

India at Urban20: G20

written by iasexam.com | 10/12/2022



[GS Paper 2 - International Relations, Bilateral, Regional and Global Grouping]

Context - Fifty percent of the world's population currently lives in urban areas, which is projected to increase by 1.5 times to 6 billion. However, cities continue to face mounting challenges in accommodating the needs of this rapidly expanding population. As a catalyst for global change, what promises can India's presidency hold for half the world's urban population?

Background

- India's G20 presidency began on December 1. It will be driven by the underlying vision of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", best encapsulated by the motto "One Earth, One Family, One Future".
- G20's Sustainable Development agenda aligns itself with sustainable actions to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

About Urban20

- A city diplomacy initiative within the G20 ecosystem: Within the G20 ecosystem, a city diplomacy initiative called the "Urban 20" (U20) was launched in December 2017. As one of the formal Engagement Groups under G20, the U20 forum was meant to collectively raise critical urban issues of G20 cities during the G20 negotiations.
- Special emphasis on cities: U20's City Sherpas emphasize on the increasing

importance of cities (both G20 and non-G20) as a country's engines of innovation, economic growth, and productivity.

- Focus on climate change and sustainable development: U20 specifically focuses on climate change, sustainable development, and socio-economic issues in connection with the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Largely remained a platform of recommendation: Despite U20's concerted efforts to run parallel to G20, the absence of any written constitution, procedures, or formal agreement has made U20 unable to effectively address the aspirations and concerns of cities. U20 seems to have largely remained a platform for expression and making recommendations without being able to directly influence urban planning or implement policy initiatives.
- In this backdrop India has a unique opportunity: Within this framework, India now has the unique opportunity to outline and action specific U20 goals to link with the larger objectives of one of the most influential international forums.

Opportunity for India

- India's U20 prospect can work towards engaging in meaningful policymaking and investments towards fulfilling the global 2030 Agenda.
- By mindfully planning the allocation of urban resources and inspiring sustainable practices, India can set a new balanced template. While learning from the best practices of some of the soundest cities,
- Prioritizing post Covid urban social and emotional wellbeing: In a post-pandemic world, U20 2023 can priorities the role of urban mental health to raise awareness of its bearing as a consequence of an overpowering-built environment Urban amenities must account for the improvement of the overall quality of life and social-emotional well-being.
- Emphasizing on efficient data and policies: U20 2023 can create a primer for effective data collection, analysis, monitoring, and reporting for timely assessment or urban plans to align with G20 and national agendas. Going further, India must emphasize policies for efficient data use and supporting data governance.
- Increasing efficiency of digital services and bridging the digital divide gap: Digital literacy in urban India is only at 61 percent, suggesting a pervading low awareness of the government's e-services. Moreover, gender biases in technology and digital skills lead to a greater gender digital divide suggesting a huge disparity in access to digital services. New regulatory frameworks are needed to encourage research and investment in bridging such gaps.
- Gender inclusive planning to develop equitable cities: U20 2023 can call for global collaborations to develop equitable cities by engaging in dialogues around gender-inclusive planning. This is not only to benefit women and children but to include representation of diverse marginalized genders and LGBTQ+ persons in the urban planning process.
- Prioritizing capacity building and training for city planners: It is also essential to highlight the importance of capacity building and training for planners and civic officials about the various sensitivities and impacts of urban development plans. India can bolster global joint discussions around increased investment in urban healthcare facilities.

- **Boosting investment in sustainable energy transition:** While delivering on the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda and 2030 Agenda, India can reinforce direct investment in areas such as sustainable energy and mobility transition. For instance, managing the risks of urban flooding in a changing climate has become a global focus area for policymakers.
- **Investing in quality education and skill development:** With cities burgeoning, investing in quality education and skilling has become critical to better prepare for the future of work and jobs for. Policies, across sectors, must support better skilling and training for entrepreneurship. For example, while the PM Employment Generation Programme and other Credit Support Schemes support MSMEs for training the youth and generating employment, we are yet to see their effectiveness and outreach. On the other hand, the rising trend of the gig economy demands innovative policymaking to accommodate the aspirations of the urban youth.
- **Local participation must be enhanced:** Most importantly, U20 2023 can reinforce the importance of local-regional involvement for the integration of perspectives at the national and sub-national government bodies as the way forward. Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) can be strengthened further to facilitate basic infrastructure needs, inclusive economic growth and equitable development.

How can India Lead?

- India's theme of G20 2023 holds the promise of interconnectedness to bring in an attitudinal change through deliberation, partnerships, dialogues, cooperation and knowledge-sharing.
- India can lead the way for global response and action by setting the stage for newer partnerships and agreements to facilitate community empowerment and social justice at both the local and societal levels.
- By stressing on equity, inclusivity, sustainability and resilience, U20 2023 will be able to honor its commitment to establish better cities.

Conclusion

By exploring the interlinkages and shared issues related to urban planning, India can help pave the way to bring about a global consensus for renewed urban vigor.