

Transforming urban India calls for community-based moves towards a circular economy

Seven years after launching his government's marquee programme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced the second phase of Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), with a fresh promise to make India's cities clean. For all the attention it has received, the goal of scientific waste management and full sanitation that Mahatma Gandhi emphasised even a century ago remains largely aspirational today, and the recent lament of Principal Economic Adviser Sanjeev Sanyal on dirty, dysfunctional cities drives home the point.

That urban India, in his view, is unable to match cities in Vietnam that has a comparable per capita income is a telling commentary on a lack of urban management capacities in spite of the Swachh Bharat programme enjoying tremendous support. SBM-U 2.0, with a ₹1.41-lakh crore outlay, aims to focus on garbage-free cities and urban grey and black water management in places not covered by AMRUT. In its first phase, the Mission had an outstanding balance of ₹3,532 crore, since the total allocation was ₹14,622 crore while cumulative releases came to ₹11,090 crore. The issue of capability and governance underscores the challenge — of being able to process only about one lakh tonnes of solid waste per day against 1.4 lakh tonnes generated — to transition to a circular economy that treats solid and liquid waste as a resource.

Raising community involvement in resource recovery, which the rules governing municipal, plastic and electronic waste provide for, calls for a partnership that gives a tangible incentive to households. The current model of issuing mega contracts to big corporations — as opposed to decentralised community-level operations for instance — has left segregation of waste at source a non-starter. In the absence of a scaling up of operations, which can provide large-scale employment, and creation of matching facilities for material recovery, SBM-U 2.0 cannot keep pace with the tide of waste in a growing economy.

On sanitation, the impressive claim of exceeding the targets for household, community and public toilets thus far obscures the reality that without water connections, many of them are unusable, and in public places, left in decrepitude.

State and municipal governments, which do the heavy lifting on waste and sanitation issues, should work to increase community ownership of the system. As things stand, it is a long road to Open Defecation Free plus (ODF+) status for urban India, since that requires no recorded case of open defecation and for all public toilets to be maintained and functioning. Equally, the high ambition of achieving 100% tap water supply in about 4,700 urban local bodies and sewerage and septage in 500 AMRUT cities depends crucially on making at least good public rental housing accessible to millions of people.

GS World Team Input

IN THE NEWS

AMRUT 2.0 mission

- ➔ AMRUT 2.0 mission will help in making cities self-reliant. It will ensure water security across the cities. This mission has been launched with the aim of providing 100 percent coverage of water supply to all households in 4,700 urban local bodies. This target will be achieved by providing 2.68 crore tap connections and 100% coverage of sewerage across 500 AMRUT cities. An outlay of Rs 2.87 lakh crore has been sanctioned for this mission.

SBM-U 2.0

- ➔ SBM-U 2.0 mission seeks to make all cities 'Garbage Free'. It also seeks to ensure grey and black water management across the cities that are not covered under AMRUT.
- ➔ Mission will focus on source segregation of solid waste by utilizing the principles of 3Rs that is "Reduce, reuse, recycle". An outlay of Rs 1.41 lakh crore has been sanctioned for SBM-U 2.0.

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Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

Q. Consider the following statements about AMRUT 2.0 Mission-

1. This mission has been launched with an objective to provide 100% coverage of water supply to all households of 4,700 urban local bodies.
2. An outlay of Rs 2.87 lakh crore has been approved for this mission.

Which of the above statement is/are true-

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

Q. "The lack of cleanliness in India is not only a policy problem but also an attitude problem prevailing at the level of the people, so there is a need to make changes at both the levels." make a comment. (250 Words)

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Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.