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Q4

What are 'Smart Cities'? Examine their relevance for urban development in India. Will it increase rural-urban differences? Give arguments for 'Smart Villages' in the light of PURA and RURBAN Mission.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS III · 12 marks · Indian Economy

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Core demand of the question

- Define Smart Cities in the Indian Mission sense
- Examine relevance for urban development
- Argue whether the Mission will widen rural-urban differences
- Give the case for Smart Villages using PURA and the Rurban Mission

Revision summary

Indian Smart Cities combine area-based works and pan-city ICT for water, mobility, housing and e-governance.

They are relevant because cities are congested, under-served and economically central.

If capital stays in 100 cities, rural-urban differences will widen.

PURA sought urban amenities in rural clusters through four connectivities.

The 2016 Rurban Mission is the present cluster vehicle for Smart Villages alongside city Missions.

Introduction

A **Smart City** in the Indian **Smart Cities Mission (2015)** is not only sensors and Wi-Fi. It is an urban area that uses data, area-based retrofitting, greenfield pockets and pan-city ICT to improve **water, mobility, housing, energy and governance**. India is urbanising fast. The Mission is relevant. If it stays a few city islands, **rural-urban differences** will widen unless **Smart Villages** - in the spirit of PURA and the **Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission** - move in parallel.

Body

What Smart Cities are

- The Mission uses **area-based development** (retrofit, redevelopment, greenfield) plus **pan-city** solutions such as intelligent traffic, e-governance and energy meters.
- Core claims are 24x7 water, solid-waste systems, public transport, affordable housing, safety and citizen feedback - **liveability**, not only gadgets.

- Funding mixes Union grants, State and urban-local-body shares, and **public-private** projects, with a Special Purpose Vehicle to implement.

Relevance for urban development

- Indian cities face **congestion, polluted air, leaking pipes, slums and weak municipal finance**. A focused, competitive Mission can demonstrate better service standards.
- **Economic engines** sit in cities: jobs, colleges and hospitals. Smarter logistics and power raise productivity.
- E-governance and open data can cut discretion in building permits and property tax, which ordinary master plans failed to do.
- Relevance is real only if the poor in **notified and non-notified slums** get tenure, water and buses, not only a central business-district makeover.

Will it increase rural-urban differences?

- **Yes, if** public money, skilled staff and private capital concentrate in 100 Mission cities while villages keep leaking schools and seasonal power.
- Migration will then accelerate, and the rural non-farm job base will thin.
- **Not necessarily**, if city success is paired with **rurban clusters** that offer urban amenities without forcing every youth to the metro.
- **The risk is** selection: already-capable municipal corporations win the challenge; weaker towns and villages fall further behind.

Smart Villages: **PURA** and Rurban

- **Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA)**, associated with A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, argued for physical, electronic, knowledge and economic connectivity so a village cluster has roads, telecom, skills and markets.
- The earlier **PURA** scheme under the Ministry of Rural Development had mixed, often weak, private-partner delivery; the idea remained sound.
- **Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (2016)** funds **Rurban clusters**: groups of villages with integrated planning for roads, water, sanitation, skill, agro-processing and digital services, aiming at **urban amenities with rural soul**.
- **Digital India, Gram Jyoti, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana** and e-NAM are the sectoral rails a Smart Village needs.
- Smart Villages reduce distress migration, support farm value chains, and make Smart Cities less overcrowded. The two Missions should be **complements**, not substitutes.

Flow diagram

Smart Cities Mission -> Urban liveability jobs
 Smart Cities Mission -> Risk of rural lag
 PURA connectivity -> Smart Villages
 Rurban Mission clusters -> Smart Villages
 Smart Villages -> Narrow rural-urban gap
 Urban liveability jobs -> Narrow rural-urban gap

Conclusion

Smart Cities are relevant as a liveability and governance push in a rapidly urban India. They will widen rural-urban gaps if they remain exclusive enclaves. PURA's connectivity idea and the Rurban Mission are the rural counterpart: urban-quality services in village clusters so development is not only a city story.

Facts & figures

Smart Cities Mission

Union urban Mission launched 2015: competitive selection of cities for area-based and pan-city smart infrastructure.

PURA

Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas: Kalam's four-connectivity idea, later a rural-development scheme with mixed results.

Rurban Mission

Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (2016): integrated development of rural clusters with urban-level amenities.

SPV

Special Purpose Vehicle: the company-style body that implements a Smart City proposal with Union, State and city funds.

PMGSY

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana: all-weather rural roads, a basic physical connectivity that Smart Villages still need.

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