The State of Urban Planning in India

Why in news?

The pictures of adverse weather phenomena in cities are becoming increasingly common in India, with the urban authorities finding themselves unprepared every time a new disaster hits.

How about the picture of urban floods in India?

- The urban floods in Delhi (2013, 2021), Mumbai (2005, 2017), Chennai (2015, 2021), Hyderabad (2020) and Bengaluru (2022) caused extensive losses to property and life.
- In terms of damages, Mumbai reportedly lost Rs. 14,000 crore between 2005 and 2015 while the figure for Chennai was an estimated Rs. 15,000 crore in 2015 alone.
- The social and human costs disproportionately affect the poorer sections of society as they tend to live in the more environmentally vulnerable areas.

What efforts were taken in this regard?

- **General measures-** Measures such as river/drain cleanup, anti-encroachment drives, and stormwater network projects were proposed by the administrators.
- **Karnataka**- A Rs. 900 crore project was announced in 2021 by the Karnataka government after 2021 flooding Bengaluru.
- Now, after the recent floods, the municipality has ordered an anti-encroachment drive.
- **Delhi-** After 1976, a new Drainage Master Plan for Delhi is being implemented now.
- City administrations such as Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Nagpur have begun adopting climate action plans.
- **Mumbai**- The Mumbai plan covers all aspects of the city's environment from flooding to air pollution and aligns itself with the larger national goal of net-zero emissions.

What are the current issues?

> *Across India, 65% of urban settlements do not have a master plan.*

- **Master plans**- The powers to prepare master plans remain with State governments, but they lack the capacity to undertake this exercise as per the NITI Aayog report 2021.
- Even if master plan exists, they usually do not address issues of environmental protection or climate change mitigation.
- **Authority of city governments**- Some city governments lack much authority while some city administrations have developed flood mitigation plans without statutory backing.

- Bengaluru has not had a master plan to control its development since 2015.
- **Issues in Bengaluru plan**- In the case of Bengaluru, the drainage lines, as per the 2015 Master Plan, vary significantly from the drains mapped by the municipality.
- The responsibility of maintaining these and the lakes are split among at least 12 agencies at the State and city level which lacks co-ordination.
- **Issues in Mumbai plan**- The Mumbai plan lacks any statutory backing and does not prescribe any regulatory controls.
- It comes across as a series of recommended measures rendering it toothless.
- These plans are usually an expert-driven, without the critical element of public participation, thus reducing the plan's credibility.
- This in turn results in a greater focus on proposals such as the removal of encroachments instead of a focus on other mitigation measures.
- **Issues in Delhi plan**- The drainage master plan prepared by Indian Institute of Technology Delhi was found to be generic.
- A committee headed by the Public Works Department (PWD) is working on it.

What lies ahead?

- **Comprehensive climate action plan**- A comprehensive climate action plan needs to be created for all key Indian cities with statutory backing within the ambit of the city's master plan.
- This would institutionalise processes such as public consultations within the plan preparation process.
- **Role of environmental protection agency**- There is a need for an environmental protection agency to proactively tackle issues related to climate change.
- This agency would need to be devised as an overarching body along the lines of the unified transportation authority formed by different cities for coordinated action.

The great cities of Moscow and Paris pride themselves on addressing one-in-a-hundred-years flooding by building massive stormwater drainage systems that have successfully prevented flooding.

References

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