

## 'URBAN GOVERNANCE PLANS NEED LINKAGE'

Relevant for: null | Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies incl. Migration & Smart Cities

*Director of the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) Hitesh Vaidya says it is important to review the approach towards urban planning, which has been given a lot of importance in Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget speech. He says policies by the Centre, the State and at the city-level need to be linked. Excerpts:*

**Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a high-level committee, five centres of excellence and a rethinking of urban planning in her Budget 2022-2023 speech. How do you see these announcements?**

This was the first time that 'urban' came into the policy decision in any of the Budgets in the past 25 years of my career. That urban took such prominence in the decisions and had so much place in her speech itself shows the importance. When our cities are growing and we are saying that by 2050, 50% of India's population will be urban, then it also shows that we are recognising that India is no longer going to be a rural economy and is moving towards an urban economy. Unless we start looking at urban very seriously, we will be missing the bus.

**Has the Budgetary allocation shown this focus?**

The PMAY scheme has got roughly a 37% increase. There has been an increase in the Smart Cities Mission, which is coming to an end by 2023. So, there may be planning for new missions. A lot of the emphasis of her speech was on structural reform, like modernising building bylaws, looking at urban planning and design process, transit-oriented development, etc. Those areas have to be looked at by think tanks like NIUA. Her emphasis was on structural reform rather than operational reform.

**What role would NIUA have then?**

First, is that we need to come up with strategies and standards.

Second, we need to come up with tools and templates that they [States and cities] can start using.

NIUA, based on our learnings from different projects, can be an aggregator or knowledge provider to the more than 4,000 urban local bodies.

The thing is that being a think tank, we talk about resilient cities, child-friendly cities, climate-friendly cities, but one thing we also need to look at is, after the 74th Constitutional Amendment, who will do it, how will cities be governed? I think that is an area where we need to bring much more focus. If the 74th Amendment has lived its life, then what is the new way of looking at it?

**Will it require an amendment, and what would you say on the State vs Centre political battles that we have seen when it comes to implementation and monitoring of some urban missions?**

I don't think it would need legislative action. I think we need a management intervention... Every mission, for example, Swachh Bharat Mission, it has its own assessment through Swachh Survekshan; Smart Cities Mission has its own assessment framework.

I think the time has come that we start coming up with India's integrated urban assessment framework. We need to apply management tools. The last diagnostic study of urban in the country was done in 1982, when the last National Commission on Urban happened. So I think as a think tank, we need to conduct a diagnostic study, and based on that, we need to come up with the policy controls for future directions of urbanisation.

*(For full interview, log on to [bit.ly/vaidyainterview](http://bit.ly/vaidyainterview))*

If the 74th Amendment has lived its life, then what is the new way of looking at it?

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