

29–30 Nov 2023

# Urban Policy Dialogues 2023

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**POLICY CORNERSTONES FOR THE NEXT LEAP**

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS**



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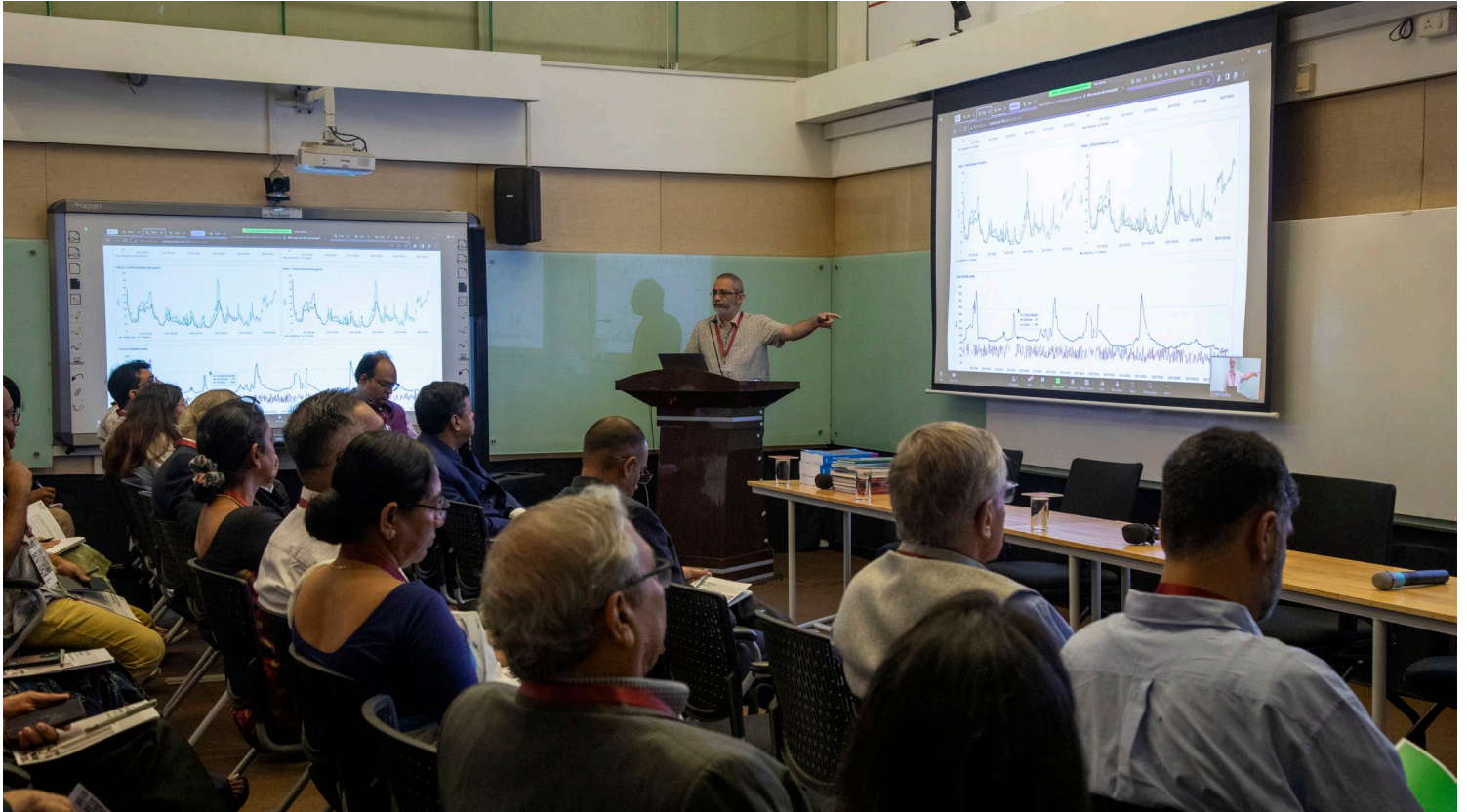


## About Urban Policy Dialogues (UPD)

The UPD is a flagship IIHS event hosted by the IIHS Practice Programme. It has, since 2014 brought together in the last week of November, India's leading urban thinkers and practitioners. They come together under one roof to reflect on the state of the urban and the policy agenda needed to realise the rich development possibilities India's urbanisation presents. Past editions of the event have informed several national and state level policy stances. These, in turn, have gone on to shape the country's urbanisation.

## UPD 2023

The ninth edition of the UPD was held at IIHS' Bengaluru City Campus over 29-30 November 2023 on the theme of Urban India: Policy Cornerstones for the Next Leap. UPD 2023 engaged about 60 participants from diverse spheres of action – policy, regulation, business, finance, research and academia – in discussions on six key themes that will determine the future of Indian cities: economic growth and development policy; governance and administrative reforms; city and infrastructure financing; improved land management; re-imagining infrastructure as service; and, promoting green innovation.



## Welcome Note | Demonstration on Sustainable Buildings

**Prathijna Poonacha, Senior Consultant – Practice and Director’s Office, IIHS, welcomed participants and led a brief retrospective of the UPD.**

**Prasad Vaidya, Senior Advisor, IIHS** presented how IIHS is designing for—and achieving—high water and energy use efficiencies and improved air quality and waste management in its existing and upcoming buildings and campuses.

Prasad’s demonstration highlighted a mix of cost-effective operational enhancements, retrofits, ground-up design and data-driven smart approaches that have been implemented in IIHS campuses, that have provided Factor 3 to Factor 4 improvements in energy efficiency. These are monitored via a dashboard that sits on top of a purpose-built, CampusOS that can be adapted for diverse settings. These have informing capacity development and teaching within [Solar Decathlon India \(SDI\)](#), the world’s largest net-zero building design challenge that is co-managed by IIHS and AEEE.



## Keynote Address

**Aromar Revi, Director, IIHS delivered the keynote address on India Urban Policy 2024-29: An Agenda.**

Drawing on insights from key IIHS publications and collaborations – including the [report to the 15th Finance Commission](#) on the potential of urbanisation to accelerate post-pandemic economic recovery, a recent [stock-take of the climate finance landscape in India](#), and the enabling conditions and policy instruments to achieve 1.5°C and 2°C goals, [the summary for urban policymakers of the IPCC's sixth assessment report](#), and pathways to [transformative water governance](#) and [a healthy net zero future](#) – Aromar made a case for urgently operationalising an urban agenda that places sustainable development and climate action at its core and strives for just and simultaneous transitions across the infrastructure, energy, industrial, water and societal systems. The need for freshly imagining institutional and financing mechanisms for harmonising action across the domains and balanced attention across geographies and different size classes of urban centers was underscored.

An edited recording of the keynote address can be found [here](#).



## Unveiling of Knowledge Products

UPD 2023 continued the tradition of releasing key IIHS reports, policy briefs and publications that contribute to the development discourse in India. Eight knowledge products were released and are available for download at these links:

- [Climate Finance in India 2023](#). The report takes stock of the current climate finance landscape in India, along with estimated financing requirements and enabling conditions and macro policy instruments needed to achieve 1.5°C and 2°C goals.
- [Indian Municipal Finance 2023](#). The report examines decadal time-series data from 33 cities across India, revealing persistent challenges and identifying opportunities to address them.
- [The Urban in India's Recent State Budgets](#). Analysing data from the last three budget cycles for five Indian states, the report reflects on allocation and spend trends and strategies of state governments.
- [Urban Land and Property Record Systems in India: The Case and Agenda for Reform](#). The policy brief dwells on the current status of such systems, core gaps and the case for reform therein, and offers a way forward.
- [The State of Real Estate Regulation in India 2023](#). Drawing on public data from 18 real estate regulatory authorities (RERAs), the report reflects on progress on the of RERA mandate, the extent and timeliness of project disclosures, and arrangements for grievance redress and institutional functioning.
- [Urban Employment Programmes: A Policy Brief](#). The brief examines urban employment programmes in India, offering insights into three prevalent models, and suggests modifications to the design and operationalisation of these programmes so that they can be leveraged to engage with broader questions of urban inequality.
- [The Need for Real Time and Granular Data to Study the Urban Economy](#). The policy brief argues that the recent city-driven economic growth agenda is severely constrained by gaps in the methods of data collection and release and the level of spatial granularity.
- [The Application of Granular Economic Data for Improved Planning and Decision-making in Indian Cities](#). To address the need for granular data on urban economies, IIHS has compiled a data set for Bengaluru covering formal and informal firms across different kinds of economic activities at a high level of spatial granularity. The brief presents applications of this new data set and how it can play an important role supporting better economic and urban planning for Indian cities.

DAY 1



## Session # 1: Improving Urban Governance – Building Capacity and Empowering Elected Representatives

**Moderator:** Amlanjyoti Goswami, Chief–Legal and Regulation, IIHS

**Panellists:** Milind Mhaske, Chief Executive, Praja Foundation | Shubha Raul, former Mayor, Mumbai | V Ravichandar, Chairperson, Feedback Consulting

### Key Takeaways

- Elected representatives have the pulse of their constituents and are well aware of the interventions needed to improve living and working conditions in their constituencies. A supportive ecosystem that closely engages with them to enable an improved understanding of existing legal and programmatic provisions and communication and negotiation techniques will allow available spaces for action to be better leveraged.
- Elected municipal representatives in smaller urban centers are less hemmed in by elected representatives from higher tiers of government and the local executive, and thus enjoy relatively higher latitude in functioning. This offers an opportunity to build exemplars that could strengthen the case for addressing current gaps in law and practice that imbalance the power relationship across various tiers of government and between the elected and executive wings of urban local bodies (ULBs).
- Waiting for the ‘perfect’ law or a sweeping change in siloed municipal structures with limited orientation towards outcome delivery may not be advisable. Opportunities to move the needle wherever available need to be seized, whether it is through capacity development of elected municipal representatives and/ or through exemplars of elected municipal representatives collaborating with stakeholders in the private sector or with knowledge institutions to deliver change on ground.
- Elevating mayors to the status of legislative assembly members could be a step in correcting the power imbalance across various tiers of government and enabling a collaborative approach between elected city and state level representatives.

DAY 1



## Session # 2: Reimagining Infrastructure as a Service

**Moderator:** Mahima Vijendra, Senior Consultant- Practice, IIHS

**Panellists:** Archana Tripathi, Chief Executive, Saahas | Roshan Toshniwal, Head- Center for Future Mobility, OMI Foundation | Shrimoyee Bhattacharya, Program Lead, WRI

### Key Takeaways

- The rural-urban transition needs to be strategised better so that settlements entering the urban ambit have introduced base infrastructure and are armed with a plan for meeting and servicing their projected needs.
- Infrastructure planning and associated investment decisions need to be informed by comprehensive assessments of existing disparities in infrastructure access and service quality and prevailing and projected climate and disaster stresses. They also need to systematically take into account considerations of affordability and convenience, particularly among poor and under-served communities. The rural experience presents a strong case for dialogue between communities, elected representatives and concerned agencies during the process of infrastructure planning, and seeding such processes in cities and towns is important.
- Weaving elements of efficient infrastructure operation and service delivery, together with performance indicators for improved liveability at affordable costs, in procurement contracts could ensure that the process of infrastructure creation does not become an end in itself but as a means to deliver services that better citizens' lives.
- Current performance measurement metrics tend to focus on either input metrics or city-level outputs. This constrains prioritisation of under-served locations and populations and tracking of performance on liveability indicators. Disaggregated reporting on liveability indicators has the potential to change this.
- High-quality granular data on access, service quality and risks remains either unavailable or parked in institutional silos, inhibiting investment in under-served areas and on under-served populations and reflection on performance improvement possibilities. Integrated data command centers that draw together data available with both public and private agencies, including real-time data from sensors, network connected devices, and CCTVs – need to be considered, with due importance to questions of data governance and citizen's privacy.



DAY 1



### Fireside Chat: Enriching the City- Inclusive Growth Pathways

Discussants: Aromar Revi, Director, IHS | Nasser Munjee, Chairperson, Tata Motor Finance; Chairperson, DCB Bank Ltd (2005-21); Managing Director, IDFC (1997-2004); Executive Director, HDFC (1997-2007)

#### Key Takeaways

- India's persistent structural inequality and worsening urban poverty post the COVID-19 pandemic, together with regional divides, infrastructure deficits, institutional inertia and growing climate stress, is a hard reality and calls for more inclusive and sustainability-focused policy agendas that realise aspirations of generational and social mobility, a more nimble and accountable bureaucracy, and a range of partnerships designed to empower citizens and encourage and scale-up innovation.
- Public policy, going forward, needs to strongly focus on equitable and inclusive development, drawing on concepts from Charles Correa's manifesto of equity, disaggregation, pluralism, malleability, participation and income generation.
- Harvesting forward-looking opportunities in agriculture, technology and renewables and promoting impact-focused, synergistic partnerships between the government, private sector and civil society holds the key to an inclusive and sustainable future. Building trust and relationships of care among actors will be crucial to realising impactful partnerships, beginning with mutual appreciation of their respective roles among all stakeholders, agreeing a coherent change agenda, and then bringing to bear their respective strengths to realise the said agenda.

DAY 2



### Session # 3: Urban Finance- Finding the Money, Directing it Right

Moderator: Manish Dubey, Chief – Practice, IIHS

Panellists: Anshul Mishra, Member Secretary, Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority | Debolina Kundu, Professor, National Institute of Urban Affairs | Somnath Sharma, Director-Economic and Policy Research, Reserve Bank of India | Srinivas Ramanujam, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Villgro

#### Key Takeaways

- Given limitations among central and state governments in supporting the high capital expenditure investment requirements of Indian cities, ULBs and other public agencies need to examine commercial financing options. With growing regulatory clarity and policy accent on mobilising private sector resources, municipal bonds and blended financing options are increasingly being explored. The experience with municipal bonds, though limited, has been encouraging with no instance of default and recent oversubscriptions. Blended financing options too are being taken forward incrementally, with public, development finance and philanthropic resources being drawn to attract private investment.
- Whether municipal bonds and blended finance instruments will prove sufficient to bridge the investment gap will depend on the extent to which Indian ULBs harness their own revenue mobilisation options, particularly in relation to property taxes, user charges, and land-based revenue streams. The experience in this regard has been mixed, despite frequent nudges and incentives/ disincentives from central and state governments, Finance Commissions, development finance institutions and national flagship program guidelines.



- The incremental pace at which ULBs have moved on own revenue mobilisation (despite awareness of what needs to be done and broad familiarity with the tools for undertaking this) is because of a mix of factors: gaps in incentive design to promote such mobilisation, insufficient absorptive capacity (as reflected in utilisation levels of resources transferred), and their acknowledgment of 'political' difficulties in reworking property tax and user charge regimes.
- With certain larger cities having moved - and others keen to move - on tapping commercial financing, municipal bonds and blended finance, these options are being viewed as realistic infrastructure financing options by larger cities. Should the trend snowball, there's likelihood of a two-track infrastructure financing track emerging in the country. Larger cities could opt for a track with a high share of commercial financing and smaller cities largely financing their needs through central and state government support. The implications of this needs further reflection.
- Venture capital is inclined to favour consumer businesses and not infrastructure at the moment. Blended finance, combining equity and debt, can present a way forward. While blended finance options are increasingly being talked about, the appetite for the same is limited at the moment in the philanthropic space and highest in the public sector.

DAY 2



### Session # 4: Innovation and the Green City

**Moderator:** Amir Bazaz, Senior Lead- Practice, IIHS

**Panellists:** Ashwini Saxena, CEO, JSW Foundation | Jeeth Iype, Co-founder, GoodEarth | Subhabrata Ghosh, CEO, Celsius100 Consulting | Sunita Purushottam, Head- Sustainability, Mahindra Lifespaces

#### Key Takeaways

- Cities need to be reimagined as a network of small organic clusters based on people's collective logic and cultural influences (and a consequently defined sense of ownership) rather than massive systems saddled with out-of-context, externally imposed master plans.
- Behaviour change is critical to innovating and scaling-up green initiatives. Such behaviour change, given the consumptive, individualistic and status-driven markets larger Indian cities have become, will need exciting experiential triggers from newly and sustainably designed products and services and is unlikely to be achieved by appeals to 'logic' alone. This, in turn, makes a case for product and service design efforts located in understandings of citizen's views of their city and its sustainability.

DAY 2



## Session # 5: The Contours of a Citizen-centric Land Governance Regime

**Moderator:** Deepika Jha, Senior Consultant- Practice, IIHS

**Panellists:** Mamatha B R, Inspector General, Department of Stamps and Registration, Government of Karnataka | N K Sudhansu, Settlement Commissioner and Director of Land Records, Government of Maharashtra | Ray Sharat Prasad, Founder, Delta 1Law | Sunali Rohra, Senior Executive Vice President, HDFC Bank

### Key Takeaways

- Traditionally the emphasis of land management systems has been on rural areas, leaving an information void in urban areas. Urban land records differ from rural records, posing challenges in awareness and legal distinctions. From the homebuyer's perspective, inefficiencies in the urban land governance and management system become apparent in property deals, legal due diligence and overall transaction reliability. The repercussions extend beyond mere information access and tenure security, impacting the economy and urban planning.
- Technology can be a key driver for citizen empowerment and data accessibility. Challenges and lessons learnt from state experiences in transitioning to digital systems underscore the importance of citizen awareness, capacity development and decentralisation of decision making. The importance of a citizen feedback mechanism, grievance redressal, transparency of services and help desks equipped with call centres was also stressed.
- A proposal of establishing a property index for each property, based on available information, was put forward. This index, differentiating properties with sound records, was seen as a potential catalyst to exert pressure on the government for improved reliability of property records and on the property owners for updating information. The suggestion included superimposing textual and cadastral records for a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of property details.



- Another proposal for a unified land management system was discussed. This would interconnect multiple existing property related databases across departments, and would also interconnect associated services. This has the potential to substantially reduce the efforts put in by citizens and make all relevant information available digitally. However, provisions of Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and their potential impact on land information systems must be considered.
- The government has initiated substantial changes through the National Land Monetisation Corporation, which aligns with the Gati Shakti initiative. The structured framework, coupled with investment incentives, aims to encourage the disposal of land for productive use, thereby influencing land prices positively. However, the challenge lies in execution, as land allocated is primarily owned by the central government, while responsibility for development permissions fall on the state government or local bodies, with delays potentially impacting investments.



### **Closing Remarks**

In his closing remarks, Aromar thanked the participants for their insightful contributions, reflected on the discussions held in the two days and spoke of the need to harness the energy and ideas generated by UPD to counter evolving urban challenges and shape more liveable, equitable, efficient, and sustainable cities.



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[iihs.co.in](http://iihs.co.in)

**IIHS, BENGALURU CITY CAMPUS**

197/36, 2nd Main Road, Sadashivanagar, Bengaluru 560 080, India  
T +91 80 6760 6666 | F +91 80 2361 6814

**IIHS, CHENNAI**

Floor 7A, Chaitanya Exotica, 24/51 Venkatnarayana Road, T Nagar, Chennai 600 017, India  
T +91 44 6630 5500/6555 6590

**IIHS, DELHI**

803, Surya Kiran, 19, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi 110 001, India  
T +91 11 4360 2798 | F +91 11 2332 0477

**IIHS, MUMBAI**

Flat No. 2, Purnima Building, Patel Compound, 20-C, Napean Sea Road, Mumbai 400 006, India  
T +91 22 6525 3874