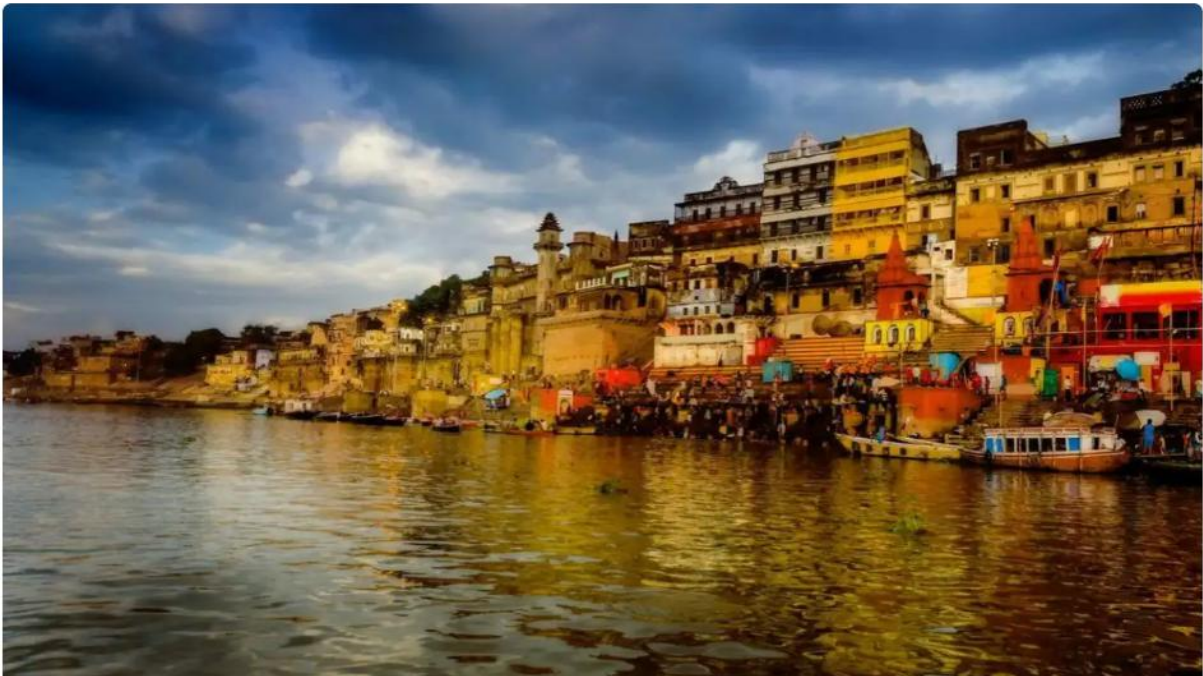


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Viksit Bharat 2047: Transforming Urban Governance through Capacity Building

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Urban governance and Viksit Bharat 2047.

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Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his reply to the motion of thanks on the President's speech in Lok Sabha laid out the importance of building "future ready cities for Viksit Bharat". He highlighted that the increasing pace of urbanisation in India should be treated as an opportunity rather than a threat. This shows that the government envisages our urban centres to be the principal engines of growth towards a developed India and our urban governance is bound to act as either the principal facilitator or bottleneck towards this goal.

Be it the urban centres of yore like Kashi, Ujjain, Madurai, and Vijaynagar or the new age metropolises like New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Gurugram, cities have defined the economy, identity and culture of the surrounding region. The criticality of our urban areas can be gauged from the fact that only around 3% of India's area falling under cities contributes to more than 65% of the GDP. However, despite the massive contribution to the economy, the sorry state of India's urban governance manifests through our crumbling urban infrastructure, highly polluted cities, unenforced town planning regulations and much more which is affecting more than 4,800 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in the country.

Historically, municipal bodies have been direct providers of civic services – notably conservancy, healthcare, water supply, building regulations, waste management, fire combat services, development of civic infrastructure amongst others. The 74th amendment to the constitution constitutionally accorded 18 statutory functions – mostly obligatory to municipal bodies across the

country.

These functions included mandates of strategic and statutory spatial planning, such as urban planning, building control, planning for economic and social development and others. However, constantly increasing migration to the cities and rising expectations on public infrastructure and service delivery front are mounting pressure on the ULBs to adopt forward looking urban planning, quick response systems, development and maintenance of public assets and use of modern management and technology for city management.

While in the last 2 decades, multiple urban development schemes and missions came into existence such as JNNURM, Swachh Bharat Mission, Smart Cities, AMRUT, PM Awaas Yojana and others which collectively helped in building the foundation of an ecosystem for managing urbanization through provision of urban infrastructure, public amenities, tech enabled service delivery, waste management, urban transport etc. But still, most of our ULBs still fall short in meeting the rising pace of needs and expectations. Experts attribute this shortfall to “Capacity Gaps” with respect to individual competencies and institutional capacities. Though most of the urban schemes and programmes had component of capacity building with earmarked budget but it was always a top- down approach where capacity building interventions were linked to scheme specific objectives.

Capacity building has often been viewed as an auxiliary function, with training and learning initiatives treated as mere "checklist items," limiting their effective internalization and long-term impact. To ensure effective capacity building in ULBs, it is important to connect the dots between individual roles and responsibilities, competencies required to fulfil them, training needs to hone the respective competencies and finally linking them to performance assessment.

This was not addressed fully in earlier interventions. At the same time, the “supply side” of the capacity building landscape which deals with right kind of training delivery

institution, infrastructure, access and platforms have also been the historical weak links leading to hurdles in effective and continuous learning for our city administrators.

Since ULBs are the first layer of governance and deal directly with citizens, the key drivers of capacity building should be citizen centricity, flexibility to adapt emerging technologies and strengthened municipal finance. A leadership mindset rooted in public service values is essential to inspire teams and drive impactful city-wide initiatives. In this direction, the government has launched Mission Karmayogi to bring large scale interventions for behavioural competency improvement focussing on strengthening leadership, decision-making, public dealing and team management skills coupled with mental well-being are being designed for ULB employees.

Under this initiative, Capacity Building Commission (CBC) along with Integrated Government Online Training (IGOT) portal are channelizing their efforts in capacity building of ULBs under the aegis of National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB). CBC's mission is to create optimal learning opportunities for each public functionary with the objective to build an agile and future-ready municipal civil service. A bottom-up approach is conceived to identify and deliver skill development landscape focusing on functional, domain and behavioural competencies for fulfilling responsibility of each designation under any ULB.

One of the critical elements of Mission Karmayogi is city finance management, as financial sustainability is at the core of effective urban governance. A sound capacity building programme has been envisaged to improve and adopt effective financial practices including revenue augmentation, budget management, project financing and access to alternate funding sources by ULBs.

Stakeholders are working on creating customized courses, peer to peer learning opportunities and expert mentorship for ULBs to foster long-term economic stability for cities.

It is heartening to see that several States have proactively expressed interest in using the IGOT platform for genuinely enhancing the skills and competencies of their municipal staff. The focus of Government of India in the next few years would be to see if a common framework for municipal staff competencies can be reached through consensus with the states, and to keep up the supply of high-quality content that allows municipal functionaries to stay abreast of competency requirements of the day.

Capacities are typically built upon four key pillars: people, processes, tools, and techniques. While the efforts on the people aspect is still work in progress, the capacity building of ULBs need supplementary support on processes, tools, and techniques through structural reforms in urban governance. This requires systematic changes in existing structure of city governance along with democratic empowerment and accountability. It could be hoped that through this new bottom-up approach, ULBs will move from being 'rule based' organisations to becoming 'role based' organisation and evolve from being service providers to becoming city managers for cities of tomorrow.

The ULBs of tomorrow need to become true representatives of the public, articulating and manifesting their needs and aspirations through a wide range of initiatives.

The new generation of tier 2 and 3 cities need to gear up since our megacities are reaching saturation of their potential to hold population. The megacities need to focus their efforts more on sustainability and climate sensitive aspects of development while smaller cities need to improve their institutional and individual capacities to conceive future ready infrastructure and citizen service delivery.

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