General Studies – 1; Topic: Urbanization – problems and remedies

Smart Cities Mission (SCM)

1) Introduction
   - ‘Smart city’ is a city equipped with basic infrastructure to give a decent quality of life, a clean and sustainable environment through application of some smart solutions.
   - It includes basic infrastructure like adequate water supply, electricity supply, sustainable sanitation and solid waste management, efficient urban mobility, affordable housing and ensuring robust IT connectivity and e-governance.

2) Progress
   - After three years of the announcement, 89 cities have been selected, but with little to show in urban transformation.
   - There are a few cities that have taken the task seriously. Pune has begun by raising funds through the issuance of municipal ‘smart city’ bonds.
   - Bhubaneswar has launched a railway multi-modal hub, a hi-tech transport signal system and an urban knowledge centre.
   - The New Delhi Municipal Corporation has started implementation of mini-sewerage plants, wi-fi activated ‘smart’ street lights and city surveillance systems through a command and control centre.
   - But, most cities are still struggling at a primary planning stage, and financial closure to projects is still a long way off.
   - More importantly private investment – has hardly been identified and defined.

3) Concerns / Challenges
   - Smart cities function as special purpose vehicles diverged from regular urban governance structures. It can create islands of development rather than an inclusive all round development of the city.
   - State and local governments lack fine-grained data or the capability to analyse them in order to understand the evolving needs of their communities.
   - Although India’s Smart Cities Mission has identified more than 20 priority areas, interventions by the respective agencies are weak.
   - There is an inadequate emphasis on the functioning of urban local bodies.
   - The Area Based Development approach – development of a sewage system somewhere or a web of roads in another city – will cover just about three per cent of the urban areas associated with these smart cities.
   - Urban local bodies lack both technical and human capacity and professionalism.

4) The New Urban Agenda (NUA) and SCM
   - The NUA is a landmark vision document that calls for a paradigm shift in addressing urban issues, rooted in concerns of sustainability.
   - “Sustainability” and “inclusivity” are the core principles of the NUA.
   - NUA requires that countries involve municipal, state and federal governments to form a basic framework for implementation of urban reforms.
   - Both the NUA and SCM guidelines pay close attention to infrastructure and services such as solid waste management, compact urban planning and energy resources.
• Paying attention to the aspects of resilience and local governance outlined in the NUA can ensure that Indian cities respond to more than just competitive sub-federalism.

5) **Way Forward**

• Smart cities cannot be a solution to urban crisis happening in India. It needs understanding of problem rationally through data collected systematically.
• If Chicago city is taken as an example, Array of Sensors are installed on streets for people to download raw data on air quality, pedestrian movement and standing water.
• Similarly India also shall develop transport, waste management data for improving urban governance based on evidence.
• When one has limited funds, an easier and speedier route is to take five big cities or 10 small ones at a time, and transform them comprehensively.
• Building of these cities cannot come only with government spending. The funding has to happen through private sector’s involvement.
• Since the smart cities programme aims at affordable housing and modern transportation, government has to facilitate smoother land acquisition with appropriate rehabilitation and resettlement.
• We see cutting of trees for widening of roads and highways. Care has to be taken to protect the environment while making cities smart.
• Citizen participation is important right from policy inputs, implementation and execution because citizens are the ultimate beneficiaries of smart cities.
• Smart cities development requires smart leadership which has to come from all the three tiers of the government.

6) **Conclusion**

• Clearly, there is a lot of low-hanging fruit on the road to smartness, and a nimble policy approach can tap this quickly.
• The plan should recognise that the vibrant life of cities depends on variety and enabling environments, rather than a mere technology-led vision.
• Pollution-free commons, walkability and easy mobility, with a base of reliable civic services, is the smart way to go.
• With urbanization gaining prominence in the global policy discourse, it is important to focus on local governance.