

## Gist of EPW May Week 4, 2022

The Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) is an important source of study material for [IAS](#), especially for the current affairs segment. In this section, we give you the gist of the EPW magazine every week. The important topics covered in the weekly are analyzed and explained in a simple language, all from a [UPSC](#) perspective.

### Unpacking the Black Box of Urban Governance in India

#### Context

This article discusses various challenges in urban governance in India.

#### Details

- Efficient and equitable urban service delivery is the most important factor to ensure that cities are the engines of economic growth and are liveable.
- However, most of the cities in the country are plagued with severe infrastructural deficits and a high prevalence of poverty.
- Experts as well as other empirical evidence on urban local governance argue for correcting the institutional setup and the introduction of participatory governance to improve urban service delivery.
- Even after 25 years of the [74th amendment to the Constitution](#), the cities in India experience challenges in key urban services such as water supply, sewerage, drainage, solid waste management, street lighting, and roads.

#### 74th Amendment to the Constitution

- The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 introduced a new **Part IXA** in the Constitution, which deals with the issues relating to municipalities.
- The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 provides a basic framework for the decentralisation of powers and authorities to the municipal bodies at different levels.
- It provides for the constitution of three types of municipalities depending upon the size and area, namely:
  - **Nagar Panchayat** - for an area in transition from rural to urban area
  - **Municipal Council** - for smaller urban area
  - **Municipal Corporation** - for a larger urban area
- It is left to the State Legislature to decide which specific type of municipality will be constituted for a particular urban area.
- The seats of the municipalities are filled by direct elections.

- According to the Act, all municipalities would be empowered with such powers and responsibilities which are necessary to enable them to function as effective institutions of self-government.
  - The State Legislature may, by law, specify what powers and responsibilities would be given to the municipalities in respect of the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice and for implementation of schemes as may be entrusted to them.

### Various challenges plaguing urban governance

- In Kerala, the urban governments must follow a long sequential procedure to approve or reject any proposal on devolved responsibilities, with a part of such procedure falling under the purview of the District Planning Committees (DPCs) and Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) established by the state government.
  - These complications in the decision-making process undermine the powers of the local government and are making them inefficient and the process time-consuming.
  - However, the local authorities in urban governments in Gujarat decide on the systems and procedures for infrastructure services making the delivery framework faster, smoother and more transparent.
- Kerala's urban governments are affected by increased horizontal functions that result in a mismatch between staff qualification and service specialisation.
  - **Example:** The delivery of services such as solid waste management (SWM) requires environmental engineering specialists but the SWM aspect is placed in the health domain and medical personnel are assigned to it.
  - Whereas in Gujarat, service-specific, well-differentiated organisational mechanisms help in ensuring effective coordination between planning and infrastructure division.
- Also, many state governments interfere in city governance through ad hoc micromanagement, constraining financial regulations and an extensive top-down system of approvals.
- Further, the absence of local autonomy undermines the city governments' capacity to plan and design various programmes.
- The practice of seeking financial and technical approvals from the state government leads to an increase in the project and delays in implementation.

### Way forward

- Experts suggest that cities can perform better in providing urban services if their local capacity to make and implement decisions is enhanced.
- Genuine autonomy in decision-making and facilitation of technical support by the state governments also help strengthen the local capacity significantly.
- Further, enhanced community participation in decision-making processes and the scope for contestation induce equity in the delivery system.

## Conclusion

Increased autonomy, enhanced community participation and cooperative state-local relations are important to better the capacity of urban governments and are hence conducive to local governance.

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