

T. N. DHAR

URBAN PROBLEMS

Global and Indian Trends

CITIES AND towns truly are engines of growth. They are the main drivers of economic progress and wealth generation. It is in these localities that the division of labour is at its apogee. Urbanization is afoot, spreading over the world. This is the trend we witness in India, too. Although only 30 per cent of the world's population lives now in urban agglomerations. In India, 30 per cent people reside in cities and towns. Uttar Pradesh is comparatively less urbanized at around 21.5 per cent or so, but, the rate of growth of urban population is much higher (32.0% in the decade 1991-2001) than the State's demographic growth as a whole. Nearly 40 million people now live in U.P.'s urban areas (2009) and their number is rising.

Urban Demography of U.P.

Nationally 27.78 per cent of India's population lived in urban areas in 2001. Some States are on a faster growth curve in this respect. Higher urban populations, e.g., Maharashtra (42.4%), Tamil Nadu (38.03%) and West Bengal (38.03%). Table -1 shows the categories of Urban Local Bodies and their population as of 2001.

TABLE 1 ULB CATEGORIES AND THEIR POPULATION IN U.P. (2001)

S.No.	Category	No.	Population
1.	Nagar Nigams (Municipal Corporations.)	12	13.72
2.	Nagar Palika Parishads (Municipalities)	194	12.83
3.	Nagar Panchayats (Town Areas)	417	6.02
4.	Other Urban Areas	137	1.94
	Total	760	34.61

NOTE: Other Urban Areas include Cantt. Boards, Census Towns, Outgrowths and Townships

SOURCE: Census, 2001.

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Table 2 reflects the trends of urbanization in U.P. since 1951.

TABLE 2 URBAN DEMOGRAPHIC GROWTH IN U.P.
(Population in millions)

Year	Total Population	Urban Population	Urban Population as % of total Population	Decimal of Urban Population (%)	Growth
1951	63.22	8.62	13.6	23.7	
1961	73.75	9.48	12.9	10.0	
1971	88.34	12.39	14.0	30.7	
1981*	105.25	19.01	18.06	53.4+	
1991*	132.06	25.97	19.67	36.6	
2001*	166.05	34.51	20.78	32.9	

*: Figures are for U.P. as reorganized after the carving out of Uttarakhand from it in 2000.

+: Decennial growth in the decade 1971-81 is an overstatement due to definitional changes made in what are termed as urban agglomerations

SOURCE: Censuses of India.

Pressures on ULBs

- Growing demographic pressures exacerbated by incessant in-migration. People from rural areas and small towns move to cities/metropolitan areas in search of employment. In such migration both pull and push factors operate;
- Rise of consumerism, urban construction explosion, high income surpluses and expensive lifestyles. Sharpening economic inequalities;
- Difficulties in assessing accurately basic environmental infrastructure needs and services in view of quickly changing urban scenarios;
- Poor sanitation; lack of sewage and drainage facilities; waste and effluent disposal problems, air water and noise pollution that are on the rise;
- Water supply deficiencies in qualitative and quantitative terms and in terms of dependability and duration of supplies as per norms. Conjunctive uses of surface and ground water are, by and large, missing.;

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- (vi) Poor city planning and declining green cover;
- (vii) Waste disposal deficiencies (solid and liquid wastes). Here, the problems faced are both inadequate collections as well as safe disposal of household, commercial, institutional, industrial and hazardous wastes. Such disposal would have to, for example, also include recycling, energy production, production of farm yard manure, etc. The problem of safe disposal of bio-medical wastes is, particularly, much more difficult;
- (viii) Urbanisation is transforming landscapes, affecting local ecosystems and disrupting ecological balance on a large scale. The hinterlands, too, are, in many ways the victims of such consequences;
- (ix) Rising levels of air, water and noise pollution;
- (x) Traffic, vehicular and of other types, is explosively increasing in cities and towns giving rise to congestion, more accidents and increasing air and noise pollution and consequent health problems, accidents, road rage and casualties. Blatant road encroachments worsen such problems;
- (xi) Health problems are also rising in the form of polluted air and impure water related diseases, stress, depression, obesity and other lifestyle sicknesses;
- (xii) Noise pollution is incessantly up and, in some ways becoming intolerable and resulting in many adverse health consequences;
- (xiii) ULBs suffer from marked managerial and capacity building deficiencies and lack of empowerment. Poor financial management, lack of accrual accounting, limited uses of ICT technologies and computerization;
- (xiv) Severe resource constraints are faced by ULBs. Their tax and non-tax assignments are limited and their devolutions still low. Most of them are financially weak and, therefore, are not able to get credit ratings so as to tap institutional finances; and
- (xv) The quality of public services provided is not up to the mark and one major cause of it is absence of e-Governance;

The above factors represent only an illustrative listing. These are, however, some of the core areas in respect of which civic bodies face acute problems in developmental, environmental, safety, sustainability and citizen satisfaction contexts.

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Urban Governance, Constraints of Resources, Organisational Capacities and Lack of ULB Empowerment

Resources

Own resources of urban local bodies in U.P. are low. Devolution funds received and grants are limited. These bodies have not been able to obtain credit ratings so as to be able to tap institutional finances. The measures needed for improving ULB resources include the widening and deepening of their tax assignments, mobilizing additional tax and non-tax resources, more of devolution from the states and Central Government, tapping of institutional resources, achieving cost reductions and going in for public-private partnerships. ULBs face another handicap in resource contexts. Such bodies normally are able to raise very considerable resources from land development and city expansion. This function, in many of medium and large cities in the State, are assigned to non-elected Development Authorities which are government controlled bodies. Then there are a number of parastatals which perform what should be the functions of ULBs. That, further, curtails their resource base as well as capacities.

Governance

Managing cities is much more difficult than managing rural areas. Cities are highly diverse and rapidly evolving structures where managerial as well as technical problems are very complex and require specialist knowledge and experience as well as overall administrative and organizational abilities and vision. Unfortunately urban local bodies in the State are very poorly manned in terms of knowledge, capacities, training and skills. Financial management abilities are low or missing. The presently obtaining income-expenditure accounting system is outdated and does not reflect the true financial state of a ULB. Professionally trained and groomed city managers are hard to find. So are tax administrators, city planners, health specialists, environmental and financial managers and urban engineers. Data bases are weak, incomplete and largely not updated. Computerization and use of information and communication technologies have yet to permeate the system. Monitoring, evaluation and timely application of correctives are other areas of weakness. Training facilities are highly deficient. In fact there is no State level training academy or institution for urban managerial, supervisory and field staff or for elected representatives and office bearers of ULBs. This is a serious gap in HRD terms. In short, urban governance in UP is of a distinctly low quality and keeping in view the growing complexities of city management, this is an area crying for priority based interventions.

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Empowerment

Despite the enactment of the 74th Constitutional Amendment and subsequent conformity laws enacted by the State Government, progress in the devolution of functions, functionaries and funds has either not been made or it has been done very slowly, haltingly and inadequately. The extent of real devolution, delegation and decentralization is as yet highly limited and does not reflect the spirit of the 74th Constitutional Amendment brought about over a decade and a half ago in 1992. The fact of the matter is that the State Government has retained, in many forms, control over municipal bodies and, at the same time, some other organizations and parastatals have been assigned ULB functions. The net result is that ULBs are yet to be duly empowered. Until that happens they will find it difficult to perform their rightful tasks effectively.

Other Main Problems

Apart from governance inadequacies, resource constraints and the needed empowerment deficiencies the other main problems faced by ULBs relate to city planning and expansion, intolerable traffic congestion, waste disposal, providing of essential services like sanitation, clean and potable drinking water, street lighting, road systems, drainage and sewerage, parking facilities, making available greenery and tree cover areas and open spaces as urban breathing lungs, control of air, water and noise pollution, slum management, etc.

Protection of Cultural Resources and Heritage Sites

Cultural resources like archaeological and historical sites, religious monuments, heritage buildings and open spaces are important elements of the urban environment. Unplanned urban development often causes damage to such resources and degrades the aesthetic, historical and cultural ethos of urban communities. There is an urgent need of preserving such invaluable resources. These are essential and vital components of urban development and urban renewal.

Urban Renewal

Urban renewal is a much more important need and necessity. Cities and towns have generally grown and expanded out of core areas. Most of these face the problems of old structures, narrow roads and infrastructural deficiencies. Environments in such areas deteriorate and cause multiple problems relating to quality of life, health standards and social accord. Urban renewal is, therefore, a clear priority area in social, economic as well as environmental contexts. That would, *inter alia*, include rehabilitation of old buildings, conservation of heritage areas, structures and historic architecture,

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slum redevelopment, greening, relocations, etc. Urban renewal usually comprises of three strategies; Redevelopment, Rehabilitation and Conservation. Its essential objectives would include:

- (a) To improve functional efficiencies and, in turn, quality of life for people;
- (b) Improve the city environment;
- (c) Conservation of important buildings and structures of historical, architectural and archaeological importance;
- (d) Pedestrianisation of some roads and restrictions on vehicular traffic. Introduction of heritage walks;
- (e) Development or relocation of slum areas; and
- (f) Creation of open spaces by relocation of activities and reshaping of shopping facilities.

The overall approach to urban renewal has to be accompanied by people's acceptance and involvement. It has to be gradual, incremental, design-driven, zoning regulated, humane process that maximizes local participation. Experts define this kind of an approach as Urban Husbandry. Renewal strategies would also have to adopt spatial planning. The main urban spaces generally are:

- (a) *Entry and Exit Spaces:* Railway and metro stations, airports, bus terminals, roads, bridges, flyovers, underpasses, etc.,
- (b) *Living Spaces:* Residential areas and colonies,
- (c) *Recreational Spaces:* Parks, zoological gardens, river fronts, esplanades, cinemas, theatres, museums, stadia, multiplexes, city forests, nature parks, sheet waters, gardens, etc.,
- (d) *Activity Space:* Industrial and commercial areas, markets, malls, hotels, fountains, sports grounds, institutional areas, educational areas, research facilities, service stations, labs, hospitals, etc.,
- (e) *Circulation Spaces:* City squares (chowks), grounds, main arterial roads, esplanades, temple complexes, memorials, markets, parks, water fronts, churches, mosques, gurudwaras, etc.,
- (f) *Special Spaces:* Unique spaces associated with a city, e.g. Kaisarbagh, Chowk, Residency, Husseinabad and Dilkusha in Lucknow; Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri and Agra Fort in Agra; Sangam, Civil Lines and Fort in Allahabad; Ghats in Varanasi, etc in the State.
- (g) *Heritage Spaces:* Like Forts, Imambaras, Temples, Mosques, and important heritage sites like the Taj, Kausambi, Sravasti, Ayodhya, Prayag, Vrindavan, Mathura, Chitrakut, Sarnath, etc in U.P.

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Greening of Cities

Haphazard urbanization imposes severe environmental burdens on cities. One of the negative results is that green cover in urban settlements has diminished and, at places, even practically vanished, yielding place to tree-and-grass-bereft concrete jungles. Metros and cities have become oxygen deficient. Open spaces have shrunk. Rivers, water sheets, ponds, urban wetlands, and wells are in a state of decline. Cities need lungs; they need open spaces, grounds, parks and water bodies. They need fresh air and clean water for the good health of their denizens. That requires, among other things, adequate greening. It is the view of experts that about one third of a city's area should have green cover and open spaces. This objective needs to be proactively factored into city planning both from environmental as also aesthetic view points. In fact one would like to suggest that green accounting should inform urban planning in which physical and economic measurements must take into account the effects of all the transactions of production and consumption of the environment.

E-GOVERNANCE AND USE OF ICT IN ULBs

e- Governance

Development of information and communication technologies in the last four to five decades has ushered in a new era in human history. The Information Age has arrived and created tremendous opportunities for progress. Its role in economic and social spheres of development is expanding fast. These technologies have become powerful tools for realizing the goals of development more quickly, more equitably and at less cost. They enable speedy decision-making, effective monitoring and ready, corrective interventions. India has been using ICTs for years now. The national IT law was enacted in 2000 and is under revision now. Legal status has been given to electronic records and digital signatures. The Government of U.P. has set up a separate IT & E-Dept which has also come out with its policy document. Advances in ICT have made it possible to provide a wide range of services in the form of video, voice and data content through single communication channels and easy as well as extended connectivity. This has opened multiple possibilities in areas like e-Governance, natural resource management, market information, financial services, maintenance of and access to correct land and property records, registration of deeds, taxation, providing of delivery systems and services, etc. The possibilities are immense. The Government of U.P. has laid special emphasis on completing speedily and operationalizing the State Wide Area Network (SWAN) and the setting up of tele-centres, tele-kiosks, cyber cafes and DTP booths for maximizing the coverage of the IT base in the State. It is proposed to establish about 10,000 Knowledge Centres under a

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national plan umbrella. The crux lies in its operationalization on the one hand and to greatly expand e-Governance related literacy on the other, so that enabling and empowering electronic networking can reach maximum benefits to people and provide redress when and where needed.

The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) reflects the importance attached to ICTs by the Central Government. The scope of G2G and G2C (Government to Government and Government to Community) applications is immense and expanding. First there is need to train government, ULB, PRI, PSU and institutional cadres. Simultaneously, a massive effort at expanding computer literacy of citizens is called for. IT has to be made an essential component of school and college curricula. There is, at the same time, need to train and orient peoples' elected representatives in Gram Panchayats, ULBs and Legislatures. Other States like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal have moved ahead much faster in expanding the scope, reach and coverage of e-Governance. U.P. has to catch up much ground in this area. It has a policy that is awaiting effective implementation and operationalisation.

Planned, sustainable and people as well as environment-friendly development, quick easy and dependable access to services, safety and speed, citizen facilitation and participation and revenue as well as expenditure efficiencies are some of the key issues confronting city administrations in general. One of the crucial areas for making urban administration, and public services it is expected to deliver quickly, and affordably, is the adoption and use of e-Governance methods and techniques and modernized equipment and connectivity required for the purpose. ITCs can be used to clear advantage for activity areas like in-house administrative work in urban local bodies, revenue (tax and non-tax) assessment and collections, financial management, human resources management and development, monitoring of environmental indicators and the taking of needed preventive and curative measures to ensure that the measureable factors which contribute to negative impacts are below prescribed legal and scientific norms, and for ensuring that the quality of basic services delivered by local bodies (these can be water supply, sanitation, waste disposal, street lighting, sewerage, drainage, etc) are dependable, efficient and fairly priced. These are some of the functional areas where e-Governance, by utilizing the wide and rich gamut of available information and communication technologies, can be of immense advantage both to the service providers as also the users of such services. It is now well recognized that ICTs clearly have a tremendous potential for enhancing the quality of management, reducing costs and improving public satisfaction in urban local government bodies.

Let us here take a look at the categorization of municipal functions from

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the information technologies (IT) perspective. These can be classified into three broad areas;

- (a) Local Government to Citizen, or Business or to Government (External) (G to G.G to C, or GtoB)
- (b) Local Government to its own Personnel (Internal)
- (c) Local Government to Local Government (Intra-governmental)

In the above contexts, the primary task of an urban local body would be to have a Land and Property Inventory (LPI) and Citizen Data Integration (CDI) with periodic updating arrangements. The former (LPI) makes it possible to undertake scientific city planning and assess taxes and fees properly, while the latter (CDI) enables the body to increase efficiency, reduce error rates, reduce chances of frauds and take faster as also higher quality decisions leading to better outcomes and much more satisfying customer experience.

Services & Backend Processes

There are multiple types of services that ULBs make available to citizens. These can vary in number depending on citizen needs, capacities of service providers and the effective functional assignment of these bodies according to laws of the State Government. Let us remember here that the functional assignment of ULBs as per 12th Schedule of the Constitution (adopted in 1992) is enabling and indicative, not mandatory. It is for the concerned State Government to assign functions in real terms and, further, also to make it possible for these bodies to have funds and functionaries so as to discharge their obligations properly.

Local Government to Citizen (G 2 C)

For operationalising an effective delivery system, a ULB should render services to citizens quickly and, in the process, also, reduce costs. Depending on services being provided, all citizen interactions should be integrated and ideally be a 24x7 arrangement. Let us cite a few examples here. In Andhra Pradesh the e-Seva project is delivering more than 20 citizen-centric services (which include ULB services as well). The Municipal Corporation of Delhi, in health sector alone, has accomplished digitization in areas like registration of births and deaths, digitization of records, online institutional registration, health related licenses registration, a disease surveillance system, a hospital information system, e-tendering, e-procurement and a grievance redressal system. The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation is using IT for citizen-administration interface, providing of a G 2 C web platform for payment of taxes and non-tax dues, birth and death registrations, building plan application processing, e-tendering, financial management and a real time Citizen Forum.

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In providing these services, the essential needs are: accessibility, transparency, accountability and responsiveness. The second aspect is that of a decentralized and dispersed arrangement of service providing facilities and locations. This is where franchisee systems based on public-private partnerships can play, a citizen-facilitating role. The e - Suidha experiment in cities like Lucknow is an example of this type but this system has to be widely dispersed and expanded through privately owned computerised service centres. Lokvani in district Sitapur of U.P. is another example of this type of an initiative. Such decentralized systems need reasonableness of costs, dependability of service and reliable, well-organised back office support, which these lack in varying degrees at present.

Local Government to Business (G 2 B)

ULBs also provide services to businesses, industries and commercial establishments. Such establishments generally fall into two categories —(i) those from which revenue is generated like, for example, through trade licenses, fees, rents, etc. and, (ii) those vendors that provide services and goods to local bodies through the processes of procurement, tendering, contracting, etc. Procurement, and tendering for the purpose, are frequent and regular tasks of urban local bodies. e-Procurement as also e-Tendering, it is well recognized now, hold immense potential in terms of effectively and efficiently leveraging information technologies to centralize and standardize the procurement and tendering functions. By doing so, the functions like purchasing, contracting and even outsourcing can get streamlined, become transparent and cost less.

Local Government to its Employees

Human resources in any local body are a major and valuable asset. Efficient and optimal utilization of this asset is an important and essential method for an effective municipal administration. In other words good human capital is a major driving force for better and economic ULB management. According to HR experts, development of an integrated, computerized and interactive human resources system with provision for self-service, covering areas like pay roll and other service applications (e.g. leave, provident fund, loans, retirement benefits, training and capability upgradation, duty rosters, etc) is bound to increase the value proposition of such services provided to employees, improve their satisfaction levels and productivity, reduce administrative costs and also make more time available to deploy the staff for strategic activities.

Financial Management

ULBs are now required to shift *over*, in a phased manner, to accrual accounting.

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The National Municipal Accounting Manual lays down guidelines and procedures for such a transition. This is another area where software solutions can be put in place for—

- (i) Financial data development, its periodic updating and projections,
- (ii) Integrated budget management,
- (iii) Expenditure control,
- (iv) Fund accounting,
- (v) Maintenance of cash-and-accrual based sets of books,
- (vi) Management, in financial contexts, of projects, grants and programmes.

Geographical Information System (GIS) and Spatial Data

Geographical Information System (GIS) is a tool that addresses the problem of the use and management of natural resources (which includes land) and environment. It integrates bio-physical and socio-economic data and generates strategy options for resource uses. One of the essential elements of a complete e-Governance solution for a ULB includes GIS. The objective is to develop a system to facilitate strategic planning and resource mobilization and utilization, streamlining municipal taxation and making scientific medium and long-term city planning possible. GIS, generally speaking, has four kinds of applications:

- (i) *Revenue Mapping:* It provides accurate information in respect of municipal taxes, fees and charges leviable on assesseees and helps improve collections of revenue;
- (ii) *ULB Infrastructure Mapping :* It helps city planning and city management;
- (iii) *Resources/Asset Mapping:* It details assets for optimum utilization and, consequently, better services to citizens;
- (iv) *Poverty Mapping:* It shows socio-economic conditions of poor households, enabling ULBs to target such areas for providing services.

In Uttar Pradesh introduction and adoption of e-Governance in ULBs has begun but, as of now, its pace is slow and its reach limited. Some progress has been made but it is sporadic and has not yet permeated ULB managements or become universal in citizen awareness and use contexts. The reasons are not far to see why the take-off has not yet occurred. First, citizen computer literacy in the State is still low. This is true also of the municipal personnel at nearly all levels. Things are changing now. At the national level the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) has launched a

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Mission Mode on Project for e-Governance in Municipalities (MMP) under Jawahar Lal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) umbrella across the country. The JNNURM which, at present, covers 63 large sized ULBs in India (7 in U.P) and is funded in a major way by the Central Government, makes e-Governance a mandatory reform required to be undertaken in the selected cities. At present MMP on e-Governance will cover 35 cities with population of over one million as per census of 2001. The plan is to expand its coverage based on experience gathered in the already selected 35 municipalities and outcomes achieved.

CONCLUSION

The scope of and market for e-Governance in ULBs is expanding in the country at a fast pace. Most major software providers have entered into this market and are providing solutions for diverse purposes. These efforts, supported by policy, resources, training of municipal personnel and increased citizens' computer literacy, should help in inducting and expanding city based single window systems that can vastly improve the quality of urban services provided to people, reduce costs and improve citizen satisfaction. These very initiatives can also greatly improve the quality of management in ULBs, their planning and operational capacities and their productivity and efficiency. The rapid pace of technological developments (in ICT field) has resulted in the integration of computers and telecommunications to unfold within governments, local bodies, public undertakings, business and industrial establishments, educational systems and common citizen collectivities. ICTs are efficient, low cost, time saving and better information and service providing means capable of achieving quantum leaps and enabling governments (including of course local governments) to enhance and transform relations with citizens, businesses, institutions and other types of agencies as well as with other governments. Uttar Pradesh and its ULBs have to seize the opportunity. They just cannot afford to miss the boat!