Revisiting Masterplan for ULBs

Why in news?

Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa, stressed at the Urban-20 City Sherpas' meet that a master plan is crucial for any city to manage urbanisation.

What is a Masterplan?

- A master plan is a dynamic long-term planning document that provides a conceptual layout to guide future growth and development.
- It includes analysis, recommendations, and proposals for a site's population, economy, housing, transportation, Community Facilities, and land-use.
- Master plan consists of future directions of development, policy and implantation of the same.
- It sets out how a particular area can develop and redevelop into the future.

How significant is a masterplan for ULBs?

- A master plan is an *instrument of governance* for urban local bodies (ULBs).
- Master Plans may not be the panacea but is crucial for any city to manage urbanisation.
- It has an important role in determining the shape of the urban environment.
- Master plans blur the program particular plans to improve urban areas.
- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has recommended that master plans in cities should be revisited for the improved governance of cities.

What are the challenges?

- Master plan is an archaic concept whose sales-pitch is more spectacular than its performance.
- **Dated instrument -** The legal and institutional frame of the master plan remained unchanged without accommodating later sensibilities for urban service rationalities.
- **Spatial vision -** A master plan is simply a spatial plan of land-use allocation supported by bye-laws and development control regulations.
- **Burden on ULBs -** The ULBs are cultivated and shaped by the agenda of regulating spatial growth and remain slaves to the master plan.
- The edifice of urban governance is built around this spatial vision and provision of urban services.
- **Spatial plans -** The statutory and spatial nature of the master plan can pose constraints on the programmatic plans, especially the spatially associated ones.
- Most water-body related projects negotiate the challenges of encroachment of floodplains as encroachments in ex-post.

Close to 65% of India's urban settlements do not have master plans, according to NITI Aayog.

- **Absence of Master plans -** There is no set criteria for mandating a spatial plan to regulate urban growth.
- The approach is ad-hoc, to be notified by State governments.
- For a variety of reasons primarily lack of human and financial resources, such notifications of mandatory spatial plans are delayed.

What could be done?

- Urban planning in India must be reimagined urgently to accommodate these emerging demands and sensibilities of urban governance.
- Recent moves such as Gati Shakti and Model Rural Transformation Acts are a reflection of this growing demand but are remote and limited.
- **Acceptance -** Acknowledging that the master plan instrument is limited and address the expanded scope of urban governance through new ways.
- **Best practices -** Many States have tried supplementing the inadequacies of the master plan with innovative bye-laws.
- These Indian cities offer enough experiences to learn from.
- **Focus Areas -** The incapacities in urban planning and governance highlighted by the 2021 report of the NITI Aayog must receive priority.
- **Cooperation -** The Centre must work with the States to reconsider the spatial planning framework in India.

Quick Facts

Sherpas

- A sherpa is the personal representative of a head of state or head of government who prepares an international summit, such as the annual G7 and G20 summits.
- Between the G20 & G7 summits there are multiple sherpa conferences where possible agreements are laid out.

References

1. The Hindu - The master plan and the slaves
2. World Bank - Master Planning

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