



Xavier University Bhubaneswar
University Dialogue Series (UDS)

Date: 28 June 2019

Time: 03.00 pm

Venue: Classroom 126

From Decentralization to Corporatization: Evolution of India's Urban Policy in the Post-liberalisation Era

Speakers:

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This research analyses three centrally sponsored flagship missions of the neoliberal era (i.e JNNURM, AMRUT and the Smart Cities Mission) to show how the policy discourse has shifted between the first and the second-generation reforms.

With the beginning of the market oriented economic reforms, the Government of India started to focus more closely on issues related to urban development. The Constitution was amended in 1992 to explicitly recognize the urban local governments as the third tier in the federal governance system with defined roles and responsibilities. Subsequently, the first major intervention by the national government to reform the urban sector was launched under the JNNURM program was launched in 2005. And then the third set of reforms were launched in 2015 under the aegis of the Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT.

By tracing the trajectory India's urban policy over the past two and half decades, this research shows how the focus of the reforms had changed, in tandem with political economic environment. Emphasis has moved from empowerment of the elected urban local governments through devolution of financial and administrative powers to outsourcing of governance through new spatio-legal instruments such as SPV (Special Purpose Vehicles) and increasing reliance on private consultants. Central missions (e.g. JNNURM, AMRUT and Smart Cities) which combine features of financial program as well as policy instruments are prioritizing supply and delivery of infrastructure through market-friendly financial instruments, application smart digital technologies for service level benchmarking and urban renewal through land monetisation. But, in the process, elected municipalities are being bypassed, reducing scope for participatory democracy and accountability at the local level.

A new pattern of urban governance has emerged, characterized by universal, modular and transactional approach. Citizens are increasingly seen as 'customers', rather than 'participants' in city development while the process of comprehensive approach of urban transformation is being taken over by a paradigm of closed system of urban restructuring through spatial bounding and place making. The focus has shifted from citizen empowerment and participation towards 'managing' the city, by 'improving' customer satisfaction and 'solving' service delivery bottlenecks to achieve higher standards of living for the aspirational neo-middle class. Portable solutions based on 'best practices' are imported and implemented by multinational consultants. While the new form of

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governance is designed to improve the economic roles of the cities through fast track decision making and ability to access market based financial instruments, structural reforms in urban economic governance are being bypassed.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Urban Policy, Corporatization, India

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