



Rethinking Urbanisation and the Right to the City

Conference Proceedings
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CAG

Citizen consumer and civic Action Group

Acknowledgements

On October 2, 2018, CAG organised a one-day conference titled Rethinking Urbanisation and the Right to the City. This report is a summary of the conference proceedings. It was authored by Apoorva Ramaswamy and Armaan Ranjani Mustafa, both researchers in the Urban Governance team at CAG.

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Introduction

Urban areas are continually expanding and evolving, and experts project that by 2030, nearly 5 billion (61 percent) of the world's 8.1 billion people will live in cities (United Nations). The rapid influx of people adds layers of complexities to already overwhelmed and saturated cities. To cope with this, governments are gravitating towards using technology and data-driven planning. There is much excitement and expenditure on real-time big data, sensors, and automation. Thanks to the rise of ubiquitous internet connectivity and the miniaturisation of electronics in now-common devices such as RFID tags, cities have crystallised into an image of a vast, efficient robot. Yet, many city governments continue to fail to provide infrastructure and services in an equitable manner to city residents.

Indian cities have large pockets of unplanned settlements whose residents access basic services and earn livelihoods informally. Very often, there is no record of their homes or workplaces in official datasets. This lack of information not only prevents access to basic services, but also absolves the government of its responsibility to its citizens. This paradoxical situation not only paves the way for the gentrification of cities through anti-poor urban regeneration schemes, but also erodes democratic values of participation, equity, informed dialogue, and accountability of elected representatives.

In this context, it becomes extremely important to discuss the approach to urbanisation. Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, among other urbanists, have discussed how cities are shaped by capitalist forces and the accumulation (of profits) takes place by dispossession. They argue that these forces result in political, economic, social, environmental and spatial injustices and inequalities. It becomes essential to reclaim the city as a co-created space. This provides an alternative to the market oriented, more technocratic and centralised approaches prevalent today and can simply be explained as the right of all citizens to access the qualities and benefits of urban life.

The conference brought together twelve distinguished speakers to discuss their experiences and insights on the current manner of urbanisation in India. The conference was divided into four sessions: Mind the Gap, Displacement by Design, Right to the City and Fooled by Smartness. It concluded with a keynote address on the Urban Futures: Between the Smart and Unsmart. The speakers spoke about the evolution of urbanisation in India, ranging from intensive urban regeneration schemes funded by the government to the role of private and international financial institutions. Though these schemes aimed to improve basic services, housing and civic infrastructure on paper, in reality our cities are sites of increasing inequality, informality and the degradation of environmental commons. This report documents the presentations and discussions of the one-day conference. The session titles have the links to the video recordings that are available on CAG's [YouTube channel](#).

Session 1: Mind the Gap

Democracy in Indian cities has been reduced to mere elections: there is little interaction between people and their elected representatives, and critical decisions are taken hastily without active and informed consent of the people. Land, forest, coastal and environmental laws are being amended to reduce citizen participation and to serve private interests. City planners are adopting ingenious ways to bypass the state's responsibility to provide housing, services and open spaces to all city residents. In this session, the speakers explored how such legal opportunism erodes the hard-won rights of citizens to participate and to be heard in processes that shape their cities. It began with a discussion on the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act and discussed the challenges and successes in the establishment of local self-governance and decentralisation. It then moved on with a brief overview of the manner in which land, forest, coastal and environmental laws were being amended, thereby reducing the scope for public participation and impacting the people's right to the city and the environment in the process. It concluded with an evaluation of the manner of planning and mapping of cities that was resulting in exclusive urban enclaves.

74th Constitutional Amendment Act - Derelict by Design or Default -Mathew Idiculla:

Mathew Idiculla is a research consultant with the Centre for Law and Policy Research wherein he works on urban law and policy issues. He began his presentation by reflecting on Gandhi's conception of decentralised governance, the Gandhian spirit of local self-governance along with the Ambedkarite view of constitutional governance embodies the birth of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA). He spoke about the divergence between law in books and law in practice in the context of the 74th Amendment which established the local self-governance mechanism in India. He highlighted the irony of the topic when the city council in Chennai has been dissolved and elections have been delayed.

The 73rd CAA mandates the creation of rural local bodies on a three-tier level: the village, block and district levels, whereas the 74th CAA requires the creation of three kinds of municipal bodies, the town *panchayat*, municipal council and municipal corporation. He stated that these amendments are important in light of the fact that without constitutional recognition, these bodies would have become 'creatures of the state'. He posited that there are inherent limitations and the ground realities of implementation that have possibly kept us from reaching the extent of decentralisation that was envisioned through the passing of these amendments. One instance is the usage of the word 'may' in several of the key provisions, which makes it optional for State governments to devolve certain responsibilities and authority. The 12th Schedule lists eighteen items that fall within the purview of municipalities, but it does not include essential civic issues such as housing and urban transportation. Similarly, the exemption of industrial townships from the requirement to establish a municipality and cities not establishing ward sabhas prevents the public from participating in local decision making.

Idiculla asserted that the more fundamental issue is that the functions of the local governments are being diverted by state and central governments. This can be seen in the functioning of parastatal agencies, such metropolitan development authorities and utility boards for water and electricity, which are performing many of the functions listed under the 12th Schedule of the Constitution. At the same time, the central government is increasing its purview over areas of urban governance that were handled by urban local bodies through programmes like the Smart Cities Mission and Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Rural Mission (JNNURM). For instance, the Smart Cities Mission through the creation of Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV) encourages the handing over of the municipal council's rights and duties to private players that are not accountable to the people. Further, the absence of fiscal devolution of powers prevents municipal corporations from raising their own revenues. State governments retain the authority to decide the tax to be levied by local governments and often municipalities do not generate enough revenue from taxation, making them reliant on the loans and grants handed out by the state and central governments. He concluded his presentation by posing the question: has the 74th CAA been unsuccessful in achieving decentralisation (as is reflected in the top-down decision-making process) or did it succeed in creating a three-tier layer of governance with a strong and independent role for municipalities?

Amendments to Land, Coastal and Environmental Laws - Meenakshi Kapoor

Meenakshi Kapoor, from the NAMATI Environmental Justice Program at Centre for Policy Research, spoke about shrinking spaces for public participation in policies governing the urban environment through different amendments and dilutions of the existing legislative and policy framework. Land, forest, coastal and environmental laws are being amended to reduce citizen participation, serve private interests, and bypass the state's responsibility to provide basic amenities, housing, open spaces, etc. Taking the example of coastal laws, she explained that the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification had been through eleven amendments since June 2014. The Ministry Of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MOEFCC) reviewed the CRZ Notification under the Shailesh Nayak Committee, which consulted the State and Union Territory governments. Based on the findings of the Committee, the MOEFCC passed eight amendments which provided for the development of ports, facilitation of tourism etc. In 2016, the MOEFCC decided to replace the CRZ Notification with a new draft legislation without consulting the groups that had been consulted in the earlier public process. Kapoor pointed out that out of the eleven amendments, six had been passed without public comments and only one review of the Notification had occurred.

Kapoor explained that there were similar challenges with the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act 2014 (RFCTLARR Act). The central government passed a notification granting amnesty to those projects functioning without an appropriate environmental clearance (EC), giving them six months to obtain one. This retroactive granting of an EC reduces it to mere paperwork, and undermines the overall significance of environmental impact

assessments, which is to prevent negative environmental impacts. Further, the time period for the ECs granted under the EIA Act and the CRZ Notification was extended, compromising the review process severely. Many state land acquisition laws have omitted the prior consent clause and the requirement of conducting a social impact assessment that are present in the RFCTLARR Act.

Kapoor pointed out that apart from the substantive content of these amendments, the manner in which these amendments are passed also restrict the scope for public consultation and comments. For instance, the government posts drafts related to several different laws at a single time and giving very short time to respond. Researchers and activists do not have sufficient time to scrutinise all documents and to prepare meaningful responses, with the result that at least some of the controversial provisions might slip by unnoticed. This occurred in the case of the draft Forest Policy, National Compensatory Afforestation Policy, and the Marine Coastal Regulation Zone Notification. Further, there are frequent piece-meal amendments making it difficult to keep track and the drafts are framed in a near-final manner, thereby subtly indicating that public comments are just a checkbox to be ticked off without actually considering the merits of the submissions made.

Misleading Planning - Shweta Wagh

Shweta Wagh is an architect by training, and is currently a faculty member at KVRIA and research associate at the Collective for Spatial Alternatives. She talked about how the process of planning precludes many citizens from their right to the city through changes in definitions, maps and categories. She explained how the three domains of planning viz, the territorial (conception of physical space), systemic (infrastructural interactions) and regulatory (transformative policies) intersect in the production of space. Changes in any or all of them are being made to justify and legalise social exclusion.

Wagh believes that Mumbai's planning system has failed because it conceives land as an individual entity without considering the complex interplay between different ecosystems. She explained how the No Development Zones (NDZ) in Bombay's Comprehensive Development Plan included around 13,000 hectares of ecologically sensitive land and Aarey colony. In 2014, the draft plan did away with NDZ and introduced 'natural areas' demarcation based on legal territorial criteria. This resulted in a proposal to release 20 percent of earlier NDZ areas, including Aarey Colony, for urban development. The widespread opposition to the scrapping of NDZs resulted in a Revised Draft Development Plan which retained the NDZ, but inserted a twist in its definition as "land kept in abeyance for development in the future." In addition, it proposed building affordable housing on salt pan lands and the reclamation of 120 hectares in front of the Cuffe Parade fishing village for recreation. This would be facilitated by an amendment to the CRZ regulation by justified it as 'green reclamation'.

In response to the floods in 2005, authorities built a storm water drainage system in Kharbanda that damaged the mangroves, removed low income communities from

floodplains, and proposed a 5m cordon along rivers and other water bodies. This perpetuates the idea of recreational open spaces as opposed to coastal commons belonging to resident fisherfolk. The proposed coastal road project is another example of planning that negatively impacts the environment and the livelihoods of the fishing community under the veil of green interventions. Laws were amended to make way for the construction of projects, exempting the Slum Rehabilitation Authority and Special Economic Zone buildings from the CRZ notification. The same notification is used to criminalise the poor while allowing for large infrastructure projects.

She concluded her presentation with two key points; first that acts of naming and classification are not just descriptive procedures, but also political acts as witnessed in the shift in the definition of the NDZ and the change in terminology from public housing to affordable housing and resettlement. Second, that planning is as much a struggle over meanings and definitions as it is over land, habitations and settlements.

Session 2: Displacement by Design

The focus on providing infrastructure has led to the setting up of special purpose vehicles and task forces at the cost of people's participation in decision making and their right to life and livelihood. The speakers in this session discussed how the current development paradigm results in the displacement and exclusion of citizens. The key point highlighted throughout this session is how do we reimagine public infrastructure and urban commons in times where the middle-class narrative dominates public discourse and is being used to edge out the voices and needs of the poorer sections of society. This session delved into the paradoxical implications that the word 'public' has come to acquire in its application across provision of different infrastructural services by the local governments. It also included an interesting narrative of the myriad ways in which it is possible to tie in biodiversity and the urban commons for better cities.

Reimagining Urban Infrastructure - Amita Bhide

Amita Bhide, Professor and Dean at the School for Habitat Studies (TISS), elaborated on indirect and direct displacement related to infrastructure in cities. She stated that Indian cities have seen networked infrastructure only in patches. Most infrastructures are created by state-established institutions, using public funds, and are justified in the name of public interest, but they also create large amounts of exclusion in the process. The planning of infrastructure currently has three main attributes: the usage of comprehensive visions and development plans; the conversion of every development initiative into a series of infrastructure projects; and a shift towards using parastatal agencies and public-private partnerships for municipal service provision. In such a context, it is important to reflect on how these also define the avenues for displacement.

Bhide elaborated on changes to infrastructure using three examples of public infrastructure projects. In Mumbai, the suburban rail and BEST bus system worked extremely well within the island city but failed as the city expanded. This was because the rails were fixed, leaving no space for expansion. Buses were less frequently used

because the increase in private vehicles meant they had relatively less road space. In Bhubaneswar, a JnNURM proposal to bring in public buses faced opposition from private bus services. The High Court held that public buses were in public interest, but the new buses were used for inter-city travel rather than to improve mobility within the city. In Mankhurd (East) ward in Mumbai the state provided only public toilets despite the increased demand for individual toilets. Despite this, the onus of maintenance of toilets remained on the public, poor demand-supply ratios (85 people to 1 toilet seat) and poor conditions of toilets result in violence on a daily basis.

Bhide concluded by talking about the paradox of 'publicness'. The public infrastructure system is characterised by a focus on consumer-citizens (people who can pay for services), a shifting of subsidies from the poor to the middle class, and the state's role as a regulator of public services that are increasingly being privatised. As the definition of what constitutes public is becoming increasingly paradoxical, it is important to reimagine infrastructure in order to remove the injustices inherent in the system by asserting and broadening the public domain. Bhide also asserted the need to control and protect public institutions as there is no guarantee that private space will be more efficient and inclusive. Further, while many campaigns of the right to city are concerned about housing rights, the right to city should also talk about other infrastructure as claims to infrastructure is a large part of accessing the city in itself.

Loss of biodiversity and urban commons -Vishwanath Srikantaiah

Vishwanath Srikantaiah is a well-known water activist and director of Biome Environmental Solutions in Bangalore. He stressed on the importance of preservation of urban biodiversity and urban commons in Bangalore even as the city prioritises human-centric issues, like infrastructure. Testimony to this is the Revised Master plan for Bangalore which fails to even mention the word biodiversity. He pointed out certain paradoxes that arise in the relationship between urban biodiversity and the city's growth outcomes, as exemplified by the staggering disappearance of tree cover and water bodies with the increase in Bangalore's population. One of the paradoxes is that as a result of Bangalore having first priority to water drawn from the dams on the river Cauvery, there is continuous water flow throughout the year on an 80 km stretch of the river. This has resulted in this stretch of the river being host to an interesting variety of biodiversity, including river otters.

Surface water bodies, like lakes and tanks, are part of the urban commons. In contrast, there are 'invisible commons', such as groundwater, that have almost disappeared due to the emphasis given to individual means of transportation and the construction of basement parking. This problem of disappearing groundwater commons is ignored because the poor depend on groundwater for drinking purposes through the use of handpumps and borewells, whereas the rich receive piped water supply. He proposed engaging with well diggers to revitalise wells and thereby groundwater as commons. He also suggested that repurposing surface water bodies and viewing them more than for their aesthetics could help protect and conserve them. He gave the example of Jakkur

lake being integrated with sewage treatment plants, which has led to the lake becoming the city's fourth most bird diverse area.

Srikantiah emphasised that it was practically possible to view development and biodiversity congruently, and expressed the need for new institutions and mechanisms that adopted an ecosystems approach to problems. He concluded by saying that that renewal process of tying in the commons and biodiversity would be slow, messy, sub-optimal and led by the middle-class. This is unfortunately the scenario because the poor have to focus on their basic needs before they can focus elsewhere, and the middle class has more access to infrastructure among other things. He emphasised that the success of this renewal process depends on two things: the sensitisation of the middle class to be inclusive, and the need for government mechanisms and institutional structures that help facilitate this process. The democratic process will play an important role in influencing urban spatial planning, which in turn will change the current development paradigm and the politics of land.

Ousted by Special Purpose Vehicles and Task Forces - Vinay Baidur

Vinay Baidur, an independent researcher whose interests include urban governance, urban politics, and public policy, talked about participation in urban governance in the context of the 74th Amendment. Bangalore has a history of task forces with three such groups being established in the past with more or less the same members, prompting the question as to who's right to the city is being talked about? In 2016, the government established the Bangalore Blueprint Action Group consisting of the city's most elite and rich residents. There were several public interest litigation suits filed against the same, and following the High Court's view that the group was unnecessary, the government withdrew the group. However, the new government established in early June 2018, again created a similar group with all the same members.

Baidur gave two examples of city policies dictated by the private citizens. In 2004 the Infosys Chairman demanded an elevated road connecting the main city to the electronic city and even proposed to fund it partly. This project has served as a model for the city's development with plans for other elevated roads connecting to the major roads in the city. Interestingly, in that year the city spent only INR 30-40 lakhs on slum redevelopment, in comparison to the INR 700 crores spent on the elevated road. This was a clear indication of how urbanisation is dictated by capital given by the private sector. The second example is that of a legislation put forward by one of the members of the Bangalore taskforce, to put a budget constraint on local governments. This legislation was similar to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2004. Neither the urban nor rural development departments agreed to the proposed legislation.

Baidur opined that the 74th CAA was poorly implemented and that urban local bodies had been reduced to infrastructure provision agencies without allowing for the process of public participation. This can be seen in the manner of implementation of the Model

Municipal Law, 2003. The entire process of formulating this legislation at the national level was carried out by a consultant appointed by a foreign bilateral development group and the document produced was titled the Specimen Municipal Legislation. This law gave the central government the power to supersede the municipal legislative process, thereby allowing the entry of the private sector and central government control. Therefore, that there is a need to look at the processes replacing the 74th amendment not only from the perspective of entry of public private partnerships and the conversion of the citizens into consumers, but also from the lens of implication of what would be the municipalities duty in such scenarios. Baindur concluded that it was important for courts and bureaucrats to take a firm stand against such task forces and special purpose vehicles. However, it was more important that civil society become more aware about such issues and adopting methods to question these processes.

Session 3: Who's Right to the City

The inability of the state to provide adequate formal housing, basic services and livelihoods has led to the informal sector filling the gap. A large part of the urban population relies on these systems to meet basic needs, and this renders them vulnerable to the vagaries of nature, the state, corporates and middle men. The session dwelt on how the current approach to urban planning restricts low income groups from accessing urban space and reinforces segregation, marginalisation and exclusion within the city. The speakers in the session "Whose Right to the City" shed light on challenges faced while strengthening and providing access to informal networks and systems present in cities. They highlighted three aspects of India's urban informality that have undergone change in recent years: the issue of social housing and tenure for the urban poor, the informality of waste and its implications for decentralised governance, and middle class perceptions of street vending.

Urban poor and the Right to Shelter - Dr Karen Coelho

Dr. Karen Coelho, a professor at the Madras Institute of Development Studies, explained the urban phenomenon of ghettoisation. In Chennai, one can see this embodied in resettlement housing in Perumbakkam and Kannagi Nagar along the OMR, and Urapakkam, a resettlement colony in Kanchipuram district. These resettlement colonies are rooted in the geography of caste, as most residents are Dalits and OBCs. This form of urban untouchability is associated with the policies of urban renewal undertaken by the state to create an image of an urban slum free city as part of the move towards an image of world class cities. Urban renewal schemes, like JnNURM, promote urban untouchability through the creation of resettlement colonies instead of improving urban infrastructure.

This problem arises from ambiguity around the definition of slums and urban poor. Urban policy misunderstands urban poverty as slums, and the issue of slums as a housing problem. As a result, authorities like the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) focus on the provision of social housing along the peripheries of Chennai. The urban poor are forced to negotiate between substandard housing outside the city and

livelihoods and education for their children. This form of displacement disrupts basic human rights, community and social networks of the urban poor. The movement of slum dwellers to these new areas prevents these networks from being rebuilt, with resettlement often failing to improve the lives of the resettled. This has led to a scenario where 50 percent of the residents of Kannagi Nagar moved back into the city for better access to services and livelihoods. Even though there has been an improvement of Kannagi Nagar's infrastructure from 2011 to 2018, it still failed to prevent its ghettoisation.

These ghettos also faced the brunt of the 2015 floods, as residents were moved from ecologically sensitive land alongside river banks to low lying areas prone to flooding, including housing colonies built in lake beds. Coelho opined that these settlements were planned and executed in a hurry to meet project and infrastructure guidelines, forgetting the most important part of the process - the people. The poor provision of second tier services also rendered these colonies qualitatively poor, perpetuating poverty, alcoholism, gang violence, and drug abuse. Coelho concluded with the question as to whether the development of a slum free modern city justified taking away the dignity of the invisible who keep the city running. Dignity is what makes people human. Perhaps if the government does not reduce the issue of right to the city to the right to housing, discourse and patterns of urbanisation might change.

Informal Waste Pickers and the Right to Livelihood - Lakshmi Narayan

Lakshmi Narayan, co-founder of SWaCH - a co-operative working with female informal waste pickers, spoke about the issue of the representation and voice of the urban poor. The lack of dignity of waste workers is evident when conservancy workers use their bare hands to segregate waste. The issue of waste is invisibilised to the extent that waste pickers do not even see it as legitimate work but socio-economic conditions force them into this profession.

Over the past fifteen years, SWaCH helped mainstream informal waste management, integrating female waste pickers into Pune's Solid Waste Management process. SWaCH provides an alternative model to private contractors, providing front end service for a nominal fee paid by the citizen. It has established a working relationship between citizens and waste pickers, thereby providing dignity to informal waste workers whilst solving the waste problem in Pune. SWaCH's model thus presents an alternative to PPP models operating in other urban cities. Instead of merely dumping the waste in landfills, segregation of waste and composting reduces the amount of waste created, mitigates environmental degradation, and provides employment to the informal sector.

Narayan highlighted that it was important to hold producers responsible through the principle of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). EPR would not only reduce the waste produced at the end of the day, but also promote green design and alternatives. It is important to remember that SWaCH is a cooperative run by waste pickers. The organisation of informal sectors not only provides workers economic security but also

provides them dignity of labour, and through that, life. This form of organisation enables the informal waste sector to integrate with the formal system, giving them back their right to the city.

Street Vendors, pedestrians and the Right of Way - Vinay Sreenivasa

Vinay Sreenivasa from Alternative Law Foundation spoke about street vending in Bangalore. His talk stressed on the creation of a middle class discourse that invisibilised street vendors contrary to the Street Vendors Act, 2014. In Koramangala, a suburb with well-developed roads and 20 feet wide, street vendors were evicted twice to suit the image of an affluent and smart area. These vendors provide cheap food and services to residents and employees of firms in the area. Rather than recognise this, IT companies paid the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagar Palike (BBMP) officials and local police to evict the vendors. The officials used Section 288-D of the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act to remove the vendors without following due process. Similarly in Krishnanagara, street vendors were evicted to free up space for the movement of cars in the area. Car users often disregard the needs of people that depend on informal economies by transforming urban cities to their taste.

Sreenivasa illustrated two policies adopted by the BBMP that were influenced by affluent groups. One is the TenderSURE programme that redesigned streets by increasing footpath space and making them more pedestrian and bus friendly at the cost of INR 10-18 crores per kilometre. He emphasised that while this design was good, it would have been more useful in the less affluent public spaces that were more frequented by pedestrians and public transport users. The other is funding for public transport. Metro rail gets more funding than buses because they perpetuate an image of a modern, developed city. This form of exclusion comes from the misplaced notion of a clean and modern city. This affluent movement sustains itself through the internet and social media. This is because the middle class is more digitally literate, reaching out to public authorities that use social media to appear tech-savvy. Sreenivasa concluded by calling for the need to look at streets from the perspective of equity and justice, rather than perspectives that suit the discourse of a modern, developed city.

Session 4: Fooled by Smartness

Programmes, such as the JnNURM, AMRUT and Smart Cities Mission, have aimed to transform urban centres through 'smart' solutions. However, these schemes have diluted the role of urban local bodies and enabled the delegation of responsibilities to unelected entities. They have institutionalised a powerful role of private enterprises in delivering public services, leading to the commodification of services. This session interrogated how the neo-colonial nature of the urban policies has resulted in the conversion of citizens to consumers, humans to sensors, and land to real estate. The speakers built on the issues of the right to the city and urban exclusion that was brought up in the previous sessions, mainly with the concept of urban renewal. They felt that it

was important for public policy to be motivated by a rights based approach rather than in image of a “modern city”.

Housing and Land Rights in Smart Cities - Aravind Unni

Aravind Unni, of Indo-Global Social Service Society, elaborated on the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) and its “unsmart decisions and misplaced priorities”. He drew upon his work on the Smart Cities Mission in Indore and New Delhi Municipal Council. He outlined the manner by which the Smart City Mission (SCM) reconfigured urban spaces to create an “urban, developed city”, but evicted slum dwellers under the guise of beautification and modernisation programmes. The Indore SCM proposal pushed for the eviction of slums to create green spaces, bicycle lanes and to reclaim land for heritage areas. It promoted the vilification of the urban poor to create an image of a smarter, sustainable future. Indore’s proposal sent out a clear message that it needed money to become smart. Money transfer enabled through the leasing of municipal bonds was used to improve certain types of infrastructure instead of focusing on the provision of social housing.

He compared this to the vision of the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), which involved the creation of global benchmarks for slum free cities, air quality and FIRs. The NDMC compared itself to Toronto, Dubai, and Helsinki, but ignored the realities of poverty in India. Unni pointed out that the peripheralisation of the poor from the municipality to other areas for a Slum Free City contradicts the values and policy of the mission. He likened this to the time when Delhi hid its beggars before the Commonwealth games, suggesting that the use of SCM in smaller cities was similar to Delhi’s clean-up policy prior to the Commonwealth games.

Unni concluded by addressing the double speak embedded in the SCM. Most of the city proposals speak about inclusion, sustainability, ecological development and a ‘sustainable cities’ approach, but do not recognise marginalised populations. Instead, proposals all over India look at slums as ‘threats’ and ‘challenges’. He felt that the SCM promoted investment and ignored positive policy frameworks and laws, especially in housing, solid waste management, and the informal sector. He attributed this to a lack of minimum standards and definitions that led to convenient and paradoxical interpretations. The SCM caters to the needs of the affluent, middle class that benefit from technology oriented solutions. He said that if it employed a rights-based approach, it could be more inclusive in its implementation. Thus, there is a need to move beyond the discourse of smart cities, and look at the process of urbanisation from a more wholesome, rights-based approach.

Digital divides and social marginalisation - Dr Rumi Aijaz

Rumi Aijaz, a senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), elaborated on the challenges faced in building a smart city. He pointed out that the SCM aimed to get rid of the word “unsustainable” by modernising urban areas. Even though the urban poor and the informal sector are essential for the construction of infrastructure and

buildings for the SCM, they were excluded from the programme's vision and benefits. Aijaz explained that the SCM originated in 2005 when the Clinton Foundation asked technology giants CISCO and IBM to come up with ideas of better cities that involved the use of technologies to improve the lives of people. This was later taken up by India without making the approach recognise and address the challenges the country faced.

After spending a year on preparation, India identified various committees and SPVs to implement the programme. This led to the development of command and control centres that promoted centralised rather than decentralised governance. These centres were also set up to monitor and digitise all aspects of the city, but it is difficult to monitor the city when some sections and areas lack access to basic services. To address this, the Government of India has promoted 'Digital India' and Aadhar, a biometric and demographic-information-based identification. It was projected as a mechanism to ensure the smooth delivery of public services while limiting the risk of fraud. However, very often the biometrics of Aadhar does not work, and many of the urban poor are unable to access subsidised food and other welfare benefits.

In conclusion, Aijaz raised two important questions for reflection: why is there a failure and is it because the agencies are not in a position to perform their duties? One can reflect on the creation of command and control centres and the role of SPVs that bypass democratic processes laid down in the 74th CAA. He suggested that there was a lot of work being undertaken at all three levels of governance, but there was a need for holistic change to create the vision where everyone has the right to the city.

Urban Futures: Between the Smart and Unsmart - Darshini Mahadevia

The need for holistic change and the semantics of a Smart City were discussed by the Prof. Darshini Mahadevia from CEPT University. She deconstructed the notion of "smartness", contrasting building resilience to hostile events with the extensive consumption of resources for urbanisation. She reminded the audience that while that the current rate of technology advancement enabled mind-boggling possibilities of data collection and analysis, technology was only a means to an end, not the end in itself. The Smart Cities Mission lacks rudimentary data as evidenced by the Ministry of Urban Affairs website. Governments at all levels are using technology for mass surveillance, but have not meaningfully addressed the lapses in data security.

She addressed the concern with the SCM and urbanisation approach using the example of the 'Gujarat model'. This 'Gujarat model' involves the pooling of individual pieces of land for urban development. It has faced stiff resistance from farmers who believe that their land has been forcibly snatched away by the government. It also employs mechanisms of eminent domain and serves the interests of the rich elite class. She linked the SCM to previous urban policies and programmes, like the JNNURM, pointing out that it was yet another vehicle to enable land acquisition for real estate. This leads to the creation of educational institutions, business enclaves, and privately funded

residential projects at the edges of the city, leading to urban sprawls. This creation of urban sprawls promotes the use of private vehicles through lobbying, indirectly deprioritising public transport, and puts pressure on the government to provide basic services instead of to informal settlements within core areas of the city.

After addressing the issue of maldevelopment in the Smart Cities context, Mahadevia elaborated on her conception of the four different kinds of urban futures in store for India if this form of urbanisation continued. The first kind of future involves a vulgar display of wealth in the city, like Mukesh Ambani's Antilia. San Paulo, Brazil serves as an example of the stark future that could be ahead of us if we followed this path. It has more provisions for helipads than bus stands! Even though India has a lot of capacity and money flowing in, it has failed to provide for its Economically Weaker Sections. The second urban future would be one with gated communities and private enclaves for the affluent and elite sections of society, who believe that guards and various barriers would protect them from the urban poor and crime. Mahadevia linked the issue of crime to a larger issue at hand - the issue of unemployment. Nearly 15 percent of India's youth is unemployed, and it is critical that public policy aim to reduce unemployment as well as segregation within cities. The third urban future is slowly unfolding in most metropolitan areas. It involves the peripheralisation of the urban poor through the creation of suburbs and resettlement colonies away from the cities. These colonies consist of poor quality housing, and are constantly being built with no regards to international and national norms. The last future was the most bleak wherein the poor and marginalised have been completely deprived of the right to the city. In this future, rural and semi-urban populations stop coming to the city, as they no longer see the city as a place of opportunity for better work, education and healthcare, and most importantly, a place to improve themselves.

Mahadevia concluded by elaborating on the challenges we face in the way forward. She accepted that it was very difficult to illustrate alternatives. Possibilities of alternatives, however were possible through increased negotiation and engagement with the state, leading to the creation of a legitimate protest space. The first step would be to unpack and deconstruct terms like "development" and "smart". Engaging with the state and addressing these issues of development could help prevent these inequalities from trickling down to smaller cities and towns. This could be achieved by reinvigorating the decentralisation mechanisms put forward through the 74th and 73rd CAA.

Conclusion

Participants of the conference had the opportunity to hear a wide range of issues on the current approach of urbanisation in India and to engage with the possibility of alternatives. The first session of the conference highlighted how laws were being subverted to facilitate the reconfiguration of urban commons to private needs. This narrative is accompanied by the slow deterioration of democratic processes put forth by the 74th amendment. The second session built on the dilution of laws and regulatory processes that have resulted in spaces for public participations, by presenting how urbanisation programmes and schemes are redefining India's cities. This process has

worked towards a deliberate exclusion of India's poor, creating a model that is unsustainable in the long run. In light of urban India's exclusionary policies, the third session focused on the need to revisit the concept of right to the city by looking at shelter, waste and the urban commons. This session highlighted the intrinsic role of informality in the process of urbanisation, which have been ignored by public policies and praxis in favour the more affluent class. This impact of urbanisation on the urban poor was further detailed in 'Fooled by Smartness', where speakers detailed the exclusionary policies of the Smart Cities Mission that developed from India's need to project itself as a modern, global and sustainable nation. The use of Public Private Partnerships and technocratic approaches coupled with the lack of data failed to accommodate the poor into the vision of a smarter city. A focal point of this session was the need to re-envision the current model of smartness answer the question around whose right to the city. The keynote speech extensively detailed four possibilities of urban futures if this manner of urbanisation continues. These futures detailed aspects of urbanisation highlighted in the previous sessions, such as the subversion of the democratic process and the public's role in planning and democratic processes; the influence of middle class discourse, SPVs and public private partnerships and their role in transforming cities into exclusive spaces; the need for a paradigm shift towards an inclusive model focusing on the right to the city, sustainability and urban equity.