

Report Summary

Reforms in Urban Planning Capacity in India

- NITI Aayog released a report on ‘Reforms in Urban Planning Capacity in India’ in September 2021. The report mentions that during 2011–36, urban growth will be responsible for 73% of the rise in total population. This brings opportunities to leverage urbanisation, while posing challenges to sustainable growth. Key observations and recommendations include:
 - **Institutional structure:** The Committee noted that most states have not devolved the funds, functions, and functionaries for undertaking urban planning to the urban local government, as envisaged by the Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992. Consequently, several agencies are involved in planning and infrastructure development, at both city and state levels, with overlapping functions. This leads to a lack of accountability, causing delays and resource wastage. The Committee recommended: (i) empowering mayors and standing committees to make them more effective in urban planning and management, (ii) recruiting urban planners as advisors/fellows in the offices of the mayors by the states/UTs, and (iii) commissioning a High-Powered Committee for reviewing the urban governance structure in India.
 - **Master Plans:** The Committee noted that even though most states have legal powers to prepare and notify master plans, 65% of the 7,933 urban settlements in India do not have any master plan. Master plans regulate land utilisation, expansion, and zoning of cities for 20-25 years. Not implementing master plans leads to haphazard constructions, aggravating problems like traffic congestion, pollution, and flooding. To resolve these challenges, the Committee recommended implementing a five-year central sector scheme named ‘500 Healthy Cities Programme’. The scheme would aim to achieve health-centric planning through convergence in spatial planning, public health, and socio-economic development. To ensure maximum impact of the scheme, the Committee recommended: (i) providing incentives to states for preparing sectoral visions based on budgetary allocations and citizen aspirations, (ii) constituting metropolitan planning committees and district planning committees, and (iii) enhancing the scope of the Ease of Living Index for 500 cities to ensure healthy competition.
 - **Development control regulations:** The Committee notes that planning regulations and building byelaws often increase the cost of construction, leading to underutilisation of urban land and market distortions. Further, many of these regulations were amended without sufficient empirical evidence on their impacts. To address these issues, the Committee recommended a sub-scheme named ‘Preparation/ Revision of Development Control Regulations’ for all the cities/towns covered under the recommended ‘Healthy Cities Programme’. The scheme aims to: (i) assess the impact of existing regulations and bye-laws on health and safety of citizens, (ii) develop virtual three-dimensional models to depict various scenarios of skylines, densities, and streetscapes, and (iii) handhold state/city government in selecting appropriate scenarios.
 - **Augmenting human resources in the public sector:** The Committee noted that town and country planning departments across states have vacancies as high as 42% (of 3,945 sanctioned posts). It recommended: (i) sanctioning an additional 8,268 lateral entry posts of town planners’ cumulatively, for a period of three years (minimum) to five years (maximum), and (ii) reviewing the human resource requirements after the results of the latest Census are available.
 - **Professional education and standard setting:** To improve skill mapping and data capture of planning professionals, the Committee recommended: (i) constituting a statutory body named ‘National Council of Town and Country Planners’ to set standards in planning and make suggestions for updating curricula, (ii) establishing a National Digital Platform of Town and Country Planners to function as a marketplace between industry and the workforce, (iii) establishing postgraduate courses in urban and rural planning and policy (with corresponding departments) in all central universities and technical institutions, and (iv) teaching the history of human settlements in the Indian subcontinent to all planners.
 - **Capacity building:** For capacity building of the staff of town planning departments, the Committee recommended: (i) utilising the National Urban Learning Platform for short online courses, and (ii) participation of state government officials in juries, exhibitions, and sessions of prominent planning education institutions.

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