengthening institutions, improving transparency, and decentralising decision-making are critical aspects of successful urban transformation.

Focus Areas Highlighted in Budget

- **Housing Solutions:** The **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban)** has been instrumental in providing housing units for the **Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and Middle Income Groups (MIG)**.
  - The recent budget proposes support for constructing an additional one crore housing units in urban areas, with a substantial investment of 10 lakh crore. Interest subsidies will facilitate affordable loans for beneficiaries.
  - The budget addresses the housing needs of migrant workers by introducing new rental housing options in partnership with the private sector. These dormitory-style accommodations aim to provide decent living conditions close to industrial workplaces.
- **Core Infrastructure Development:** Water supply, sanitation, roads, and sewerage systems are essential for urban well-being. The **AMRUT** allocates 8,000 crore for these purposes. Additionally, the availability of the **Viability Gap Funding (VGF)** window encourages **public-private partnerships (PPP)** in core infrastructure projects.
- **Urban Planning and Design:** Transforming low-density areas into high-density mixed-use developments is crucial.

- ◆ It involves vertical mixed-use buildings, green spaces, pedestrian-friendly designs, diverse housing options, and adaptive reuse of existing structures.
  - ◆ Sustainability, community engagement, and phased development play pivotal roles in creating livable and resilient cities.
- **Paradigm Shift towards Sustainability:** Urban development strategies need to shift towards sustainability and ecological urbanisation. Balancing economic growth with environmental conservation is essential for long-term prosperity.
- **Investment and Implementation:** Since 2014, India has witnessed a remarkable 12-fold increase in investments in urban development, totaling 18.07 lakh crores.
  - ◆ It reflects the government's determination to enhance urban infrastructure and quality of life.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Balancing economic growth with environmental conservation is essential for long-term prosperity. Urban development strategies need to shift towards sustainability and ecological urbanisation. It includes efficient waste management, green spaces, and clean energy initiatives.
- **Role of Citizens:** The success of any urban transformation strategy hinges on citizen participation. Engaging citizens in decision-making, planning, and implementation remains the bedrock of effective urban development.
  - ◆ After all, cities are not just concrete structures; they are vibrant ecosystems shaped by the people who inhabit them.
- **Inclusive Development:** Cities must cater to diverse populations, including vulnerable groups. Ensuring equitable access to services, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities is vital.
  - ◆ **Transit-oriented development (TOD) plans**, which maximise accessibility to public transport, can contribute to inclusivity.

Do You Know?

- **Brownfield Redevelopment:** Existing cities hold immense potential for transformation. Brownfield redevelopment involves revitalising underutilised or deteriorated urban areas.
  - ◆ By repurposing existing infrastructure, we can create vibrant spaces for living, working, and recreation. The government's focus on brownfield redevelopment aims to breathe new life into our cities.
- **Transit-Oriented Development (TOD):** TOD emphasises maximising residential, commercial, and leisure spaces within walking distance of public transport hubs. By integrating land use and transportation planning, TOD enhances urban connectivity, reduces traffic congestion, and promotes sustainable living.

Related Government Initiatives and Strategies

- **National Urban Policy Framework (NUPF):** The NUPF is a comprehensive policy framework that aims to guide urban development in India. It covers various dimensions, including urban planning, economy, physical and social infrastructure, housing, transportation, finance, governance, and environmental sustainability.
  - ◆ It recognises the need for an infusion of approximately US $1.2 trillion in urban infrastructure by 2030 to meet the growing demands of urbanisation.
  - ◆ **Key Components of NUPF** are *Urban Planning, Urban Economy, Physical Infrastructure, Social Infrastructure, Housing & Affordability, Transportation & Mobility, Urban Finance, Urban Governance and Environmental Sustainability.*
- **National Rural Infrastructure Development Agency (NRIDA):** While NRIDA primarily focuses on rural infrastructure, it's worth mentioning. The agency works to set high technical and management standards for rural roads, ensuring sustainable management of the rural road network.

Way Forward and Conclusion: Building Thriving Cities

- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Lack of accurate and timely data hampers informed policy formulation. Urban information systems need improvement to support evidence-based planning and monitoring.

- **Financial Sustainability:** Funding urban projects and maintaining infrastructure require sustainable financial models. **Value capture financing (VCF)**, property taxes, and innovative revenue sources are essential for long-term viability.

- **Balancing Economic Growth and Livability:** While economic growth is crucial, cities must also prioritise residents' quality of life. Brownfield redevelopment—transforming existing urban spaces — can play a pivotal role in achieving this balance.

- As India continues its urban journey, thoughtful strategies, sustainable practices, and active citizen involvement will pave the way for thriving cities that balance growth, well-being, and environmental stewardship.

Source: TH

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Mains Practice Question

[Q] Highlights the major gaps in Urban Infrastructure in India. How can India strike a balance between modernising urban infrastructure along with economic growth and livability?