

India was 131 out of 188 nations on the Human Development Index report published by the United Nations Development Programme[1]. Further, the report stated that approximately 642 Indians lived in multidimensional poverty[2]. Even though with rapid urbanisation, there is still population, approximately 69 per cent, which is devoid of the fruits of this urbanisation and resides in remote areas, where digital knowledge, governance infrastructure, and network connectivity are weak[3]. Research reveals that in metropolitan zones, for every six Indians, one lacks adequate housing, 85 million Indians residing in urban areas lack adequate sanitation facilities, and about two-thirds do not have access to clean water[4]. By 2030, if projections are to be believed, Indian cities would house roughly 40% of the total populace and contribute approximately 75% of GDP[5]. Smart cities thus seem to offer a concrete solution to cope with such unparalleled urbanisation.

The Government of India (GoI), recognised the imminent challenges of urbanisation the country is grappling with and hence established the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) in 2015 that promised to lead the country into a “modernised, entrepreneurial, and an endless prosperous future”[6]. According to the 2014 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) election manifesto, the SCM pledged the establishment of 100 new cities sustained by latest technology and infrastructure. The Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) is responsible for the greater goal of the SCM, which is arguably the provision of inclusive and sustainable cities that could provide to its citizens a decent quality of life, digital accessibility, core infrastructure, and a clean and sustainable environment[7]. The SCM is based at fitting in the bigger goal of inclusive development. Cities in the mission would adhere to concepts such as walk to work and sustainability and focus on the specialised domains as well move past the administrative as well as infrastructural deficiencies that plague Indian cities. Further, SCM is believed to have increased the economic growth of the chosen 100 cities.



Gurugram, India

Cities in India are sites of crushing digital divide, exclusions from social services, poverty, and inequality. Digital literacy levels in India are also low with only 18% of the population able to use the Internet. Access to digital space by some individuals may lead to or magnify exclusions. This is because some population's preferences and behaviours may receive minimal or no attention when influential actors choose to redistribute goods and alter private and public institutes[8]. Although the government is aimed at promoting smart cities, it is the citizens who create them. Research also reveals that smart cities can only be enabled by smart citizens MoUD in February 2016 declared that the 100 Smart Cities challenge had begun the procedure of "cityzens becoming netizens." Further, it recounted that approximately 15.2 million individuals had taken part in the Smart City plans' arrangement at varying stages. According to Datta, there is currently a change "from the ordinary citizen to the entrepreneurial, judicious, and tech-savvy citizen, including those who engage and benefit from online systems, such as actively tweeting about the maintenance issues of the city". This shift is aimed at putting more emphasis on the 'smart citizen.' However, some populations still lack access to indispensable services. Therefore, it is important to understand whom smart citizens is referring to [9].



Chandigarh, India

It is not clear whether smart cities will be inclusive of the populace that is on the verge of the environmental, social, or political frontiers of the previously existing cities or whether its success will be based on whom they exclude, whether the substantial lower-middle class and poor populace in India will fit in smart cities and if these technology-based innovations will be useful to them. The tech interventions (smart city missions) can create or magnify exclusions and may simply be irrelevant for the critical issues of poverty and inequality (including spatial forms) as mentioned above. The harsh reality is that India is far from achieving “inclusiveness” as various factors come into play (caste, class, gender, religion) when it comes to accessibility of resources or public utility services in India. The most important task is to produce mechanisms that empower everyone and brings to the forefront the vulnerabilities and challenges of different groups that include the poor, the women, the elderly, children, disabled and the religious and ethnic minorities. It is necessary to highlight the problems in accessibility, affordability, availability of public spaces for these groups and how they use these shared resources in their everyday lives. For smart cities, in India’s case, policymakers should be wary of who stays in these cities and who can enjoy these services and whose access is compromised because of the societal divides present in the country. A city, thus, should aim at being smart and inclusive; it should stress on “equity” and move towards achieving the UNSDG of “leaving no one behind”, but also focus

on “not pushing anyone behind”.

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