



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**WHY SMART CITIES HAVE
TURNED INTO SINKING STREETS?**

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Context

- A decade after the launch of the **Smart Cities Mission (SCM)**, which aimed to transform 100 Indian cities into models of efficiency and sustainability, the **floods in several Indian cities** revealed the fragile infrastructure and selective beautification, instead of resilient cities.

About Smart Cities Mission (SCM)

- It was launched in June 2015 with the aim to transform 100 cities into urban models that are citizen-friendly, sustainable, and technologically advanced.
- It is designed to align with other national initiatives like **AMRUT, Swachh Bharat Mission, Digital India, and Housing for All**, ensuring integrated urban growth.
- It has delivered impressive outcomes — smart roads, **Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs)**, and digital infrastructure, with over 1.64 lakh crore sanctioned across 8,000+ projects.

Concerns & Issues Highlighted

- **Urban Pressure:** According to the **World Bank**, India's urban population is set to **nearly double** from 480 million in 2020 to **951 million by 2050**.
 - ♦ Megacities like Delhi and Mumbai continue to swell, while **Tier-2 cities** such as Bhubaneswar, Indore, and Coimbatore emerge **as new growth centres**.
 - ♦ Cities, because of urban pressure, are like to face the problem like **choked drainage systems** due to unplanned construction; **housing shortages** leading to informal settlements; and **transport failures** under surging traffic;
- **Shifted Priorities:** Smart Cities Mission (SCM) invested in **small islands of 'smartness'** — digitised streetlights, refurbished flyovers, and centralised command centres, instead of building resilience.
 - ♦ **Core issues** like flooding, drainage, and affordable housing remained unaddressed.
 - ♦ It missed the chance to create sustainable **satellite towns** capable of absorbing migration, by prioritising cosmetic upgrades.
- **Resilience Gap:** The **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)** was designed to complement Smart Cities Mission (SCM) by addressing issues like water supply, sewerage, stormwater drains, and green spaces.
 - ♦ Cities still face **crippling monsoon paralysis**, despite higher allocations in its second phase (2.9 lakh crore).
 - ♦ The problem lies in slow execution along with the **siloed planning** — with different schemes tackling isolated issues, rarely integrated into a coherent strategy.
- **Overlooking Greenfield Opportunities:** Most SCM efforts focused on retrofitting existing metros, while Greenfield opportunities like building new, holistic urban centres were sidelined.
 - ♦ Industrial hubs under the **National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP)** leaned towards finance and industry rather than inclusive, housing-led growth.
- **Structural Challenges:** Cities were required to set up **Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs)** — corporate entities led by bureaucrats or private stakeholders — to execute projects.
 - ♦ It **bypassed elected municipal bodies**, raising concerns about democratic accountability and citizen participation.

Smart Cities Mission and Flood Management

- **Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF):** It was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).
 - ♦ It evaluates cities on their readiness to tackle climate change, including flood risks, through indicators like water management, urban planning, and biodiversity.

- ♦ It includes:
 - Stormwater monitoring via **Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA)** systems;
 - Area-based development projects that include green infrastructure and permeable surfaces;
 - Knowledge products and case studies documenting scalable flood mitigation strategies

Way Forward

- **Creating, Not Retrofitting:** India's urban policy needs to **pivot from retrofitting to creating**, and to build **new, resilient, and affordable cities** that attract both people and investment, **like Shenzhen**.
 - ♦ Progress should be measured by **ease of living, affordability, and governance**.
- **Fiscal Incentives for Growth:** To make new cities viable, governments could adopt fiscal innovations:
 - ♦ **Lower property taxes and stamp duties** in early years;
 - ♦ **Streamlined approvals** for housing and business;
 - ♦ **Incentives for sustainable construction;**
- **Realigning Smart Cities Mission (SCM) with India's Evolving Urban Challenges:**
 - ♦ Re-centering citizen participation in planning and monitoring;
 - ♦ Expanding pan-city solutions beyond digital dashboards to include climate adaptation, affordable housing, and inclusive mobility;
 - ♦ Strengthening municipal capacity and integrating SPVs with local governance;
 - ♦ Prioritizing sustainability through nature-based solutions and green infrastructure;
 - ♦ Ensuring equitable development that reaches beyond central business districts and elite zones;

Source: BL

Daily Mains Practice Question

Q. Critically examine how the Smart Cities Mission has contributed to urban flooding in India. Discuss the role of infrastructure planning, governance models, and environmental sustainability.