WSDS 2018 | Thematic Track
'Making Livable Cities: challenges and way forward for India'

Context:

More than 40% of India's population India is expected to reside in its urban centres by 2050 (UNDESA, 2014). As of Census 2011, there are 7,935 towns, 475 Urban Agglomerations (UA) and 981 outgrowths in the country. There are 468 Class- I UA/Towns that have a population of more than 100,000 residents and 53 UA/Towns housing a population of one million or above. Among the million plus UA/Cities, there are three 'Mega cities' with more than 10 million population (Census, 2011). While these rapidly expanding urban centres in India are seen as the engines of economic growth, they also face tremendous pressures on their civic infrastructure systems like water supply, sewerage and drainage, solid waste management, etc. Data suggests that water supply is available for an average of 2.9 hours only per day across cities and towns. The non-revenue water that includes physical and revenue losses, accounts for 40-60 per cent of total water supply. About 30 to 50 per cent households do not have sewerage connections and less than 20 per cent of total waste water is being treated. Solid waste systems are severely stressed with an estimated amount of 1,15,000 MT of Municipal Solid Waste being generated daily in the country (FICCI, 2011). Besides infrastructure deficit, Indian cities are also grappling with environmental degradation, air pollution, and increasing frequency of climate induced events and disasters. There is, therefore, an urgent need to relook the ways in which we design our infrastructure, run our cities, and manage current pressures emanating from urbanization (TERI, 2014; TERI, 2015).

In order to meet these challenges of growing urbanization in the country, the Government of India launched several new urban schemes in 2014 - Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), Housing for All (Urban) Scheme and the Smart Cities Mission. The basic aim of these schemes is to recast the urban landscape of the country to make urban areas livable, sustainable, smart and inclusive while driving the economic growth of the country. The Smart Cities Mission focuses on the objectives of enhancing the quality of urban life and providing a clean and sustainable environment through the adoption of smart solutions. The Mission covers 100

cities across the country that were identified through an intra-state selection process based on their existing service levels, institutional and financial capacities, past track record of urban governance and reforms. Thereafter, in the second stage, each of the Smart Cities prepared their smart city proposals (SCPs) for participation in the 'City Challenge'. These proposals were scored on the basis of multiple criteria including city vision and strategy; inclusive planning approach; technical and financial viability of proposals, and the capacity of the urban local bodies to implement the same. The format entails the winning cities in each round to start implementing their SCPs while the remaining cities improve their SCPs for subsequent rounds. So far 90 cities have been selected for availing funds for implementation through 3 rounds of challenge. AMRUT is an urban renewal mission that has been launched for 500 cities with focus on ensuring basic infrastructure services such as water supply, sewerage, storm water drains, transport and development of green spaces and parks by adopting climate resilient and energy efficient policies and regulations. It includes a project based approach to ensure basic services and infrastructure which will be linked to urban reforms. These reforms as envisioned at present will include e-governance, constitution of municipal cadre, devolving functions and funds to urban local bodies, review of building bye-laws, improvement in assessment and collection of municipal taxes, credit rating, energy and water audit, and citizen centric urban plans (TERI, 2015). The 500 AMRUT cities and towns have been selected primarily on the basis of population i.e. 100,000 and above (Class I cities); while other criteria of selection apply for certain locations like heritage cities and towns under the Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) Scheme; thirteen cities and towns on the stem of the main rivers with a population above 75,000 and less than 100,000; ten cities from hill states, islands and tourist destinations (not more than 1 from each state).

At the global level, for the first time, the UN General Assembly adopted the urban agenda in 2015 as a specific sustainable development goal - Goal 11 which calls upon Governments to make their cities and settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The Paris climate agreement recognised that cities are key subnational entities and need to chart out their own future. The UN Conference on Housing and Human Settlement or Habitat 3 held in Ecuador in 2016 adopted a new urban agenda to address the challenges of urbanisation and endeavour to achieve SDG 11. The Ninth Session of the World Urban Forum or WUF9, taking place on February 7-13, 2018 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia will be the first large-scale event on urban development after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and New Urban Agenda, and the first one to focus on their implementation. WUF9, under the broad rubric of 'Cities 2030, Cities for all', will be instrumental to substantively feed into the inputs for the first global report of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Going forward, the Forum will also contribute to global mobilization towards advocating for the common vision on sustainable urban development enshrined in the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. India is party to all these global commitments and in many ways, AMRUT and Smart Cities Mission guidelines have similar objectives. However, the Missions are intended to enable some 500 cities to become sustainable. But India has some 8000 cities and the question remains how the cities that are not in the fortunate list of 500 develop a vision for their future, find the funding to move towards a sustainable path.

In this context, the WSDS Thematic Track on '**Making Livable Cities: challenges and way forward for India'** is being organized with support from the Royal Danish Embassy to India at an opportune policy juncture when 90 'winner' smart cities and various AMRUT cities are already in the process of implementation of their Smart City Proposals (SCPs) and Improvement Plans while the remaining cities are revisiting their proposals. The track would focus on ways and means to shape sustainable urbanisation process in India, in line with the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, in the 500 Mission cities and beyond. It would also discuss enablers for shifting from a project based approach to a knowledge sharing approach for building livable cities.

Key questions:

- What are the challenges and enablers to the process of sustainable urbanization and developing livable cities in India? To what extent the existing Missions of Govt of India – Smart Cities and AMRUT, have enabled cities to do so?
- How can Indian cities aim to achieve SDG 11 targets and implement the New Urban Agenda, and monitor and report progress on the same?
- What could be the potential partnership and implementation mechanisms in the context of building livable cities? What are the learning and experiences from PPP projects being implement under Smart Cities Mission?
- Going beyond the 500 cities for sustainable urbanisation – knowledge transfer/sharing; capacity building. How do we extend the learning from the national programs to other cities and share the knowledge?
- How can cities be empowered – policy mandate; institutional and financial support; legal provisions?