

 The evolution of infrastructure reflects changing needs and priorities in modern societies

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Recent years have seen a significant **reworking** of the definition of **infrastructure** to better reflect the **changing demands** and **complexity** of our **globalised** society. In the past, **infrastructure** was mostly thought to refer to material resources like **utilities**, **roads**, and **bridges** - the **structural framework** that allowed society to operate. However, the breadth of infrastructure has significantly increased as **civilizations** have grown more **technologically** dependent and **interconnected**.

These days, infrastructure includes **intangible systems** and **services** as well as **physical buildings** that are essential to both **economic growth** and **human well-being**. This more inclusive definition recognises the vital role that **digital** and **social infrastructure** has played in forming the structure of contemporary societies. It acknowledges that having access to digital connection, healthcare, and education are equally important as having access to utilities and roads.

One of the most significant shifts in our understanding of **infrastructure** is evident in the recognition of social infrastructure as a cornerstone of **community resilience** and well-being. **Social infrastructure** refers to the network of institutions, organisations, and public spaces that facilitate social interaction, cohesion, and collective action. This includes not only schools, hospitals, and community centres but also parks, libraries, and cultural venues.

Investing resources in **social infrastructure** is essential to building **prosperous** and inclusive **communities** where individuals feel **empowered**, connected, and supported. Social infrastructure provides space for **leisure** activities, education, and **social interaction**, which encourages a sense of **community** and **civic pride**. By ensuring that everyone in society has access to **fundamental services** and **opportunities** for personal and collective growth, it promotes **social equity**.

Furthermore, **social infrastructure** is also essential for tackling some of the most important issues that contemporary world is confronting, such as **environmental deterioration**, **social isolation**, and **inequality**. Investments in public transit and **affordable housing**, for instance, can help shorten **commutes**, increase access to **work opportunities**, and lessen the **negative environmental** effects of **urban expansion**.

In the 21st century, **digital infrastructure**, along with **social infrastructure**, has become a significant driver for **innovation** and **economic growth**. Digital infrastructure refers to the **networks**, **platforms**, and **technologies** that enable the exchange of products, services, and information in the digital economy. Examples of digital infrastructure include **cloud computing**, **mobile networks**, **broadband internet**, and e-commerce platforms. Together, these elements form the backbone of the digital economy.

The development of **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** is an area where **digital identification** (eKYC, esign), **payment infrastructure** (UPI payments), **data exchange solution** helps to deliver essential services and enables digital inclusion. India has shown stellar performance in DPI which was well acknowledged during the proceedings of Indian presidency in G20.

A robust digital infrastructure is crucial not only for **individuals** who need access to employment and education opportunities, but also for businesses to remain **competitive** in the global market, and for governments to provide **essential services** efficiently and transparently. Additionally, it can also play a significant role in bridging the digital divide by ensuring that underserved areas have access to affordable and speedy internet, as well as training in **digital literacy**.

The evolving concept of infrastructure reflects the changing needs and priorities of modern societies. By expanding our definition of infrastructure to include **social** and **digital elements**, we can build more resilient, inclusive, and **sustainable communities**. Investments in social and **digital infrastructure** are not only essential for driving economic growth and innovation but also for promoting social equity, environmental sustainability and **human flourishing** in the 21st century.