



Webinar to discuss Smart-City Systems Framework organised by SHIKHAR

The webinar aimed to raise awareness amongst students and professionals by bridging the gap between theory and praxis by bringing together different perspectives from academia as well as practitioners in the urban management and governance space. Keynote speakers included Dr. Pankaj Verma, Assistant Professor, School of Architecture and Design-DIT University, Dehradun, and Ms. V.R Vachana, Manager, Advocacy and Reforms- Janaagraha, Bangalore.

Dr. Pankaj Verma talked about the current situation of smart cities by highlighting issues caused by urban sprawl such as environmental degradation, climate change, and infrastructure-related problems in Dehradun. He discussed the lack of integration between the city and its managers at the grass-root level, thus highlighting the need for adequate and efficient urban governance. A general goal of smart cities is to improve sustainability with the help of technologies and to make cities more efficient and livable. Smart cities can work as a tool for controlling the adverse effect of rapid urbanization.

He then discussed urban governance. Urban governance is primarily concerned with the processes through which government is organized and delivered in towns and cities and the relationships between state agencies and civil society- a term that is used to include citizens, communities, private-sector actors, and voluntary organizations. However, he mentioned that there is no commonly accepted definition for smart governance. He explained that smart city governance could mean making the right policy choices, developing innovative governance structures, or/and governing with a focus on the outcome, that is, dealing with substantive urban challenges.

V.R Vachana started by emphasizing 'Indian cities do not have a hundred thousand problems, but they have the same hundred problems repeated a thousand times. Cities are crucial from three perspectives: quality of life, economy, and democracy. She then introduced the participants to Janaagraha's flagship programme, The Annual Survey of India's City- Systems (ASICS) - A diagnostic study of the state of governance in India's cities using the City-Systems framework – 1) Urban Planning and Design (UPD), 2) Urban Capacities and Resources (UCR), 3) Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) and 4) Empowered and Legitimate Political representation (ELPR). ASICS, in its 5th edition, assesses governance in 23 of India's largest cities and scores them on

a scale of 0 to 10. It also scores three global cities to serve as a reference of the distance India's cities need to cover before they can deliver a similar quality of life.

She further highlighted the issues of urban capacities and resources, the landscape of municipal finance, and financial sustainability in an urban setup. She brought up the issue of a council's power in city governance and how it may be improved by fostering active public engagement and key leadership in city governance. She also touched upon topical issues such as the need for a place-based approach for cities in India, assessment of India's urban governance from the lens of the 'city-systems' framework, the importance of governance being at the heart of smart cities. She concluded by emphasizing state governments should take leadership on city systems reforms and not rely only on central schemes and missions. The government should also adopt a twin-track approach of Projects + Reforms.

The key levers of transformative change in our cities are:

- Spatial Plans and design standards for public utilities in cities
- Fiscal decentralization and robust financial management systems
- Municipal staffing reforms; numbers, skills, organization design, performance management
- Empowered mayors and councils (powers over 3 F's)

Platforms for citizen participation, systematic transparency