

NEED FOR POLICY INTERVENTION TO MAKE URBAN ECONOMY SUSTAINABLE

All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIIILSG), in collaboration with CityNet, organized a webinar on 'Making Urban Economic Development Sustainable' on July 23. This was the second webinar in a series of monthly webinars. Other supporting organisations are Foundation EMDA Southasia and 3R Waste Foundation.

TEAM URBAN UPDATE

The venerable panel for the event comprised of Raj Liberhan, former Director, India Habitat Centre (IHC); Dr Kamla Kant Pandey, Professor (Urban Management), Coordinator, Centre for Urban studies, Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA); Dr Lekha S Chakraborty, Professor, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP); and Amarjot Singh Bedi, former President, Una Municipal Committee. The event was moderated by Abhishek Pandey, Editor, Urban Update.

Pandey began by talking about the steep decline in India's economic performance post-pandemic and how returning to normalcy is a huge challenge. "The health and education infrastructure received the biggest hit, and almost collapsed. However, cities in post pandemic times are trying their level best to revive and renew their priorities. Efforts are being made to bring economy at its normal pace and also move ahead towards becoming sustainable," said Pandey. He added that for achieving SDGs, cities have to be economically resilient, and the central government is improvising conducive structures for enterprises and businesses to flourish. He spelled out the following discussion points for the speakers to discuss during the webinar: local economic development and sustainability, importance of resource and energy efficiency, building conducive environment for revamping

and renewing sustainable practices, and engagement of ULBs.

The first speaker, Raj Liberhan began by mentioning that making anything sustainable is a formidable task. "It is not the outcome but the underpinning of any policy, or implementation, which adds up to sustainability," he said. Addressing the concern for populated cities and their corresponding growth, he said that cities will be populated and economy will expand, but the ability to let people pursue excellence in this very ambience and in accordance to the expansion is the only key to prosperity for the cities. "COVID-19 destroyed lives and lakhs fell victim to it. Nobody knew the answers to this unprecedented situation. But do we have answers now?" Liberhan exclaimed. He mentioned points which can be extremely prudent for economic revival of the shock-ridden cities. While saying that hygiene should be made a matter of utmost priority across the country, he emphasized on skill development and better connectivity. He pointed out the discrepancies and redundancies in laws that govern us and focused on how social infrastructure can only thrive when there is a linkage of culture, cohesion and coexistence. Towards the end of his talk, he mentioned how reinvention of solutions is the need of the hour to keep the systems running and how mutual compatibility between users and governance objectives are crucial to economic growth.

Dr KK Pandey took the discussion further with a city specific case study. The case study was based on

'Engagement of stakeholders for waste management: Bengaluru'. He based his argument on a global focus, which included urbanization, productivity and the environment. He added that in order to revive economies, extra budgetary support and increased participation of stakeholders is important. A quantum jump in resources is the need of the hour. He talked in length about initiatives undertaken by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) like setting up of dry waste collection centers across the city, and creation of ward committees who will be surveying disposal of waste. He acknowledged the initiatives of the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and the Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY), which are focused on establishing infrastructure that can ensure adequate robust sewage networks and water supply for urban transformation by implementing urban revival projects, bringing together urban planning, economic growth and heritage conservation, eradicating the



For video of the webinar, scan the QR Code



public action should be established,” Dr Chakraborty said while concluding her speech.

The final panelist, Amarjot Singh Bedi, being a former elected leader of an urban local body (ULB), addressed all concerns and suggestions made by others. He started by emphasizing how ULBs are the only link between people and the government, which is hampered from time to time because of systematic dissolving of powers held by municipal corporations with the help of recurring constitutional amendments. He talked about the housing scheme implemented in Una district of Himachal Pradesh, which was a powerful and successful scheme. After monitoring the situation during the pandemic, he suggested that population control can be a beneficial tool in sustaining resources and facilitating implementation of policies. He said that Una is a small town with a small population and therefore the implementation of schemes and adherence to norms and guidelines during COVID-19 was slightly easier than in the rest of the country. “The pandemic infiltrated our lives, our education system, our health infrastructure; no one was spared,” Bedi said. Contradictions in laws which govern us could also be seen as one the major impediments in growth and in becoming fully sustainable. He stressed that people should start taking ULBs seriously and that the government should consult them more often. He also suggested that the extravagant construction of flyovers should be minimized and more innovative ways of solving urban issues must be adopted so that lives of people are not hampered. The webinar was successful in addressing issues in making urban economy sustainable from all perspectives – that of urban experts, of elected representatives, and of on-ground workers. An important point that came to light is that in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030, countries need to come together to sustainably grow their urban centres. Only then will they be able to ensure long-term growth. ■

problems of poor sanitation and waste management. He signed off with a few measures which can be implemented at the neighborhood level for proper disposal of waste such as cost effective and environment friendly methods of composting of waste. He also stressed on how communities and civic bodies should work in solidarity towards the aim of sustainability.

Dr Lekha Chakraborty then joined the discussion and flagged her first point. She highlighted the need for us to expand our focus and believe in fiscal decentralization. She pointed out that the ‘one size fits all’ paradigm of growth is wrong. She was of the viewpoint that flexibility of finances is crucial for economic development and proposed mobilisation of tax and

revenue handles from Centre to state governments as one of the ways that could resolve the problem of paucity of funds. In her talk, she referred to the importance of climate change and said that the European Central Bank has emphasized climate change beyond economic development. Furthermore, she suggested climate responsive budgeting to be incorporated in the system as this could be used as a public management tool and it should include urban as well as rural spheres. She then talked of the humanitarian crisis that people are confronted with in these tough times and suggested affordable housing policies to be improvised and implemented for the same. “Growth with equity should be our motto where a link between public policy and