

Urban Observatories under UK-India Joint Network on Sustainable Cities

As the premier think tank of Government of India on urban sector, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) is responsible for promoting high quality research and advisory support on evidence based policy making. Since India's urbanisation is taking a new turn through city led envisioning aided by citizen participation as well as ICT enabled governance, it is proposed to incubate urban observatories in leading cities. This further got support as the recently established UK-India Joint Network on Sustainable Cities has embedded this as one of the core activity.

What is an Urban Observatory?

An urban observatory facilitates monitoring urban dynamics at the local level. It is typically a network of local stakeholders responsible for producing, analysing and disseminating data on a meaningful set of indicators. Data and information resources produced by the local network are used to support decision-making and formulation of evidence based policies. There are several variants of urban observatories established by Governments, Think Tanks, Technology Companies and Civil Society groups. However, the idea was widely advanced by the UN-Habitat's Global Urban Observatory. In India, the National Institute of Urban Affairs is engaging with various stakeholders for establishing urban observatories to address the complex entanglement of information in rapidly growing cities.

Urban Observatories for Indian Metropolitan Regions

Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai are three major city regions in India which have been striving to improve liveability through planned investments. Setting up an Urban Observatory in these cities can not only support effective monitoring of the impact of development projects in the city region, but also enable co-ordinated development in these urban regions. The recent global debates have highlighted the need for a coherent urban strategy and investment plan as one of the key criteria for any region to attract global capital. The Observatories can also make these

cities globally visible especially as Government of India is supporting major urban sector investment through new generation urban missions. NIUA has established working relationships with Chambers of Commerce and Urban Development Authorities (Mumbai and Chennai) apart from Higher Education/Research Centres in all three cities. University of Nottingham which coordinates the UK network of research centres has been involved in a **Nottingham-Chandigarh** city exchanges. This offers an opportunity to develop a partnership with these cities to set up Urban Observatories. Since the current phase of funding from RCUK which regulates the availability of UK institutions is until March 2017, it is proposed to limit the work to the above mentioned four cities. However, based on the feedbacks from these four cities, a few more cities could be taken up from April 2017 provided the UK network gets additional funds from RCUK. Since Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Pune are large urban systems that have crossed 5 million populations, establishment of urban observatories in these cities will help in addressing their complex dynamics through proactive governance. Some of the smart cities such as **Chandigarh** and Dharamshala have also embedded the idea of urban observatory in their plans. Surat and Pune have initiated similar activities to capture the rich urban data and use it for creating an agile policy system.

Potential Activities

1. Collect, collate and analyse data related to various aspects of urban dynamics in the city region.
2. Prepare annual 'State of the City' Reports.
3. Set up and manage 'city dash boards' and website for the Urban Observatory.
4. Provide specific skill development and capacity building services for key stakeholders and their target groups.
5. Promote evidence based planning and policies in the cities.
6. Enable effective participation of citizens in shaping the urban future.