Roadmap for Urban Development in Post-Covid Era

We have to empower cities with more granular data sources, which provide stronger evidence for decision-making, writes **Prabhakar Kumar,** AVP & HOD – Urban Planning, Rudrabhishek Enterprises.

The novel coronavirus outbreak across the globe has made the world realized that an invisible virus can break the illusion of supremacy of human being technocracy & highlights the results of environment & social ignorance.

When we compare the impact of the virus globally and in India, we find ourselves in a much better situation. However, the numbers of cases continue to increase but the recovery rate is also more than 40 per cent which is high as compared to any other country in the world. Despite this, the Covid-19 has altered the urban life dramatically and will have a long lasting impact on everyone as the authorities are still recognizing the impact of the virus. As we continue to fight against the deadly coronavirus spread, the economic activities after being stalled for almost two months have started picking up. While most of the sectors are being opened up, the urban development will still continue to face the wrath, for a longer duration, owing to various factors.

However, the government is proactively working to bring the economy back on the revival path and Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan is among one such step. The support by the government has infused courage across the industries to fight the Covid-19. Taking a stock about what lies for the urban development in future with a focus on the current and post-Covid-19 scenario and how India will reach its infrastructure goals, we expect five significant ways of impacting the sector.

Focus on Important Services

With the steep spike in the corona cases the need of the hour is to think that whether we have moved towards urbanization more than it was required. Has this density caused a bigger problem? But this density is one of the major contributors in the economy, culture and politics of the particular area.

In fact, density is the precondition for successful urban service delivery and many people in today's cities who lack access of public services have experienced it. It is the lack of access to basic services including water, sanitation, waste

**Prabhakar Kumar,
AVP & HOD –
Urban Planning,
Rudrabhishek
Enterprises**

management and health care that have intensified the challenge in many cities to respond effectively to Covid-19.

Bad access in some areas makes lockdown instructions difficult to follow. Closing this gap in public infrastructure needs to be a priority for the future of cities. While planning for the transport system, we should give emphases on active transport such as walking and cycling, which have multiplier effects on environment and health.

Increased Regional Planning

As we already see, the cascading economic effect of this crisis will affect manufacturing and supply chains in nearby regions and will spill out into global set-ups too. We should benefit from this extraordinary disruption to prepare better for the next crisis. For example, we know that towns, mostly low-lying and flood-prone, would be on the frontlines of climate impacts. How will we ensure the next time area ecosystems are more robust?

We need more coordinated regional planning in order to make these networks a source of resilience rather than vulnerabilities across the economies, the energy supply, transport networks and food supply. A larger and diverse group of players will engage in such a strategic approach, which will lead to a stronger alliance for reform.

Integrating Blue and Green Spaces

A new approach to infrastructure development will place green fields, watersheds and parks at the center of planning and designing of our cities. Blue-green infrastructure is critical as a measure for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and has a host of wider benefits for humans and wildlife such as improving air and water quality; reducing noise; cooling effects and biodiversity. Such benefits also contribute to enhancing human well-being and sustainability. It effect on strengthen the resistance to the impacts of climate change.

In addition, larger open spaces will help cities enforce emergency services and evacuation plans in urban areas while giving a long lasting support to the current infrastructure.

Housing and Public Spaces

How we build our communities ultimately dictates how robust it is. The infrastructure growth would add to challenges without sufficient public space or appropriate affordable housing assets. It was the reason that many building rules and regulations were being enforced, and expected many to be up by the time. Covid-19 can also cause improvements, ranging from immediate steps to allow citizens to obey socially distant recommendations and sanitation to longer lasting reforms that will concentrate on enhancing access to affordable housing and public space, such as improvement in informal settlements.

> Blue-green infrastructure is critical as a measure for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and has a host of wider benefits for humans and wildlife.

In present Covid-19 situation, government has faced many challenges in providing food to daily wedge and houseless workers who are spread in segregated manner throughout the city. This has resulted into the emphasis of sufficient provision of community centers, night shelters and big public space which can be used for revenue generation with various financial model in general condition and space for providing shelters to houseless, migrants or daily wedge workers during the condition of pandemic/epidemic/any calamities with rules and regulations as required.

Informal settlements are the result of many integrated factors like rural-urban migration; lack of affordable housing; weak policy, planning and urban management; economic disconnects; and displacement caused by natural disasters. Upgrading informal settlements by regularizing the land and infrastructure services are widely accepted as preferable to relocation, helping to sustain social and economic networks that are considered essential for livelihoods.

India is facing the huge challenge of shaping cities of the next decade as large numbers of dwellers are expected to be added to the urban populace by 2030 for economic stability. As it turns, a large share of future growth is going to be unplanned, which could raise an alarm for proper planning and investment in infrastructure. Change is important and may be Covid-19 will be the wake-up call for better and more sustainable cities. In this regards, GOI has taken in advance the PMAY and AMRUT scheme.

Granular Data at local-Level

For any decision about how to handle any disease or pandemic situation at local level, cities or regional data are important. We have to empower cities with more granular data sources, which provide stronger evidence for decision-making. This will not just to help cities in response to this crisis, but also in response to other long-term sustainability and policy making. In this regards, GOI is setting up Integrated Command & Control Center (ICCC) under Smart City Mission and transformation of urban region under AMRUT Mission which is a good step towards vigilance and controlling during pandemic.

To fully recognize and resolve the challenges ahead, community resilience requires interdependency. Knowing & learning from present crisis can improve urban stability. The cultural, social and environmental factors along with physical issue must be tackled seriously with technological interventions. It is our decision how we are going to build tomorrow.

"Covid-19 pandemic should not be only taken as threat but it can be taken as opportunity to resolve existing accumulative problems and move ahead with lesion learnt." **CT**