Urban planning: Building resilient cities for the future

What is the issue?

- More than 52 towns of Odisha were impacted from the 'extremely severe' Cyclone Fani, which had a landfall in Puri recently.
- While the intensity of the cyclone was the same as that of the 1999 super cyclone, the deaths due to Cyclone Fani have been far less.

What is helpful and praiseworthy?

- The evacuation of people, coupled with the setting up of many disaster relief centres and continuous communication, helped save many lives.
- With the help of **technology and strong policy measures**, India's disaster response mechanism, and specifically Odisha's, has improved significantly, over the past couple of decades.
- It is praiseworthy how the **administration in Odisha** has been able to minimise the impact of cyclones on human life.

What is the area on which India needs to work on?

- However, as a country, India has to still work on **strengthening the resilience of its cities** which are vulnerable.
- Resilient cities - Can swiftly bounce back to normalcy post a disaster.
- The deaths were minimised in Odisha, but the infrastructure and ecology has been severely affected and the rebuild efforts are likely to take time.
- Indian cities are vulnerable to earthquakes, severe cyclones, floods, rising sea levels, avalanches, tsunami and even man-made disasters.

What does it mean to build resilient cities?

- Building resilient cities is not a one-off effort but a continuous dialogue.
- It involves multiple stakeholders focusing on robust policymaking, strong administrative action agenda and positive behavioural change.
- **Empowering city municipalities** to be the first line of mitigation and response to disasters
- **Challenges faced by cities** - Related to poverty, housing, education, health and transportation, putting disaster risk resilience on a back seat.
- It is important for cities to have **a strong institutional framework** and a **comprehensive climate action plan**.

What is the benchmark action agenda?

- **Rio de Janeiro's 'Resilient Rio Strategy'** focusing on disaster recovery, promotion of circular economy and citizen education is a benchmark action agenda.
- **Proactive planning for resilience and disaster management funding** - A disaster risk resilience plan cannot be carried out until dedicated resources and a budget is allocated to the same.
- It is important to create a fund proactively rather than ponder over it post the occurrence of a disaster.
- **Resilient critical infrastructure** - Collapsed buildings and unstable structures are the leading cause of mortality during disasters.
- Hence, it is critical that building codes and appropriate construction norms are adhered to while building residential structures.
- It is particularly important to build disaster-resilient schools and healthcare facilities.
- Special attention also needs to be given to a city's critical infrastructure such as roads, airports, electrical, water and communication systems.
- In the long run, efficient and resilient transportation systems enable cities to quickly bounce back in economic activities.
- **Preparing citizens to respond to situations -** Adequate investment in technology and early warning systems can enable city institutions deliver warnings in a timely and effective manner.
- Trainings such as risk mitigation and rescue programmes need to be designed for crucial city personnel such as fire rescuers, police and health professionals, and also for citizens and communities.
- **Recovery as an opportunity to rebuild better** – To rebuild in a safe and sustainable manner by learning from past mistakes.
- It is essential to include a recovery plan in a city's disaster reduction strategy and involve all the stakeholders who are pillars for recovery.

What is the conclusion?

- While cities in India have started to move towards resilience, there is still a long way to go.
- A radical shift is needed in our approach on disaster mitigation and management.
- Many of the initiatives are often taken immediately after disaster strikes, instead of being planned in advance.
- It is imperative to launch a continuous dialogue and inculcate a sense of responsibility amongst city administrators and its citizens to build resilience in every aspect.

Source: Financial Express

