

INDIA 2026-2029



COUNTRY PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

“A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world.”

Complex urban fabric of Indian cities. Credit @ UN-Habitat



UN-HABITAT

UN-Habitat ROAP Country Programme Overview

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CONTENT

OPENING	4
.....	
COUNTRY ANALYSIS	5
.....	
FACTSHEET	6
.....	
URBAN CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES	7
.....	
HOUSING, LAND AND BASIC SERVICES	8
.....	
CLIMATE CHANGE	9
.....	
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS	10
.....	
RECENT AND ONGOING INTERVENTIONS	11
.....	
HUMAN STORIES	13
.....	
COUNTRY FOCUS	14
.....	
PLANNED INTERVENTIONS	15
.....	
PUBLICITY AND OUTREACH	18
.....	

01

OPENING

India Country Office **VISION**

UN-Habitat India aims to be a trusted and influential partner in shaping India's urban transformation, offering technical expertise and capacity building support to drive next generation outcomes that foster inclusivity, climate resilience, and economic opportunity for all.

India Country Office **FOCUS**

People

Furthering equitable access to high quality, climate-resilient housing and urban basic services, alongside economic opportunities.

Environment

Supporting whole-of-system transitions to low carbon, climate resilient pathways and biodiversity restoration.

Systems

Facilitating the development of capacities, institutions, and data-driven planning and governance frameworks.



Foreword by the Country Programme Manager, India Country Office

India stands at an important juncture in its development trajectory. As a country that will be the site of the largest future urbanization, and expected to meet the needs and aspirations of almost a billion urban citizens by 2050, it will be imperative to build upon the pioneering work that has been done in the past few decades and leapfrog towards ensuring opportunity, quality of life and resilience for all. UN-Habitat will support this journey over the coming decades and help build innovative models, capacities and institutions by working with governments, development partners, academia, private sector and communities to chart a trajectory that is aligned with the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.



I am pleased to present this Country Programme Overview for India for 2026–2029, which sets out the urban context, major development challenges, and the strategic priorities that will guide UN-Habitat’s engagement in the country. It sets out some of the key challenges in housing, land, basic services, climate resilience, inclusion, and urban governance to support a more coherent and forward-looking programme response. We hope the document helps to foster collaborations and mobilise investments towards advancing common agendas and goals for building inclusive and resilient development pathways for India.

Nilesh Rajadhyaksha
Country Programme Manager
UN-Habitat India



Lack of adequate planning leading to stressed urban infrastructure. Credit @ The Free Press Journal

01

COUNTRY ANALYSIS

India's urban transition is entering a decisive period, and it is set to emerge as one of the largest urban systems in the world. Census 2011 recorded a total of 7935 towns, of which 486 were cities with a population of 100,000 or more, and rest were small towns (including Census Towns with urban characteristics but rural governance). This varied system presents unique challenges and capacity gaps for planning, governance and financing of urban development.

While cities house only a third of the population they contribute two-thirds of the economic output. Urban population is projected to continue rising sharply, creating both major opportunities for productivity, innovation, and jobs, and significant pressure on housing, land, infrastructure, and local governance.



The urban population to double from **535 million in 2026 to 951 million by 2050.**



India has **53 urban agglomerations** that account for 140 million urban residents.

02

FACTSHEET



1.47 B (2026)

POPULATION



0.87 % (2026)

**POPULATION
GROWTH**



2,694.7 USD (2026)

GDP PER CAPITA



535 M (2026)

**URBAN
POPULATION**



36.9 % (2026)

**URBAN
POPULATION
PERCENTAGE**



65.49 million (2011)

**POPULATION
RESIDING IN
SLUMS**



0.685 (2023)

HDI INDEX



7.15% (2024)

AGING RATE



68% (2023)

**ACCESS TO PIPED WATER
(URBAN)**

03

URBAN CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

India's urban transition is rapid and uneven. Key challenges include a housing shortage of nearly 19 million units, persistent informality, infrastructure deficits, environmental degradation, air pollution, climate risks, and limited municipal capacity.



Housing Deficit and Informality

India faces chronic housing shortage, with over 95% affecting economically weaker and low-income groups (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, MoHUA). While about a fourth of the population lives in slums, a substantial number of people also live in old, dilapidated and unplanned housing areas that have poor infrastructure and are vulnerable to shocks.

Infrastructure and Service Delivery Gaps

India has made substantial strides in provision of basic services, implementation of public transport systems, electrification and digitalization for service delivery. However, cities continue to grapple with the needs of a growing population, quality of services, circularity and resource efficiency, and pollution.

Climate Vulnerability and Environmental Stress

Over 80% of Indian cities are exposed to climate-induced risks such as flooding, heatwaves, and water scarcity (World Bank). India recorded some of its hottest years recently, with urban heat island effects intensifying impacts. Nearly 21 major cities face groundwater depletion risks, threatening long-term urban water security (NITI Aayog).

Urban Governance and Financing Constraints

Cities generate less than 1% of GDP in revenues, limiting their capacity to invest in infrastructure (World Bank). Property tax collection remains inefficient, and over 40% of Urban Local Bodies lack adequate staffing (MoHUA). Weak institutional capacity and fragmented governance structures continue to constrain effective urban planning and urban planning, service delivery, and ability to unlock land values or access markets or green finance.

HOUSING, LAND AND BASIC SERVICES

India's housing agenda is central to inclusive urbanization. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U), Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and Swachh Bharat Mission have expanded the policy foundation for housing and basic services, yet affordability, tenure insecurity, and unequal access to serviced land continue to constrain progress. A stronger next-generation approach should combine housing delivery with slum upgrading, land management, tenure security, climate resilience, and neighbourhood-scale service provision.

There is a strong need to adopt planning frameworks for compact city growth, urban regeneration of old areas, promoting rental and migrant housing models, blue-green infrastructure, improved access to green mobility options through electrification, Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) and public transport. Besides it will be critical to build on existing digital public infrastructure, create responsive and more decentralised governance frameworks and improve access to new forms of financing.



HOUSING



LAND



BASIC SERVICES

India faces an urban housing shortage of 18.8 million units, with over 95% affecting the Economically Weaker Section (EWS)/ Low Income Groups (LIG) (MoHUA Technical Group Report, 2012). Around 24% of the urban population lives in slums (Census of India, 2011).

Only about 30% of urban land is formally planned, with significant tenure insecurity limiting access for low-income groups (India Urbanization Review, World Bank, 2016).

About 70% of urban households have piped water access, and less than 40% are connected to sewerage systems (CPCB, 2021). Only 54% of 170,000 Tonnes Per Day (TPD) waste is scientifically processed (CPCB, 2021).

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate risk is now a defining urban development issue in India. Extreme heat, flooding, drought, sea-level impacts, and water stress are already affecting cities, while rapid growth is increasing exposure. Building resilience requires integrated planning, nature-based solutions, resilient infrastructure, and stronger access to climate finance.

Despite strong policy momentum through the updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), national missions like Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT 2.0), Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Urban 2.0, Jal Shakti Abhiyan, Solar Mission, Nagar Van Yojana, Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes (MISHTI) among others, and efforts by cities to develop Heat Action Plans, Climate Action Plans and Flood Plans, cities continue to face rising environmental stress, infrastructure gaps, and climate vulnerability. There is an urgent need to converge efforts across the development ecosystem and create integrated frameworks for green built environments, clean energy, nature-based solutions, urban biodiversity and ecology protection, and locally-led adaptation.



CHALLENGE 1

Rising Urban Heat Stress

India is experiencing increasing frequency and intensity of heatwaves, with heatwave days more than doubling since 1980 (Indian Meteorological Department, 2023). Urban areas are warming nearly twice as fast as rural regions due to heat island effects (Nature study, 2024).

CHALLENGE 2

Increasing Flood Risk and Water Stress

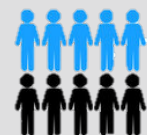
Over 80% of Indian districts are vulnerable to extreme climate events, including flooding (World Bank, 2021). Coastal and riverine cities face recurring urban floods due to inadequate drainage and unregulated development. Urban areas also suffer from severe ground water depletion.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS



India faces recurring urban humanitarian pressures driven by floods, cyclones, heatwaves, landslides, and displacement linked to disasters and climate stress.

These shocks disproportionately affect informal settlements and migrant communities (in particular, women, children, elderly and those with disabilities), who often live in high-risk locations with weak access to protection and services.



1.05 billion people
(~76% of India's population)
are exposed to climate
hazards annually



1.6 million people
(0.11% of India's population)
is displaced annually due to
disasters

RECENT AND ONGOING INTERVENTIONS

1

2019 - 2022

Sustainable Cities Integrated Approach Pilot (SCIAP)

Project Objective - To integrate sustainability strategies into urban planning and management to create a favorable environment for ecologically and financially sound investments in low carbon infrastructure and service delivery.



1.588 M USD



Global Environment Facility GEF-6



UNIDO



2

2020 - 2023

Mainstreaming “Leaving No One Behind” in National Urban Policies and Programmes (SDGs 11 & 6) in South Asia

Project Objective - To strengthen national governments and local urban institutions to center LNOB (inclusion, disability, and safety) in urban policies and programmes and facilitate evidence-based localization of national policies and SDGs 11 & 6 in urban areas.



539,000 USD



United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)



ESCAP and UN-OICT



3

2020 - 2021

Waste Wise Cities: Tackling Plastic Waste in the Environment

Project Objective - To enable data driven decision making in solid waste management in pilot cities by the application of the Waste Wise Cities Tool to support evidence-based planning and implementation to reduce GHG emissions, support circular economy and create sustainable, carbon-neutral, inclusive cities.



95,000 USD



Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW)



UBSS (UN-Habitat)



RECENT AND ONGOING INTERVENTIONS

4

2022 - ongoing

Young Gamechangers Initiative, Jatni

Project Objective- To improve the urban health and wellbeing of young people by actively engaging them in urban governance and decision-making through digital tools, while co-designing inclusive, safe, and accessible public spaces. It seeks to strengthen city systems, enhance youth participation, and promote sustainable, youth-centered urban development in intermediary cities.



582,000 USD



Fondation Botnar



Jatni Municipal Corporation, WHO



5

2019 - ongoing

Frontier Technologies for Inclusive Circularity of Low Value Plastic (LVP)

Project Objective- To promote solutions for upcycling low-value plastic waste in Bhubaneswar through innovative technologies. It focuses on strengthening public-private partnerships, improving market access for recycled products, and promoting social entrepreneurship, while reducing landfill waste and creating an inclusive circular economy model that can be replicated across cities in eastern India.



227,000 USD



Norwegian Retailers' Environment Fund

State Housing and Urban Development Department (HUDD),
Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC)

6

2024 - ongoing

Water as Leverage (WaL)

Project Objective - To strengthen and enhance the Urban River Management Plan (URMP) framework by integrating the Water as Leverage approach to enable inclusive, climate-resilient, and sustainable river-city development. It focuses on improving planning, governance, financing, and stakeholder engagement to support integrated, scalable, and investment-ready urban water interventions.



44,940 USD



The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO)

Government of the Netherlands, The Netherlands Enterprise
Agency (RVO), Deltares, NMCG, NIUA

IMPACT STORY

“Engaging Youth in Urban Governance”



Youth-led participatory budgeting. Credit @ UN-Habitat

Odisha's Young Gamechangers facilitate Minecraft co-design workshops and public voting processes with residents through UN-Habitat's digital Participatory Budgeting platform to prioritize interventions for their neighbourhood public spaces.

Under the Young Gamechangers Initiative (YGI), UN-Habitat is committed to promoting the health and wellbeing of Jatni youth and communities by actively engaging them in urban governance, digital upskilling, and co-design of inclusive public spaces. Together with the municipality and recruited Young Gamechangers, 20 public spaces have been spatially analyzed; over 300 community members have been consulted and interviewed using Kobo Toolbox and Inhabit Place; comprehensive Minecraft models and pitch videos have been co-designed to refine site Masterplans with architecture experts; and a youth-led participatory budgeting campaign was organized with the involvement of over 2000 residents to identify urgent upgrades for 2 prioritized public spaces.

Focus SDG Target 11.7 - By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

“Working side by side with architects showed me the power of thoughtful design to shape entire communities. It has inspired me to study urban planning, so that I can help create healthier, more inclusive spaces for everyone”

– Rupali Nayak, 21 years, Jatni Young Gamechanger

COUNTRY FOCUS



RESILIENT HOUSING & INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Foster affordable and climate-resilient housing, slum upgrading, secure tenure, and neighbourhood-level service delivery to reduce spatial inequality and improve quality of life for vulnerable communities.



CLIMATE-RESILIENT URBAN SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Facilitate resilient urban services and infrastructure through better water, sanitation, waste, drainage, and public-space systems, with stronger use of climate data, nature-based solutions, and investable project pipelines.



INTEGRATED & SMART URBAN GOVERNANCE

Support integrated and smart urban governance, strengthening municipal finance, local capacity, data systems, participation, and cross-sectoral coordination so cities can plan, finance, and deliver more effectively.

UN-HABITAT INDIA'S STEPS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Young Gamechangers Initiative

Youth led co-creation for local solutions

Water as Leverage

Climate-resilient urban water systems

Frontier Technologies (NREF)

Inclusive circularity for Low Value Plastic (LVP)

ACHIEVEMENTS

07



States covered under Projects

16



Cities covered under Projects

SDG
3,6,11,12,15



SDG Addressed

Sectors: Eco-tourism, ecological conservation, waste management, water, urban health, youth and livelihoods, sustainable cities, disaster risk reduction

PLANNED INTERVENTIONS



Adaptation Innovation Incubator and Accelerator for Secondary and Small Cities in Asia Pacific

Project's Aim: Accelerate high-impact, people - centered adaptation innovations in secondary and small cities across Asia Pacific by empowering communities as climate adaptation leaders through locally led adaptation initiatives.

Relevance to regional implementation plan: Universal access to resilient, risk-informed and climate sensitive basic services and infrastructures; Harmonized co-existence of cities and nature and preservation of cultural diversity.

Additional Priorities: Strengthening local institutional capacity, promoting inclusive participation, improving access to adaptation finance, supporting data, knowledge-sharing, and regional learning, and Integrating resilience into local planning and service delivery systems



TOTAL BUDGET:
2M USD



TIME FRAME:
2027 - 2031



LOCATION:
India

OUTPUT, OUTCOME AND IMPACT:

1. Enhance climate resilience for urban residents across the selected cities, through innovation in water, housing, waste, nature-based, and economic solutions.
2. Strengthen local capacities and institutional frameworks to sustain, replicate, and scale up successful innovations.
3. Establish regional and local adaptation innovation ecosystems capable of driving future resilience actions.
4. Improve social equity by empowering vulnerable groups and integrating gender-responsive adaptation planning at the municipal level.

PLANNED INTERVENTIONS



Inclusive and Climate-Resilient Public Infrastructure and DRR Systems for Children with Disabilities

Project's Aim: Develop a replicable, disability-inclusive, and climate-resilient urban development model, addressing the intersectional vulnerabilities of children with disabilities in the face of climate-induced disasters.

Relevance to regional implementation plan: Resilient, risk-informed and climate-sensitive housing for all, including transformation of slums and informal settlements; Universal access to resilient, risk-informed and climate sensitive basic services and infrastructures.

Additional Priorities: Mainstreaming disability inclusion, Strengthening child-centered and inclusive public services, building local institutional capacity, promoting accessible infrastructure, early warning systems, and emergency response mechanisms, and documenting and sharing the model



TOTAL BUDGET:
200,000 USD



TIME FRAME:
18 Months



LOCATION:
India

OUTPUT, OUTCOME AND IMPACT:

1. 1 municipal school and 1 public park transformed into climate-resilient, accessible models.
2. 1,000–1,200 beneficiaries including students with and without disabilities, teachers, caregivers empowered.
3. Disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) toolkits integrated into national frameworks [National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)].
4. Real-time data systems linking Unique Disability ID (UDID), Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) for shock-responsive social protection.
5. Replicable model with open-access digital toolkit for scaling across Indian cities.

PLANNED INTERVENTIONS



Waste Wise Cities - Beyond Collection: Leveraging WaCT Assessments to Design Circular Economy Interventions

Project's Aim: To strengthen institutional, technical, and operational capacity of urban local bodies in Odisha to implement circular e-waste and plastic waste management systems, with a specific focus on reducing plastic leakage into land and water ecosystems, improving recycling rates, and generating inclusive green livelihoods through public - private and community partnerships.

Relevance to regional implementation plan: Universal access to resilient, risk-informed and climate sensitive basic services and infrastructures; Harmonized co-existence of cities and nature and preservation of cultural diversity.

Additional Priorities: Strengthening local government capacity, reducing plastic leakage into rivers, drainage systems, promoting inclusive green jobs and livelihoods, advancing public-private-community partnerships, and supporting data, monitoring, and behavior change.



TOTAL BUDGET:
150,000 USD



TIME FRAME:
18 Months



LOCATION:
India

OUTPUT, OUTCOME AND IMPACT:

1. Increase awareness and capacity building with focus on segregation and waste minimization
2. Enhance decentralized resource recovery by boosting recycling interventions and bringing efficiency and coordination in resource recovery value chain
3. Improve operations of the waste disposal site
4. Enhance finance & circular investment

PLANNED INTERVENTIONS



Sustainable Future: Empowering School Students as Gamechangers

Project's Aim: To empower students as young change-makers by transforming schools into eco-friendly, inclusive, and climate-resilient ecosystems through sustainable practices, capacity building, and community engagement.

Relevance to regional implementation plan: Resilient, risk-informed and climate-sensitive housing for all, including transformation of slums and informal settlements; Universal access to resilient, risk-informed and climate sensitive basic services and infrastructures.

Additional Priorities: Promotes universal access to climate-sensitive, inclusive, and resilient services in schools, while strengthening environmental awareness, youth participation, and institutional capacity for sustainable infrastructure and governance.



TOTAL BUDGET:
165,000 USD



TIME FRAME:
2026 – 2028
(30 months)

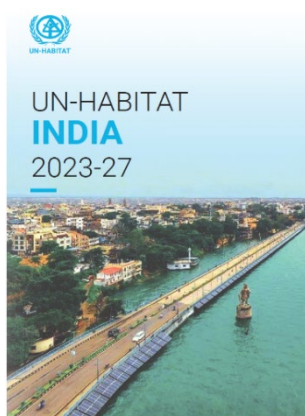


LOCATION:
Urban and peri-urban schools

OUTPUT, OUTCOME AND IMPACT:

1. Transform 15 schools into eco-friendly, climate-resilient demonstration models with green, heat resilient infrastructure and sustainable operations
2. Empower ~7,500 students as environmental leaders through participatory planning, sustainability clubs, and advocacy initiatives
3. Strengthen institutional mechanisms (green committees, living labs) for long-term sustainability and governance
4. Create scalable, inclusive models linking education, community engagement, and sustainable urban development

PUBLICITY AND OUTREACH

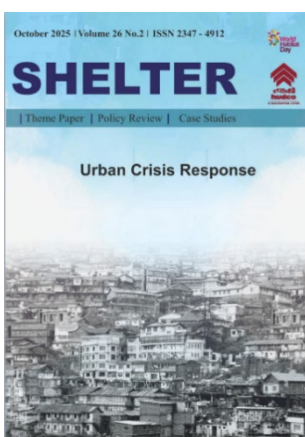


Overall Strategy Overview-Smart & Resilient Cities (2023)

HIGHLIGHTS:

Provides an overview of UN-Habitat's India work in the following areas:

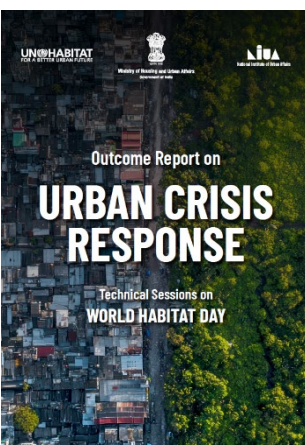
- A - Promote integrated, data-driven urban planning using the Urban Sustainability Assessment Framework (USAF)
- B - Support development of sustainable city strategies aligned with climate resilience and SDGs
- C - Enable convergence of policies, stakeholder collaboration, and institutional strengthening
- D - Facilitate climate financing and creation of investment-ready project pipelines



HUDCO/HSMI Shelter Paper (2025)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- A - Frames urban crisis as a multi-dimensional governance and climate challenge
- B - Emphasizes a shift from reactive disaster response to anticipatory, risk-informed resilience planning using nature-based and inclusive approaches
- C - Highlights institutional, financing, and capacity gaps in urban governance, stressing the need for empowered local leadership and data-driven systems



World Habitat Day (2025)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- A – Highlights urban crisis response as a growing priority in the face of climate shocks, conflict, displacement, and rising pressure on city systems.
- B – Underscores the importance of inclusive urban and territorial planning, local governance, and adequate shelter in crisis recovery.
- C – Serves as a public advocacy platform for sharing lessons, mobilizing stakeholders, and advancing scalable urban resilience solutions.
- D – Connects technical dialogue, policy outreach, and knowledge dissemination to strengthen collective action for resilient cities.



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