

HERITAGE TO SUSTAINABILITY, UN-HABITAT LAYS OUT PLAN FOR PINK CITY

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Urban development: Jawaharlal Nehru Marg with the World Trade Park visible in the background. Special Arrangement

Posing a challenge for urban planners, UN-Habitat has identified multi-hazard vulnerabilities, urban sprawl, weak urban mobility and “green-blue disconnect” as the pressing issues for Jaipur city.

Though Rajasthan’s capital has received a high sustainability rating, government agencies have their task cut out to deal with the city’s expansion.

The global body has based its findings on a sustainable cities integrated approach pilot project, as part of which the “sustainable urban planning and management” component was implemented in collaboration with the Jaipur Development Authority and Jaipur Greater Municipal Corporation.

Sustainability Rating

Jaipur has received an overall sustainability rating of three on the Urban Sustainability Assessment Framework (USAF) on the basis of data collected for 87 of its 131 parameters. Experts have identified urban sectors where the city needs to pay maximum attention, and made recommendations to increase its green cover, strengthen urban biodiversity, and enhance the quality of life for citizens.

UN-Habitat’s city coordinator Ankit Gupta told *The Hindu* that a few critical issues related to the city’s urban development had been identified to propose strategic interventions and promote sustainable development.

The project has received funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF-6) to estimate the carbon sequestration potential of Indian cities.

Mitigating urban sprawl remains a major challenge in the State capital, with the UN body emphasising the concept of a compact city with re-development and re-densification of the existing urban areas.

As an indirect measure to curb development on the city’s outskirts, linking the distance from the main city to the development charges imposed on citizens could be considered.

Better facility

Mr. Gupta said that since the city had weak access to a public transportation system, with less number of buses and poor route delineation, fare integration for different modes of transport would make movement convenient, and reduce traffic and vehicle emissions. Non-motorised transport infrastructure should also be strengthened in the city, he said.

The project found that there are about 800 dry wells in Jaipur’s Walled City that could be used as rainwater harvesting structures.

This would raise the water table, mitigate urban floods and ensure efficient utilisation of water resources, as Jaipur has been facing extreme cases of drought during summer as well as urban floods, according to the project's findings.

New proposals

In order to increase green cover and promote biodiversity, “eco-trails” have been proposed across the city, with plantation along natural drainage channels and railway tracks.

Interestingly, Jaipur's urban greenery is concentrated towards the city centre with the Central Park, Ram Niwas Garden, Deer Park and Golf Club situated there, while newly developed areas lack green cover, generating the urban heat island effect and disrupting biodiversity.

Consultation necessary

Architecture and planning expert Nand Kumar said at a stakeholders' consultation organised by UN-Habitat here that town planners should develop a model to demonstrate to the people and the government how the issues in achieving sustainability could be tackled and urban greenery expanded.

Tourism & Wildlife Society of India (TWSI) secretary Harsh Vardhan said the authorities should start quantifying oxygen produced and carbon dioxide released daily in each urban complex to plan for raising new greens. Urban development should not just embrace cement-steel structures, he added.

Mr. Vardhan said the next crucial aspect would be the selection of floral species for urban areas, as only indigenous, broad-leaved and tap-root trees would produce more shade and oxygen for the city residents.

“Urban bodies grossly undermine such species and instead plant exotic vegetation, which tends to be unhealthy for the citizens,” he said.

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