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Q11

With a brief background of quality of urban life in India, introduce the objectives and strategy of the 'Smart City Programme.'"

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS I · 12 marks · Indian Heritage and Culture

Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Core demand of the question

- Give a brief picture of the quality of urban life in India
- Then introduce the objectives and the strategy of the Smart City Programme

Revision summary

Indian urban life is marked by slums, intermittent water, congestion, pollution, and weak municipal finance.

The Smart City Mission of 2015 sought core infrastructure, liveability, a cleaner environment, and smart solutions in about 100 cities.

Strategy combined area-based retrofit, redevelopment, or greenfield work with pan-city ICT services.

An SPV and convergence with **AMRUT**, housing, and sanitation missions were the delivery tools.

A showcase pocket does not by itself fix city-wide drains and buses, so execution remains the test.

Introduction

Indian cities create a large share of national income, yet daily life for many residents is crowded, polluted, and poorly served. The Smart City Mission, launched in 2015, tried to raise that quality of life through selected area projects and city-wide services rather than through one giant new capital.

Body**Quality of urban life in India**

- **Census 2011** put more than 370 million people in urban areas, and later estimates show the share still rising, so pressure on housing, water, and transport is structural, not a short boom.
- A large part of the urban poor lives in slums and informal settlements with insecure tenure, shared toilets, and weak solid-waste collection, which is the opposite of a liveable city.
- Piped water is intermittent in many municipal wards; groundwater and tankers fill the gap, while untreated sewage still reaches rivers and lakes.
- Congestion, mixed traffic, and weak public transport raise travel time and air pollution, which the CPCB's National Air Quality Index often flags in Delhi, Kanpur, and other towns.

- Municipal finances are thin; property tax and user charges do not match the cost of roads, drains, and street lights, so service quality stays low even when a city looks busy.
- Floods after short rain, heat islands, and loss of lakes show that urban ecology is part of the quality-of-life crisis, not a side issue.

Objectives of the Smart City Programme

- The Mission aimed to promote cities that provide core infrastructure, a decent quality of life, a clean and sustainable environment, and the application of 'smart' solutions.
- Core infrastructure in the official list included adequate water, assured electricity, sanitation and solid-waste systems, efficient urban mobility, affordable housing, IT connectivity, good governance including e-governance, sustainable environment, safety, health, and education.
- The programme was not meant to rebuild every Indian town at once; it selected about 100 cities through a challenge so that models could be copied.
- Citizen consultation was written into the proposal stage, so the objective was also more responsive local government, not only sensors and cameras.
- **Inclusive cities were named as a goal:** housing and services were to reach the poor, not only a business district.

Strategy of the programme

- **Area-based development was the first pillar:** retrofitting a chosen pocket, redevelopment of a worn inner area, or a greenfield township, so visible change could be shown in a few square kilometres.
- **Pan-city solutions were the second pillar:** one or two ICT-based services such as intelligent traffic, a city command centre, or better metering that cover the whole municipal area.
- Special Purpose Vehicles, usually with the municipal corporation and the state as shareholders, were to plan, bid, and run projects with a mix of central grant, state share, municipal funds, and private capital.
- Convergence with **AMRUT**, Housing for All, **Swachh Bharat**, and **Digital India** was the intended finance and works strategy, so a smart city was a stack of missions, not a stand-alone gadget plan.
- Competitive selection among cities was meant to push states to prepare plans rather than wait for a uniform central template.

Limits that the answer should note

- A small area-based island can raise land values without fixing city-wide drains or buses.
- SPV capacity, land, and municipal politics have slowed several projects, so the strategy is only as strong as local execution.

Way forward for the answer

- Paint urban life as congestion, slums, water, and pollution first, then name 100-city selection, area-based plus pan-city work, and the SPV as the Smart City method.

Flow diagram

Poor urban services slums pollution -> Smart City Mission 2015
Smart City Mission 2015 -> Core infrastructure liveability
Smart City Mission 2015 -> Area based retrofit redevelopment greenfield
Smart City Mission 2015 -> Pan city ICT solutions
Area based retrofit redevelopment greenfield -> SPV plus mission convergence
Pan city ICT solutions -> SPV plus mission convergence

Conclusion

Urban India still offers uneven water, housing, mobility, and air, even as it drives growth. The Smart City Programme set out to lift core services and liveability in about 100 cities through area projects, pan-city digital tools, and an SPV, with other urban missions meant to fill the rest of the map.

Facts & figures

Smart City Mission, 2015

Ministry of Urban Development mission to develop about 100 selected cities with area-based and pan-city projects.

Census 2011 urban population

Over 370 million people counted as urban, showing the scale of the liveability challenge.

Special Purpose Vehicle

Company form used to implement Smart City projects with municipal and state shareholding.

AMRUT

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, the parallel scheme for water, sewerage, and green spaces.

Area-based development

Retrofit, redevelopment, or greenfield work in a defined pocket, the visible first pillar of the Mission.