Urbanization: Problems and Remedies

Urbanism and urbanization are related terms, but they describe different aspects of cities and their growth.

Urbanism The way of life and characteristics of urban areas (towns and cities). It focuses on Social, cultural, economic, and spatial aspects of life in cities.

- Patterns of social interaction in cities (fast-paced life, weaker kinship ties, greater anonymity).
- Urban culture (diversity, cosmopolitanism, consumerism).
- Physical design and planning of cities (architecture, street layout, public spaces).
- Attitudes and behaviours shaped by city living.
- Example: The culture of coffee shops, apartment living, public transport commuting, and multicultural neighbourhoods in New York or Delhi.

Urbanization The process by which an increasing proportion of a country's population comes to live in towns and cities. It focuses on Quantitative change — growth in the size, number, and population share of urban areas.

Causes:

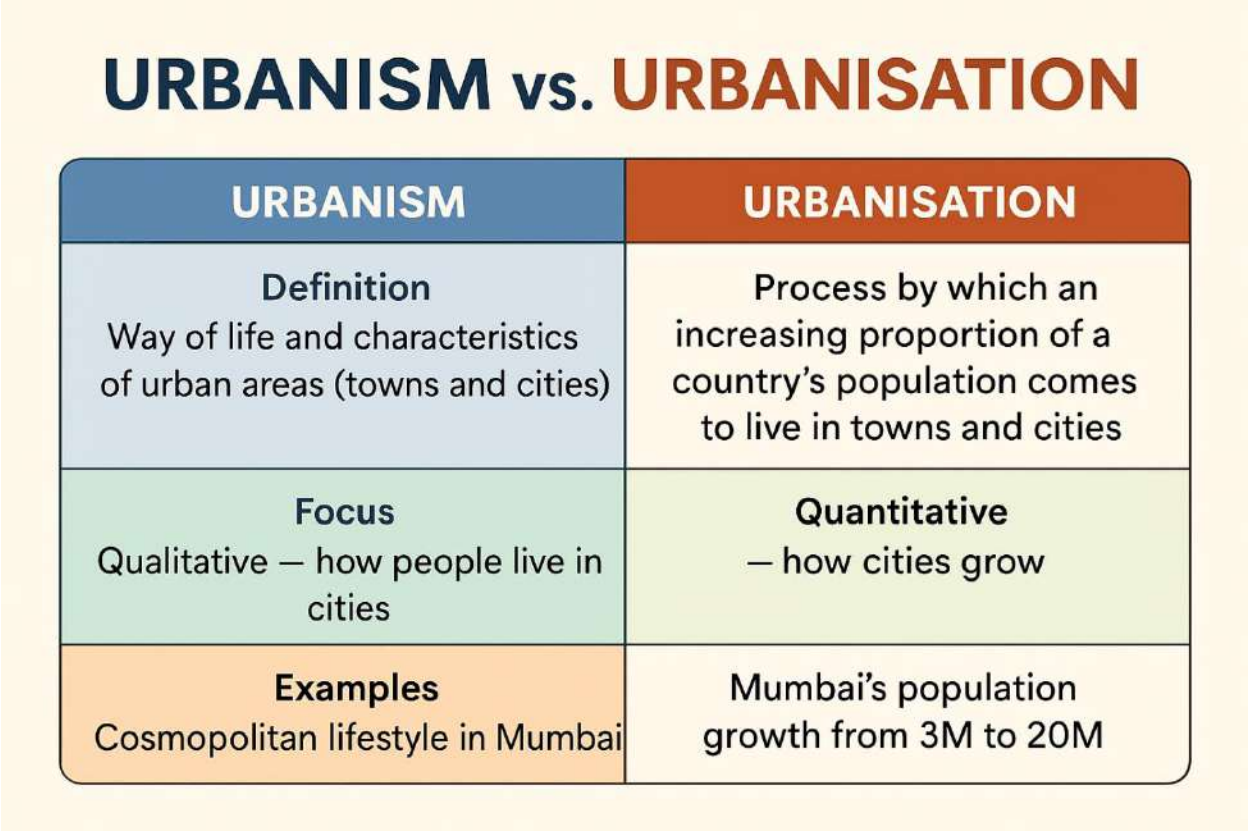
- Rural-to-urban migration (for jobs, education, healthcare).
- Natural increase in urban areas (birth rate > death rate).
- Reclassification of rural areas into urban due to population growth and infrastructure.

Effects:

- Positive: More economic opportunities, better infrastructure, innovation hubs.
- Negative: Overcrowding, slums, pollution, traffic congestion.
- Example: India's urban population rising from 17% in 1951 to around 36% in 2021.

Global Urban population

Urbanization is widespread in developed regions like North America and Europe, while emerging regions such as Asia and Africa continue to undergo rapid urban transformation. Asia dominates in sheer urban population count, even if its urban percentage is still growing. Continent-wise share of urban population, showing how urbanization has evolved across regions from the past to now.



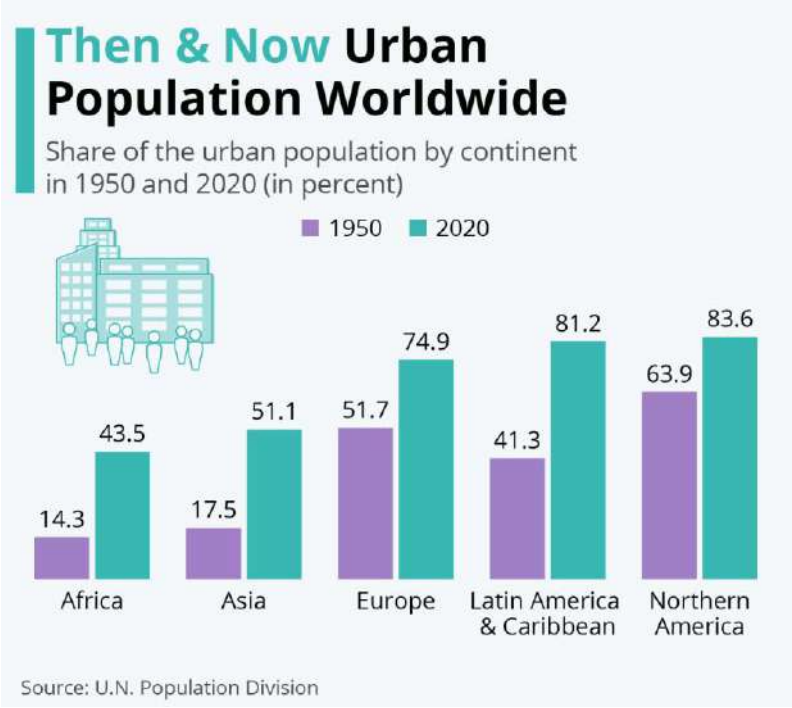
Urban Share by Continent

- North America leads with about 83% of its population living in urban areas, closely followed by Latin America & the Caribbean at approximately 81%.
- Europe stands at 74–75% urban.
- Oceania follows with roughly 68–69% urbanization.
- Asia, though home to the largest absolute number of urban dwellers, has a moderate overall share of around 49–52% living in urban areas.
- Africa is the least urbanized, with only about 41–44% of its population residing in cities.

Historical Trends & Future Outlook

In 1950, both Africa and Asia had urbanization shares below 20%; by 2020, these had increased to approximately 43% and 51%, respectively.

While Europe and North America dominated urban share in the mid-20th century, their proportion of the global urban population has declined over time. Currently, Asia alone accounts for over half of all urban residents worldwide.



In 2024, approximately 57.7% of the world's population lived in urban areas, according to the World Bank

- Projections suggest that by 2050, 68% of the global population will reside in urban areas
- The World Bank also notes that over 4 billion people currently live in cities, and this number is expected to nearly double by 2050, with nearly 7 in 10 people living in cities
- We are witnessing the largest wave of urban growth in human history, with more than half of the world's population now living in cities
- Much of this growth is projected to occur in Asia and Africa, bringing both opportunities and significant challenges around infrastructure, housing, and sustainable development

Suburbanization and Counter urbanization

Suburbanization- The process in which people, businesses, and services move from central urban areas (city centres) to the suburbs (outlying residential areas). Often leads to the growth of suburbs and decline of inner cities.

Causes:

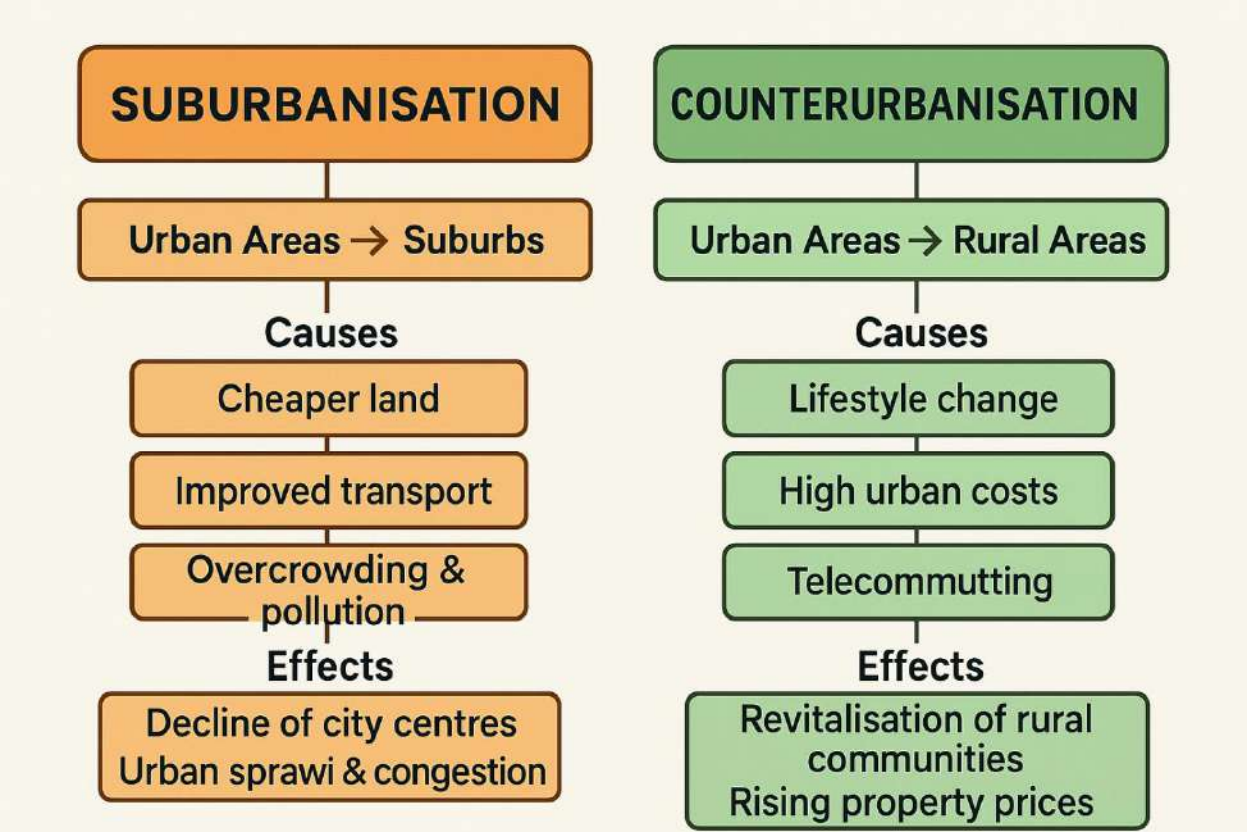
- Cheaper land in suburban areas for housing and industry.
- Improved transport (commuter trains, highways) makes it easier to live farther from work.
- Desire for better quality of life — larger homes, gardens, cleaner environment.
- Overcrowding & pollution in inner cities.
- Government housing policies encouraging suburban housing development.

Positive Effects:

- Better living conditions for many families.
- Growth of suburban economies and amenities.

Negative Effects:

- Decline of city centres (loss of businesses, services, and tax revenue).
- Urban sprawl consuming agricultural land.
- Increased car dependency → traffic congestion & pollution.



Counter urbanization -The movement of people from urban areas (including suburbs) to rural areas or smaller towns/villages. Also called de-urbanization in some contexts.

Causes:

- Lifestyle change — preference for quieter, cleaner, less crowded environments.
- High urban costs — expensive housing, high living costs in cities.
- Telecommuting & remote work making location flexible.
- Retirement migration — older people moving to countryside.
- Urban problems — crime, pollution, congestion pushing people out.

Positive Effects:

- Revitalization of rural communities (new businesses, services).
- Reduced pressure on urban infrastructure.

Negative Effects:

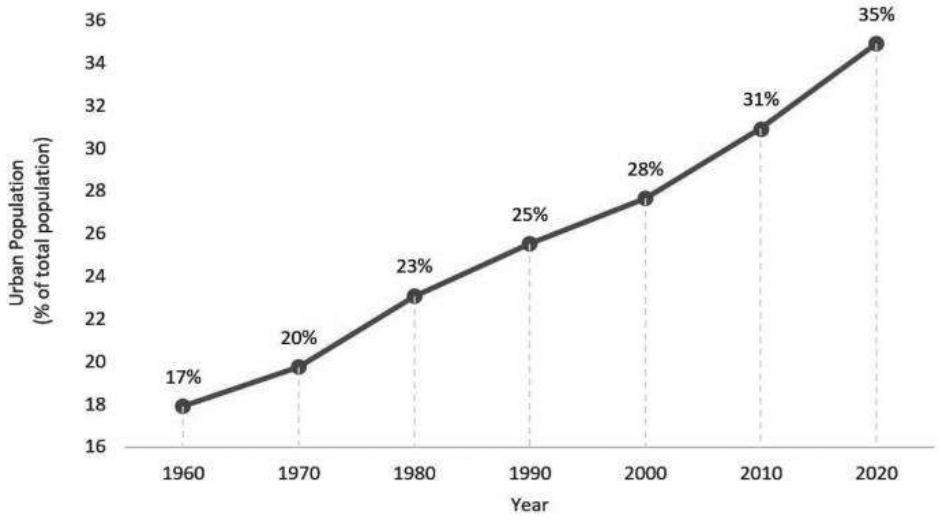
- Rising rural property prices, making housing unaffordable for locals.
- Increased commuting traffic from rural areas to cities.
- Possible loss of rural character and environment due to development.

India's urban population growth

Indian urban population growth over the decades—shows the urban share has steadily increased, nearly doubling from around 17% in 1951 to over 34% by 2017. India is experiencing a steady and rapid shift toward urban living. The growth is driven by economic expansion, rural-to-urban migration, and infrastructural transformation. While this presents opportunities for economic development and improved livelihoods, it also brings challenges such as expanding urban infrastructure, affordable housing shortages, and regional disparities in urban readiness

Historical Growth

- Urbanization in India began accelerating after independence. The urban population rose from 11.4% in 1901 to 28.5% in 2001, and reached approximately 34% by 2017, as per World Bank data
- In 1951, only about 17% of the population lived in cities—growing to 35% today, with projections indicating an increase to 50% by 2050



Projections for the Near Future

- Research anticipates the urban share to climb to 35–37% in the 2021 Census, rising from 31.1% in 2011
- According to a UN-backed report, India's urban population is expected to reach around 600 million by 2031, accounting for roughly 40% of the national population
- The UN-Habitat forecast further estimates a rise to 483 million in 2020, then 543 million in 2025, 607 million by 2030, and about 675 million by 2035, when the urban share would be approximately 43.2%

Urbanization means the increasing proportion of a country's population living in urban areas and the growth of towns and cities.

Drivers of Urbanization in India

- Economic– Shift from agriculture to manufacturing & services.
- Infrastructure – Transport corridors, smart cities, metro networks.
- Migration – Rural–urban migration for jobs & education.
- Administrative expansion – Villages reclassified as towns.
- Globalization – IT hubs, foreign investment, industrial corridors.

Types of Urban Units in India Urban units in India are broadly classified by the Census into:

1. Statutory Towns Places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board, or notified town area committee, irrespective of population size. Legal/administrative status, not population.

- Delhi (Municipal Corporation of Delhi)
- Shimla (Municipal Corporation)
- Darjeeling (Notified Area)

2. Census Towns Places meeting all of the criteria (Census 2011 definition): Functional & demographic, not legal status.

- Minimum population: 5,000
- At least 75% of male main working population in non-agricultural activities
- Population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km
- Balarampur (West Bengal)
- Amini (Lakshadweep)

Number of UAs/Towns and OGs in India

Type of Urban Units	2011 Census	2001 Census
1. Towns:	7,935	5,161
(a) Statutory Towns	4,041	3,799
(b) Census Towns	3,894	1,362
2. Urban Agglomerations	475	384
3. Out Growths (OGs)	981	953

3. Urban Agglomerations Continuous urban spread consisting of:

- A statutory town and its adjoining outgrowths or
- Two or more physically contiguous towns with or without OGs.
- Greater Mumbai UA (Mumbai city + suburbs + OGs)
- Delhi UA (Delhi MCD area + Cantonment + New Delhi + contiguous CTs)

4. Outgrowths Viable units like railway colonies, university campuses, ports, military camps, etc., located outside the statutory limits but adjoining a town, having urban features.

- CISF Complex near Hyderabad
- Railway Colony outside Nagpur

Metropolitan Cities Urban agglomerations/cities with a population of 1 million (10 lakh) or more- Chennai, Ahmedabad, Pune

Megacities Cities with 10 million (1 crore) or more population-Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata

Social Effects of Urbanization in India

Urbanization changes population distribution, lifestyles, values, and social structures. In India, the effects are both transformative and problematic.

Positive Social Effects

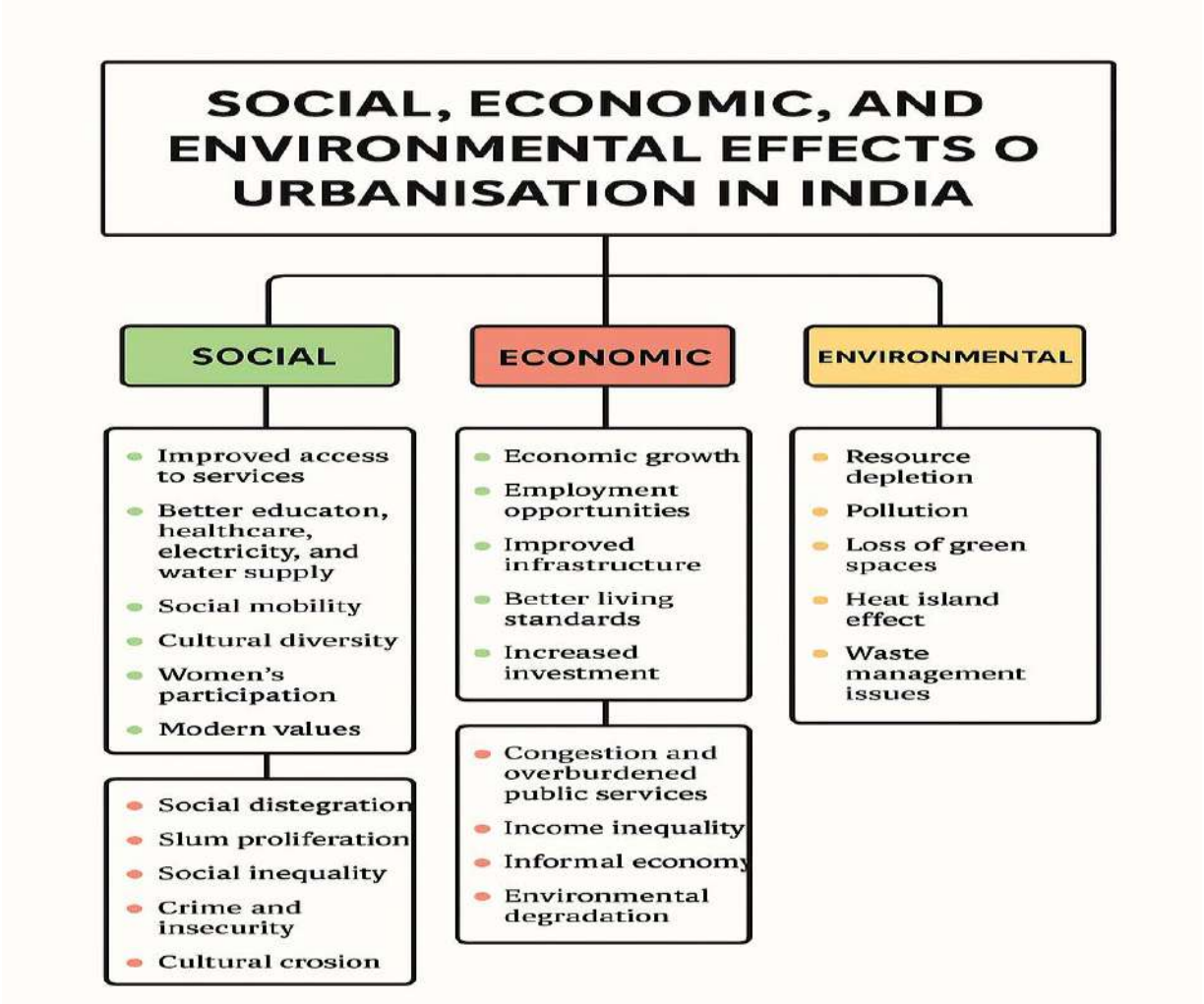
- **Improved access to services** Better education, healthcare, electricity, and water supply in cities. AIIMS hospitals, IIT campuses, metro transport
- **Social mobility** Cities offer more jobs & skill-based opportunities, enabling people to rise above caste and class barriers. Rural youth working in IT/BPO in Bengaluru
- **Cultural diversity** Urban areas bring people from various regions, religions, and languages together. Mumbai's Ganesh Chaturthi & Eid celebrations
- **Women's participation** More employment & education opportunities for women, weakening some patriarchal norms. Female workforce in garment & service sectors
- **Modern values** Urban life promotes individualism, merit-based systems, and secular attitudes. Mixed marriages, nuclear families

Negative Social Effects

- **Social disintegration** Weakening of traditional community bonds; rise in anonymity & loneliness. Elderly isolation in metros
- **Slum proliferation** Rural migrants unable to afford housing live in overcrowded, unsanitary settlements. Dharavi in Mumbai
- **Social inequality** Gap between rich and poor widens; gated communities vs informal settlements. Gurgaon luxury apartments next to slums
- **Crime & insecurity** Overcrowding, unemployment, and anonymity can fuel crime. Higher rates of theft and assault in megacities
- **Cultural erosion** Loss of traditional art, dress, and language due to Westernization. Decline of local dialects in urban youth

Complex Effects

- Changing family structure – Shift from joint to nuclear families; more independence but less support for elderly.
- Migration-driven diversity – Reduces regionalism but can also cause tensions (e.g., "sons of the soil" movements).
- Informal economy – Provides jobs for migrants but lacks social security.



Urbanization and the Status of Women

Urbanization- Growth in the proportion of people living in urban areas due to migration, natural increase, and reclassification of settlements. Urbanization and women's status are interlinked: urban living can expand opportunities but can also create new challenges.

Positive Impacts of Urbanization on Women's Status

1. **Education** Greater access to schools, colleges, vocational training; higher female literacy in urban areas (NFHS-5: Urban FLR 82% vs Rural 68%).
2. **Employment** More jobs in services, manufacturing, IT, education, healthcare; growth of women entrepreneurs; better wage parity in organised sector.
3. **Political participation** Better awareness, women's SHGs in urban slums, higher voter turnout in some metros, leadership in RWAs and local bodies.

4. **Health** Access to hospitals, reproductive healthcare, maternal health services, lower maternal and infant mortality rates.
5. **Social norms** Greater exposure to modern ideas, gender equality movements, smaller family norms, reduced early marriage rates.
6. **Legal awareness** Better access to legal aid, NGOs, and women's commissions; more awareness about rights (e.g., Domestic Violence Act, POSH Act).

Negative / Challenging Impacts

1. **Employment** Informalisation of women's work—domestic help, garment workers, street vendors with low pay and no social security.
2. **Urban poverty** Slum dwellers face unsafe housing, water scarcity, and poor sanitation disproportionately affecting women.
3. **Safety** Sexual harassment, workplace abuse, unsafe public transport, cyber harassment.
4. **Health** Lifestyle diseases (obesity, hypertension), mental health issues due to stress and isolation.
5. **Double burden** Despite employment, urban women often shoulder unequal domestic responsibilities.
6. **Marginalisation** Migrant women in informal sector face wage discrimination and lack of access to schemes due to documentation issues.

Policy and Institutional Support

- Urban Livelihood Mission – Women SHGs in urban areas.
- Smart Cities Mission – Gender-sensitive urban planning (lighting, footpaths, safety measures).
- POSH Act (2013) – Protection against workplace harassment.
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao – Urban outreach for girl education.
- Mahila E-haat – Online marketing platform for women entrepreneurs.

Way Forward

- Gender-responsive urban planning – Safe public transport, lighting, CCTV.
- Increase women's workforce participation – Skilling, flexible workspaces, childcare facilities.
- Strengthen urban social infrastructure – Affordable housing, health services.
- Legal empowerment – Awareness campaigns, fast-track courts for crimes against women.
- Promote women's leadership – Urban local bodies to ensure 50% reservation.

Problems of Urbanization				
Infrastructure	**Environment**	**Social**	**Economic**	**Governance**
Housing shortage	Air pollution	Urban poverty	Unemployment	Weak ULBs
Slums	Water pollution	Inequality	Informal jobs	Poor planning
Water scarcity	Green loss	Crime	Traffic jams	Funds shortage
Waste mgmt issues	Heat islands	Migrant issues	Cost of living	Project delays

Urban Development Programmes in India

Urban development in India focuses on infrastructure, housing, sanitation, transport, and governance. Rapid urbanization (projected 600 million urban population by 2036, MoHUA) has driven multiple flagship programmes.

Current major programmes into 5 pillars:

- Housing – PMAY-U
- Infrastructure – Smart Cities, AMRUT 2.0
- Sanitation – SBM-U 2.0, GOBARdhan
- Transport – NEBP, Metro Expansion, RRTS
- Livelihood & Climate – DAY-NULM, CSCAF, CITIIS 2.0

Housing & Slum Redevelopment - Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U) 2015 "Housing for All" – 4 verticals:

- In-situ slum redevelopment,
- Credit-linked subsidy,
- Affordable housing in partnership,
- Beneficiary-led construction.

Urban Infrastructure & Services

- Smart Cities Mission (SCM) 2015Develop 100 cities with ICT-enabled governance, improved mobility, core infrastructure, sustainability. Extended implementation to 2026.

- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT 2.0) 2021 Focus on universal water supply, 100% sewerage, rejuvenation of water bodies, green spaces in 4,800+ towns.
- Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban 2.0 (SBM-U) 2021 ODF+ and ODF++ cities, 100% solid waste management, waste segregation at source, waste-to-energy plants.

Urban Transport

- National Electric Bus Programme (NEBP) 2022 Deploy 50,000 e-buses in cities via PPP model. Linked to FAME-II subsidies.
- Metro Rail Expansion & Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) Ongoing Metro projects in 27+ cities; Delhi–Meerut RRTS first corridor.
- |National Urban Transport Policy (Revised) 2021 update Public transport priority, non-motorised transport, digital ticketing. |

Urban Livelihoods & Social Development

- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) 2013 Skill training, self-employment support, SHG formation for urban poor.
- National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM) 2021 Digital infrastructure for governance, municipal service delivery, open data.

Heritage & Climate Resilience

- HRIDAY (Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana) 2015 Infrastructure upgrades in heritage cities (Varanasi, Amritsar, etc.). Many projects still in execution phase.
- Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF) 2019 Tool for cities to measure climate resilience, integrate sustainability in planning.
- CITIIS 2.0 (Cities Investment to Innovate, Integrate & Sustain) 2023 World Bank-backed initiative for circular economy, climate action, urban planning reforms.

Sanitation & Waste Management

- SBM-U 2.0 2021 focus on sanitation infrastructure and solid waste processing.
- GOBARdhan (Urban)| 2023 Waste-to-wealth from organic waste and wastewater. |

Challenges in Implementation

- Funding constraints & delays.
- Coordination issues between state, ULBs, and central agencies.
- Land acquisition hurdles.

- Capacity gaps in urban local bodies.
- Uneven regional coverage (Tier-2 & Tier-3 cities often lag).

Way Forward

- Strengthen 74th Amendment provisions for ULB autonomy.
- Adopt integrated, GIS-based master planning.
- Ensure community participation in project design.
- Blend central schemes with state/PPP funding for sustainability.
- Incorporate climate resilience & green infrastructure in all projects.

Integrative development of Smart Villages and Smart Cities

- India's development strategy often treats Smart Cities and rural development as separate tracks.
- But rural–urban linkages are deep: migration, supply chains, labour markets, environmental resources.
- Integrative planning ensures balanced growth and prevents overburdening of cities while uplifting rural areas.

Why Integrative Development

Migration Pressure

- Unplanned urbanization happens when rural areas lack opportunities -mass migration to cities - slums, unemployment, congestion.
- Smart Villages can provide local jobs and services, reducing distress migration.

Balanced Regional Development

- Urban-centric growth widens rural–urban income gaps.
- Linking smart city markets with smart village production hubs can spread prosperity.

Resource & Supply Chain Synergy

- Cities depend on villages for food, raw materials, and labour; villages rely on cities for markets, healthcare, and higher education.
- Integrative planning strengthens logistics, cold chains, and market linkages.

Infrastructure Spillover

- Broadband, renewable energy, and transport corridors can be jointly planned to serve both urban and rural settlements.

- Example: BharatNet (rural broadband) + urban digital infrastructure.

Climate Resilience & Sustainability

- Cities depend on rural watersheds, forests, and farmlands for ecosystem services.
- Joint urban–rural management prevents resource overuse and ensures climate adaptation.

Social Inclusion

- Avoids creating "islands of prosperity" in cities while villages lag behind.
- Strengthens rural health, education, and governance to urban standards.

Policy and Programme Linkages

- Smart Cities Mission (2015) – ICT-enabled, sustainable urban infrastructure.
- Rurban Mission (Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission) – developing rural clusters with urban-level facilities.
- AMRUT 2.0 & PMGSY – integrating water supply, sewerage, and road networks across rural–urban boundaries.
- BharatNet – high-speed rural–urban digital connectivity.
- National Logistics Policy – integrates rural producers with urban markets.

Way Forward

- Integrated Master Plans for rural–urban regions, not just city limits.
- Regional Economic Clusters linking farm produce, MSMEs, and urban markets.
- Mobility Corridors – affordable, sustainable public transport connecting villages to cities.
- Common Digital Platforms for governance, telemedicine, and education.
- Participatory Planning – involve both rural and urban local bodies under 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendments.

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities (Indian Context)

SDG 11 is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN in 2015 under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable."
- Urban areas are home to over 55% of the world's population (projected 68% by 2050), making sustainable urbanization a global priority.

Key Targets of SDG 11(to be achieved by 2030)

- 11.1 Ensure access for all to adequate, safe, affordable housing & basic services; upgrade slums.
- 11.2 Provide safe, affordable, accessible, sustainable transport for all (esp. vulnerable groups).
- 11.3 Enhance inclusive, sustainable urbanization & participatory planning.
- 11.4 Protect cultural & natural heritage.
- 11.5 Reduce disaster-related deaths, economic losses, esp. for poor & vulnerable.
- 11.6 Reduce per capita environmental impact of cities – air quality, waste management.
- 11.7 Provide universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible green & public spaces.
- ***11.a Strengthen urban–rural linkages in planning & development.***
- ***11.b Adopt & implement disaster risk reduction strategies in line with Sendai Framework.***
- ***11.c Support least developed countries in sustainable, resilient building construction.***

India's Progress & Programmes Supporting SDG 11

- Housing: PMAY-U for "Housing for All."
- Urban infrastructure: Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT 2.0.
- Transport: Metro rail expansion, e-bus programmes, NUTP.
- Sanitation: Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban 2.0, waste segregation at source.
- Urban–rural linkages: Rurban Mission, BharatNet, PMGSY.
- Disaster resilience: National Disaster Management Plan, Heat Action Plans in cities.
- Green spaces: Urban forest projects, rejuvenation of water bodies.

Challenges in Achieving SDG 11 in India

- Unplanned urban expansion & peri-urban sprawl.
- Insufficient municipal finance & capacity.
- Informal housing & livelihoods.
- Climate change impacts – floods, heat waves.
- Weak coordination between 73rd & 74th Amendment bodies.

Way Forward

- Integrated master planning for metropolitan regions.
- Affordable housing & rental policies for urban poor/migrants.
- Climate-resilient infrastructure & disaster preparedness.
- Digital governance platforms for service delivery & participation.
- Strengthening of municipal finance through property tax reforms, user charges, and PPPs.

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