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**National Level Orientation Programme on
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A Participatory Research Intervention**

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**Concerns for Capacity Building in the 21st Century:
Requirements for the Urban Sector**



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Concern for capacity building in the 21st century

Requirement for the urban sector

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Third world economies are passing through a transitory stage of urbanisation. However, most of the economies have taken too long time to pass through the process. It is disturbing to note that during the last fifty years, India could not even decide the form of urban development. The macro scenario indicates around half of the urban population are residing in the informal settlements and have low access to the services. The old inner cities are deteriorating very rapidly and could not respond to the requirement of the residents. To decide proper form of urban development, it is important to take a few harsh decisions and also go for strict enforcement. The present paper devices some of the important interventions for bringing improvement in the existing set-up. Three major areas for interventions are proposed, which include development of small and medium towns, management of municipal finance and promotion of sustainable cities. To strengthen the three identified areas, three types of actions are required in each area. The first step is to identify problems and their probable solutions by means of research and documentation. The second step is to sensitise and impart training to the personnel of implementing agencies on the pattern of the course structure proposed for three major areas. The first two steps are required to be taken up by both national and state level training institutions. The third step is to organise policy seminars and expert meets at the national level to device policy frame and translate it into action plans for enforcement. These actions need to be repeated in the cyclical form.

Urban Process

The demographic structure of the country indicates phenomenal growth of population in general and urban in particular. During the last four decades, the urban population has experienced almost four fold increase and the number rose to 217.6 million persons in 1991 from 62.4 million in 1951. The population projection reveals that India would cross a billion mark by 2001AD and urban population would rise to 306.9 million persons. India has 4 mega cities (5 million plus) and 19 metro cities (1 million plus), and they provided home for one-third of the urban population. The number of metro-cities almost doubled during the eighties and is projected to

grow to 40 by 2001. The share of urban population to total population has grown from 17.3 per cent in 1951 to 25.7 per cent in 1991 and is projected to cross 30 per cent mark by the turn of this century.

Concentration of Population

The concentration of urban population in large urban settlements is another significant development. The number of such settlements (0.1 million plus persons) has gone up from 226 to 300 during eighties. In fact, out of the total increase of 58 million persons in urban areas during 1981-91, 44 million were added to 0.1 million plus settlements, accounting for three-fourth of the decadal growth in urban population. A clear indicator of this scenario is the concentration of 65.2 per cent of urban population in 300 hundred settlements (0.1 million plus persons) which form around 8 per cent of the 3764 urban agglomeration/towns. The impact of concentration of urban population is seen in the urban density indicator, which has increased from 2998 persons per square kilometre in 1981 to 3462 persons in 1991. The density in mega-cities is very high, ranging between 8800 and 13500. Of the new towns added in urban areas during eighties, 30 per cent have come up within neighbouring districts of metropolitan cities, which reflects possibility of further concentration of urban population.

It is interesting to note that urban India contributed 29 per cent of GDP in 1950-51 and 47 per cent in 1980-81. The urban areas' contribution to GDP is expected to cross 60 per cent by 2001. This phenomenon exhibits two important features of population dynamics. One, the urban productivity is much higher than rural productivity and it is growing increasingly over a period of time. Two, it has strong implications for concentration of urban population particularly in large urban settlements. Another interesting feature of population dynamics in India is poverty, which has reflected higher proportion of urban poor (40.12 per cent) in 1987-88 against the rural poor (39.06 per cent). The analysis of consumption expenditure of poor from the NSS data also reveals high concentration in urban area (44.03 per cent) as against rural area (39.51 per cent).

Unequal Access to Services

Though India has made significant investment for development and provisions of basic services, still, a sizeable

section of population does not have access to these services. The level of services particularly drinking water facility in urban area has increased from 75.1 to 81.4 per cent during 1981-91. The figures for electricity and toilets were 62.5 and 75.8 per cent in 1991 while these were 58.2 and 63.9 per cent in 1981 respectively. The data estimates for solid waste management indicate that nearly half the garbage generated per day is collected and transported outside the city limits, however, disposal of it is still a great question. The variation across size class of urban centres shows a regularity and distinct pattern. The percentage of households covered by each of the three amenities increases systematically with the size class of urban centres except for class six towns. It is indeed very disturbing that the percentage of households not covered by toilet, electricity and drinking water facilities are 61, 41 and 28 respectively in case of class V towns, having population between 5000 and 10000 persons. The corresponding figure for the cities with more than 0.5 million persons are 22, 17 and 14 per cent only. Similarly, while 14 per cent of the people in class V towns have none of the amenities, the corresponding figure for 0.5 million plus cities is less than 3 per cent. About one-eighth of the urban centres in the country (300) have a sewerage system and even fewer (70) have sewage treatment facilities. Almost one-fifth of the country's urban population lives in sub-human conditions in the squatter settlements and has low access to basic infrastructure services. Most roads are in permanent state of repairs, particularly those in smaller towns and in peri-urban areas. The variations in the percentage of households having the amenities across size class of urban centres are not as high as those across the states. The size class disparity is however relatively high in the less developed states like Bihar, Orissa, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh. There has been a significant improvement in the availability of basic amenities across the states and size classes of urban centres during 1981-91. The increase, however, is much more in case of class-I cities compared to the towns in other size category. One would therefore argue that small and medium towns particularly those located in less developed states should be the major concern of the policy makers in the context of provision of basic amenities.

Urban Concerns

The major urban concern that emerges from the assessment of the urban situation is the gap between the demand and supply of infrastructure services such as energy, housing, transport, communication, education, health, water supply, sewerage, solid waste and recreation amenities. The emerging characteristic of "the city within a city" in large urban settlements is a gap syndrome arising out of inadequate income opportunities and city management response. The

manifestations are the fast growth in slum settlements, illegal construction, undesirable land-use changes, ruralisation of urban areas, transport bottlenecks, deterioration in air and water quality, all of which adversely affect the human environment and threaten social order. The major environmental concerns of an urbanising India relate to high level of water pollution due to poor waste disposal, inadequate sewerage and drainage and improper disposal of industrial effluents. The air pollution levels are rising mainly because of congested streets, poorly maintained vehicles, fuel burning and industrial activities. The dumping of solid waste in low lying areas contributes to ground water pollution. High level of noise pollution arising out of vehicular traffic, industrial operation, construction and public address system used for several purposes are causing serious concern to human life.

Another important dimension of rapidly rising urbanisation is the role of finance to make provision of essential services for regulating urban life. The past experience of India's urbanisation reveals the role of government finances for development and provision of services. However, in India, on the one hand, the willingness and ability of national and state governments to finance infrastructure development projects is declining. On the other, after bringing out the 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992, the local governments occupy the central stage for city infrastructure development activities. The Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in India are facing serious financial crisis, which further has serious implications for provision of services to the people. The ULBs financial problems can be addressed and classified into two: internal and external. The internal problems can be addressed by the way of information gaps in the area of primary books of accounts, source documents, monitoring, financial statements, accounting method and internal controls, asset accounting, receivable accounting, payable accounting and financial planning and budgeting. The external problems can be addressed by analysing the gaps and identifying right kind of projects, self-financing, external financing, participatory approach in projects, public-private partnership, privatisation, unbundling of services, administrative efficiency, fiscal transfer, new instruments of project financing like municipal bonds, legal issues relating to involvement of private sector in municipal services, management of escrow account and keeping project funds separate from general accounts.

The problem of urban areas can be managed and minimised by adopting three pronged strategy; (a) identification of gaps through an approach of research and documentation; (b) bridging gaps through filling up positions,

provision of hiring-in services, contracting-out services and giving right perspective to local economic development through training in concerned areas, (c) unaddressed issues can be taken-up in the policy level seminars by adopting legal and administrative corrections and enforcement.

Research and Documentation

Through research and documentation approach, the problems of urban areas can be clearly identified and probable solutions can also be worked out. This endeavour would help in developing new training manuals and up-date the existing ones. The success stories of select towns and cities can be super-imposed with right kind of modifications to take support and turn the failure cases into success. Database developed through research and documentation can be used for wider circulation and future research benefits.

Training Programmes

(I) Development and Management of Small and Medium Towns

Keeping in view the infrastructure deficiencies, the government of India launched development programmes for small and medium towns in 1979-80 in the name of Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT). The IDSMT programme has been implemented or under implementation in 945 urban agglomeration/towns. The IDSMT programme could not exhibit significant impact on development of selected towns because of number of factors. One, the size of the project scheme in terms of financial input is not very significant as against the requirements/deficiencies. Two, the selection of projects in most of the cases is not appropriate or location of schemes is such that the impact is diluted and does not contribute much to the revolving funds for city growth and infrastructure development. Three, the benefit of the scheme could not fully be availed by the selected towns as the component of financial institutions has remained in majority cases unutilised, however, the expectations were much more than the scheme. Rather than availing more development benefits beyond the scheme, the programme even could not move within its own web due to absence of right kind of staff, orientation for development activities and proper understanding of the programme. In view of difficulties faced by small and medium towns, it is, therefore, necessary that the training programme would provide various combinations to the local governments to choose and select options and improve the service delivery mechanism for representing the cross section of population and give new dimension to the development approach of small and medium towns.

(II) Management of Municipal Finance

The state of municipal finance is not in a good condition due to variety of reasons. The scenario of urban services is directly linked to the financial performance of urban local governments. To improve upon the mechanism of service delivery in urban areas, the financial health of municipal governments needs to be improved through variety of inputs, mainly administrative and fiscal reforms, capacity building and legal changes and enforcement. The administrative and fiscal reforms are being carried-out as per the recommendations of the state finance commissions. It is, therefore, necessary to formulate need based training programme in the area of municipal finance.

(III) Sustainable Cities

The past experience of Indian human settlement development has been far from the level of satisfaction due to number of reasons particularly land acquisition, proper understanding of planning practices, recognition of all sections of society in planning practices, transport mode, and planning practices, planning and technological development, enforcement of planning practices, etc. This has led to the growth of scattered industrial development, proliferation of slums and squatter settlements, unauthorised developments, ruralisation of urban areas, traffic and transportation problem, water, air and noise pollution and depletion of natural resources. The 74th Constitution Amendment has made a special provision to constitute District/Metropolitan Planning Committee to examine and decide planning norms at each settlement level for effectiveness of planning practices. It is important to note that all states have not been able to respond positively for constitution of such planning committees at the district level. To reduce the problems of human settlements and make the planning practices effective, there is a dire need to sensitise and impart training to the personnel involved in city planning practices.

Seminar and Policy Framework

There are typical issues, which cannot be resolved by taking initiatives in the area of research and documentation, sensitising the participants and imparting training in three important identified areas. However, by implementing the first two steps the problematic areas would be identified and those would require expert inputs and consensus to transform the problems into programmes and policy frame. It therefore requires expert meetings in the form of seminars to devise solution, which can further be translated into policy and programmes and the existing programmes can be revised to resolved problems for effective management of human settlements. □