
THREE CITIES ONE CHAOS: LIVING THE UNPLANNED DEVELOPMENT OF NCR

Nidhi, Assistant Professor, Law, Manav Rachna University, Faridabad*

ABSTRACT

Growth can be chaotic, particularly when it accelerates beyond the capacity of planning. The ill-planned urban development by the government has failed to keep pace with the needs of the growing population, leading to basic infrastructural and environmental challenges. This paper examines the complex realities of three very prominent cities that lie at the heart of the National Capital Region (NCR)- Delhi, Gurgaon, and Faridabad. Apart from sharing borders, these cities share common concerns emerging from unplanned growth. Issues, such as scarcity of clean drinking water, improper drainage systems causing sewage overflow, and heavy waterlogging in the rainy season, have made the lives of common people miserable, especially the working class. While Delhi continues to be the most polluted city of India over the past few years, Faridabad is considered to be the most polluted city of Haryana and the second most polluted in India in 2024¹. It is estimated that nearly 270 tonnes of waste² is dumped untreated in the city of Faridabad daily, leading to contamination of groundwater, unhygienic streets, and emission of greenhouse gases. Lack of a proper waste management system results in filth lying by the roadside side causing breathing difficulty and environmental issues. Gurgaon, which is known as the Millennium City to the world, has almost one-third of its population not connected to the main sewage line and lacks proper drinking water facilities.

My lived experience of over a decade all across these three cities has shaped my lens to undertake this research. This paper examines how improper planning, or a lack of futuristic foresight by the government, has led to chaotic infrastructure development, creating a daily struggle for the people. The paper contrasts the haphazard development of Indian Cities with the well-developed cities of China, like Shanghai and Shenzhen, and highlights the lessons India can learn from these cities for planning urban development.

*Nidhi, Assistant professor, Law, Manav Rachna University, Faridabad

¹ Haryana has 15 cities among India's 100 most polluted: Gurgaon, Faridabad tops the list. (2024, September 5). *The Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/haryana-has-15-cities-among-indias-100-most-polluted-gurgaon-faridabad-tops-the-list/articleshow/113094659.cms?from=mdr>

² <https://greentekreman.com/2023/12/14/how-e-garbage-management-in-faridabad-can-manage-waste-sustainably/>

Keywords: Unplanned Development, Delhi, Faridabad, Gurgaon, Pollution, improper planning.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of India's urban areas has been influenced by rapid population growth, economic liberalization, migration, and the demands of an expanding middle class. The rise of cities has resulted in the emergence of opportunities and innovation, but it's also an era for unplanned expansion, infrastructural disruption, and environmental degradation. Delhi and its surrounding cities, such as Faridabad and Gurgaon, among others, make up the National Capital Region (NCR), which is a prime example of these inconsistencies. Although these three cities are strategically important and economic boomers, they reflect the ongoing problems of uncontrolled urban sprawl in metropolitan areas, poor infrastructure planning, and policy fragmentation.

After achieving independence in 1947, Delhi's population has grown at a rate that outperformed the city's resources. Although the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has implemented master plans and made interventions, much of its growth in informal settlements, slums to peri-urban areas, etc. has occurred without official consent. Many of these areas are not equipped with basic services, such as sanitation, water supply, and waste management, which can put a significant burden on the city's environment and living standards. Urban sprawl in Delhi is not sustainable due to traffic, air pollution, and housing shortages.

Just a few kilometers from Delhi, the industrial base of Faridabad has undergone fluctuations in development throughout its history. Although some areas have been industrially invested, and connected by the construction of Delhi-Mathura Road and metro extensions, a large proportion of the population lives in informal and under-serviced settlements. Urban planning is not coherent, building regulations are poorly enforced, and infrastructure projects are often delayed, leading to a fragmented urban structure. Poor drainage, poor waste disposal and monsoon waterlogging are the repercussions of unplanned growth in many neighborhoods.

The story of Gurgaon, which is often depicted as a symbol of India's modern urban landscape, is concealed by tall structures. The majority of the city's growth was fueled by private real estate and corporate investments, with little regulation from the government or planned public infrastructure. Consequently, Gurgaon experiences persistent challenges such as water shortages, inadequate public transportation, substandard sewage treatment, and increasing

socioeconomic inequality. In this case, the urban model prioritizes growth at the expense of sustainability and inclusivity.

Human life is often at high risk due to water logging in Delhi and the surrounding cities, which often results in fatalities during the monsoon season.³ Ultimately, Delhi is the epicenter of urban development challenges in India. How do these cities compare to other metropolitan areas? Urban governance must undergo a paradigm shift as these cities continue to expand without direction and in improvised ways, necessitating integrated planning, environmental sustainability, and equitable access to services.

Throughout the last eighteen years, my experiences have been deeply connected to these three primary metropolitan areas within the National Capital Region: Faridabad, Gurgaon, and Delhi. These urban environments have significantly influenced my personal development while providing direct insight into the irregular and frequently disorganized patterns of city expansion.

During my four-year residence in Faridabad, starting in 2021, the absence of systematic urban planning became apparent through inconsistent public transportation systems, poorly maintained roadways, and inadequate waste disposal services. While local inhabitants had grown accustomed to these issues, they created substantial disruptions to daily routines. My time in Gurgaon, also spanning about four years, contrasted sharply with Faridabad; here, I observed vertical expansion and gleaming corporate towers rise amidst glaring infrastructural gaps—flooded roads, isolated gated communities, and minimal public amenities.

Delhi, where I have lived for more than ten years, revealed yet another urban character marked by multifaceted complexity. In this city, remnants of colonial architecture, systematically designed residential areas, and overcrowded informal housing developments exist side by side, frequently creating friction between different urban elements.

The constant movement across these three cities has enabled me to observe how infrastructure quality or its absence directly affects people's daily experiences. These impacts range from transportation challenges and personal security concerns to educational accessibility and air

³ Kumar, A. (2024, September 14). Civic apathy kills again, 2 men die in Faridabad after their SUV sinks in waterlogged underpass. *Times Now*. <https://www.timesnownews.com/city/civic-apathy-kills-again-2-men-die-in-faridabad-after-their-suv-submerges-in-waterlogged-underpass-article-113341645>

quality issues. Such firsthand observations have significantly shaped my approach to understanding the effects of disorganized urban expansion, anchoring my research in authentic experiences rather than theoretical concepts alone.

The chapter delves into the unplanned urban development trends and impacts in Delhi, Gurgaon, and Faridabad, highlighting significant issues related to infrastructure, environment, governance, etc. In order to identify lessons, the study compares these trends with the planned urban growth of Chinese cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, aiming to propose sustainable, inclusive solutions that are policy-driven and tailored to the Indian urban context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rapid urbanization, which is characterized by the expansion of urban spaces beyond the capacity of planning institutions, has become a hallmark of 21st-century urbanism. The result of this is unplanned urban development in India, marked by a mix of urban sprawl, informal settlements, and poor infrastructure.⁴ Theories are employed to elucidate the patterns and impacts of urban expansion. Urban Ecology Theory, which is rooted in the Chicago School of Sociology, considers cities as active ecosystems where people and organizations compete for scarce urban space, leading to different land use and socio-economic segregation. Whereas new urbanism focuses on renewal of traditional town planning, promotes compact, walkable communities, mixed-use development, and transit accessibility to counter suburban sprawl⁵. Aligning smart growth of cities with these principles would require efficient and diligent land use, a sustainable environment, and community participation. These frameworks together will contribute towards sustainable, planned urban development and address the issue of unregulated sprawl.

Within the National Capital Region (NCR), several research studies emphasize issues related to divided administrative control, challenges in land procurement, and unsuccessful policy implementation. Bhan (2009)⁶ provides a critical analysis of unsanctioned settlements in Delhi, attributing their emergence to administrative oversight and political favoritism. Likewise,

⁴ Wu, J. (2014). Urban ecology and sustainability: The state-of-the-science and future directions. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 125, 209–221. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2014.01.018>

⁶ Bhan, G. (2009). “This is no longer the city I once knew”: Evictions, the urban poor, and the right to the city in millennial Delhi. *Environment and Urbanization*, 21(1), 127–142.

Faridabad and Gurgaon have faced inadequate infrastructure development resulting from privately-driven urban expansion lacking comprehensive coordination.

Research examining China demonstrates a different methodology. Urban centers such as Shanghai and Shenzhen have accomplished relatively managed metropolitan expansion through centralized administrative control, substantial public transportation investments, and strict land management policies.⁷ Nevertheless, analysts warn that although China's framework proves successful, its hierarchical structure may not be easily adaptable within India's democratic system.⁸

This research attempts to analyze uncontrolled urban growth in Delhi, Faridabad, and Gurgaon, while contrasting it with organized development in chosen Chinese metropolitan areas—Shanghai and Shenzhen. The comparative examination reveals distinctions in metropolitan administration, transportation networks, public service provision, and ecological impacts.

UNCONTROLLED URBAN EXPANSION IN DELHI, FARIDABAD, AND GURGAON

The National Capital Region (NCR) of India has experienced rapid urban expansion over the past few decades. This growth, however, has occurred without proper planning and coordination, resulting in significant problems related to infrastructure, environmental damage, and social inequality. This study examines Delhi, Faridabad, and Gurgaon to understand why uncontrolled urban expansion occurs and what effects it creates, while drawing comparisons with the more organized urban development approaches seen in Chinese cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen.

Delhi: Growing Population and Informal Development

Delhi's population has reached approximately 34,665,600 people, representing a doubling of its size since 2000, creating enormous strain on the city's resources⁹. Even with comprehensive development plans like MPD 2021 and 2041 in place, the capital contains more than 1,700

⁷ Woodworth, M. (2011). Developing China: Land, Politics and Social Conditions by George C. S. Lin. *Berkeley Planning Journal*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.5070/BP323111442>

⁸ Roy, A. (2011). Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35(2), 223–238. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1468-2427.2011.01051.X>

⁹ *Delhi Population 2025*. (n.d.). <https://worldpopulationreview.com/cities/india/delhi>

unofficial settlements and over 700 slum areas, providing homes for almost 30% of residents¹⁰. These informal communities have developed because of inadequate affordable housing options, insufficient policy attention, and political support systems. Basic services in these locations remain inadequate, characterized by unreliable water distribution, limited waste management facilities, and overwhelmed transportation systems. Research indicates that vehicle pollution and building activities have positioned Delhi among the world's most environmentally polluted urban centers.¹¹

Faridabad: Industrial Heritage Meets Urban Planning Challenges

Originally designed as a model industrial hub after India's independence, Faridabad has faced significant difficulties managing its rapid urban growth over the last twenty years. The city's population surged from 1.05 million in 2001 to more than 1.8 million by 2021¹², while essential infrastructure development lagged considerably behind. Most new construction projects, particularly in outlying areas such as Bhopani, Sehatpur, and Dabua, have proceeded with minimal government supervision.

Faridabad currently houses more than 150 unregistered residential areas, with many communities missing basic amenities like proper sewerage systems, metaled roads, or organized garbage collection services. Water distribution remains unreliable, forcing common people to rely on private tube wells or commercial water suppliers, which further strains the region's already diminishing groundwater reserves. According to a report, around 60 % of the water and sewage supply in Faridabad is unauthorized¹³. Badhkal and Surajkund lake that were once abundant water resources, dried up more than a decade back due to illegal water extraction. The businesses of illegal borewells and bottling plants are flourishing in the city due to lack of water supply by the local government¹⁴. Poor drainage represents a persistent

¹⁰ Richhariya, S., Richhariya, S., & Indiaspend. (2024, August 20). *In Delhi, a different kind of heat worries slum dwellers*. Indiaspend. <https://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/in-delhi-a-different-kind-of-heat-worries-slum-dwellers-918070>

¹¹ Stellina, J., & Mani, T. A. (2024). Climate displacement in India: exploring the current legal framework and proposed legal initiatives. *Asia Pacific Journal of Environmental Law*, 27(2), 185–210. <https://doi.org/10.4337/apjel.2024.02.02>

¹² *Faridabad City Population 2025 | Literacy and Hindu Muslim population*. (n.d.). <https://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/47-faridabad.html>

¹³ Tribune News Service. (2024, May 21). 60% water, sewer connections in Faridabad 'unauthorised' - The Tribune. *The Tribune*. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/60-water-sewer-connections-in-faridabad-unauthorised-623208/>

¹⁴ Raju Sajwan. (2024, July 4). Tanker economy revealed: Faridabad water mafia cash in on Delhi's woes. *Down to Earth*. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/water/tanker-economy-revealed-faridabad-water-mafia-cash-in-on-delhis-water-woes>

problem, especially during rainy seasons. Complete neighborhoods, including NIT, Sector-21, face severe water accumulation and flooding because of clogged or absent storm drainage infrastructure.

The deterioration of organized industrial zones and the expansion of unregulated work opportunities have intensified the gap between developed and underdeveloped areas within the city. Although numerous government initiatives have been launched, the Urban Local Body (ULB) continues to face budget constraints and administrative coordination problems, reducing its capacity to implement land-use regulations or provide adequate public services.¹⁵

Faridabad's situation demonstrates that having a strong industrial foundation is insufficient to maintain urban stability without comprehensive, equitable, and strategic development planning.

Gurgaon: The Ironical City

Gurgaon oscillates between polarized development. It is always promoted as a modern, global city with high-rise buildings and multinational corporate offices, but the sad reality is that a major part of the city remains fundamentally disconnected from basic urban services. Private Real estate developers like DLF, HUDA etc. led the city's growth in the 2000s with little government oversight, resulting in isolated gated communities lacking public transportation and drainage systems. The areas developed by the private companies are great. The residents have all the facilities, particularly because they can afford those services. But the areas beyond the privately developed zone are in a gloomy condition. Only one-third of the residents have a connection to the main sewage line. As of 2021, nearly 40% of the city lacked piped water supply, and many posh colonies rely on septic tanks or untreated waste that ends up in open drains. During monsoon, sectors like 56 and 15 flood within hours, despite being home to top real estate addresses.¹⁶ Water supply is another challenge. Residents in newer sectors routinely rely on water tankers, despite promises of piped water. Groundwater levels shows an alarming picture in Gurgaon. According to a report, the groundwater level has dropped over 17 meters in a decade, largely due to unchecked borewell usage. It was around 19.85 in 2006 and fell to

¹⁵ *Demand for grants 2023-24 Analysis : Housing and Urban Affairs*. (n.d.). PRS Legislative Research. <https://prsindia.org/budgets/parliament/demand-for-grants-2023-24-analysis-housing-and-urban-affairs>

¹⁶ Kedmey, D. (2024, July 25). *Skyscrapers — but no sewage system. Meet a city run by private industry*. ideas.ted.com. <https://ideas.ted.com/skyscrapers-but-no-sewage-system-meet-a-city-run-by-private-industry/>

36.99 in 2021.¹⁷ The urban poor, who are residing in unauthorized settlements, face eviction threats and exclusion from formal planning processes.

Gurgaon, exploded into an urban powerhouse in less than two decades. With over 1,500 multinational corporations, high-end malls, and luxury housing, it's often marketed as "India's Millennium City." But if we go a little deeper, we would be able to see a very different reality, unfolding the chaos by haphazard planning, private-led growth, and glaring service gaps.

The city's population jumped from around 870,000 in 2001 to over 1.5 million by 2021. It has become a magnet for middle-class families that provide great job opportunities.¹⁸ Yet this growth didn't come with matching infrastructure. Much of Gurgaon was built by private developers, often ahead of government planning. Residential sectors like Sushant Lok, DLF Phases I–V, and Golf Course Road rose rapidly, but public services lagged far behind.

On the edge of this high-rise glamour live over many unauthorized colonies and informal settlements, where basic amenities are a luxury. In areas like Chakkarpur and Nathupur, many residents have no legal electricity connection or permanent sanitation facilities. Ironically, these are the very communities that provide domestic workers, security guards, and construction labour to the gated societies nearby.

What's striking is how Gurgaon's planning was largely left to the market. Public transport remains weak — the city relies heavily on cars and ride-hailing services, leading to severe congestion. While the Rapid Metro was introduced as a solution, it covers a limited area and remains underutilized.

Gurgaon represents a picture of two cities, one of skyscrapers, India's best malls and multinationals, and another of clogged roads and neglected drains. It offers a sobering reminder that the growth of private ambition without public vision can create islands of prosperity amid seas of neglect.

¹⁷ Behl, A. (2022, June 15). Gurugram in dire straits as groundwater table records 1m reduction per year - Hindustan Times. *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/gurugram-news/gurugram-in-dire-straits-as-groundwater-table-records-1m-reduction-per-year-101655311633549.html>

¹⁸ *Gurgaon City Population 2025 | Literacy and Hindu Muslim Population*. (n.d.). https://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/46-gurgaon.html#google_vignette

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH CHINESE CITIES

China is a best example that has achieved world-class infrastructural development despite its over growing urban population. Cities like Shanghai and Shenzhen have exemplified planned urban development. The key to their success seems to centralized governance through which China has been able to implement strict land-use regulations and build a mass transit systems. For instance, Shanghai added over 600 km of metro rail between 2000 and 2020, compared to Delhi's 389 km (DMRC). The daily ridership of Shanghai metro is over 10 million people¹⁹. Shenzhen, once a fishing village, transformed into a global tech hub within four decades due to planned zoning, digitized land records, and smart infrastructure.

China follows a top-down model where policies are made at the highest level by the centralized government and implemented swiftly in the entire country without much public debate and discussion. By adopting this model, China has been able to create world-class infrastructure in record time. This kind of model ensures the timely completion of work, reduced red-tapism, and avoidance of opposition or protest by local bodies. The local government or the contractor has the task of executing the work assigned by the central government.

However, top-down model is not without criticism. Scholars argue that it often overlooks community participation and displaces marginalized groups during mega infrastructure projects. It ignores the socio-political issues, which can have very serious consequences in the future. Yet, its ability to align infrastructure rollout with spatial planning remains a lesson for India, where policy fragmentation is a chronic issue.

The urban development in China presents a sharp contrast to India's urban development, which follows a fragmented governmental model. Cities like Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou are successful examples of centralized planning, massive infrastructure investment, and smart-city strategies that have shaped their growth trajectory.

Centralized Planning and its Impacts

Urban policy in China is centrally coordinated under national frameworks such as the 14th Five-Year Plan. By 2025, the plan aims for 65% urbanization, relaxes hukou

¹⁹ Knowledgeman 2.0. (2024, January 23). *DELHI METRO vs SHANGHAI METRO comparison in 2024 || Metro Comparison* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olz2BWnDg3E>

restrictions(household registration system based on the place of origin so that internal migration can be restricted), and emphasizes human-centric, low-carbon, and flood-resilient cities. This centralized approach streamlines land-use regulation, accelerates project approvals, and ensures alignment across local governments with minimum jurisdictional overlap (which is a common problem with in Indian cities) ²⁰.

Smart City Initiatives and Technology Integration

There is no fixed definition of smart city; however, it can be judged from three perspectives namely, technical level, urban development level, and social level. China pioneered smart-city pilots as early as 2012 through Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development MoHURD, designating nearly 290 cities by 2020 to integrate AI, IoT, and big data into governance and planning²¹. Shenzhen's smart transport system uses real-time data, sensors, and electric buses/taxis to minimize congestion and reduce pollution. Furthermore, China's 2024 urban digital transformation guideline mandates full integration of data into planning and governance by 2027 promoting digitized infrastructure across all municipal services and enhancing cross-department coordination²²

Governance Model: Finance, Enforcement, and Integration

The Chinese approach centralizes control of land, infrastructure, and finance. Local municipalities coordinate under national directives and benefit from predictable funding flows. Urban renewal—rather than new construction—is now prioritized in China's 2025 strategy to avoid debt-fueled overbuilding and ghost cities²³

In contrast, Indian cities suffer from fragmented authority. Multiple agencies (e.g. Delhi Development Authority, state municipalities, utility boards) create overlapping jurisdictions and delayed infrastructure rollouts. Data systems remain patchy and planning often reactive.

²⁰ Germano, A. (2023, February 2). *Chinese Smart Cities: Inside the nation with the highest smart city pilot programs in the world*. Daxue Consulting - Market Research and Consulting China. <https://daxueconsulting.com/chinese-smart-cities/>

²¹ Swissnex in China. (2025, June 2). *Smart city and sustainable urban development in China: A comprehensive overview - Swissnex in China*. <https://swissnex.org/china/news/smart-city-and-sustainable-urban-development-in-china-a-comprehensive-overview/>

²² *China unveils guideline to promote development of smart cities*. https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202405/21/content_WS664bdf37c6d0868f4e8e74ac.html?utm_source

²³ https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/china-promote-renewal-urban-villages-dilapidated-houses-2025-07-15/?utm_source

Current Policy Shifts and Adaptations

At the Central Urban Work Conference (July 2025), China pledged a major ideological shift: from property-driven expansion toward renewal, sustainable and good living conditions for its people. It will curb skyscraper construction, improve flood-control infrastructure, and correct previous excesses in property development²⁴

CHALLENGES IN INDIA AND KEY INSIGHTS FOR SUCCESS

The zeal to fast infrastructural growth often leads to poor planning and long term negative impact on the overall living conditions of the people. There are various challenges impacting sustainable urban development in the country. India's urban expansion in cities like Delhi, Faridabad and Gurgaon is characterized by harsh inequalities generated as a result of poor planning and governance paradigms.

Administratively, Indian cities are plagued by fragmentation; multiple agencies that often have overlapping responsibilities function in the same urban area. In Delhi there are multiple bodies like Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipality Council (NDMC), DDA and state level authorities that control region's administration. This pluralism results in policy paralysis, investment lag and uneven service provision.

In India, political meddling and bureaucratic red tape frequently plague urban projects. Long-term delays in infrastructure construction are caused by bureaucratic bottlenecks, changing political objectives, and delayed clearances. For example, the 2006-approved Dwarka Expressway project in Gurgaon saw more than 15 years of development delays²⁵. Furthermore, the lack of agreement among stakeholders sometimes causes land acquisition and compensation procedures to hinder large projects, which adds to the delays.

Predictive modelling and real-time data are rarely used in Indian city planning. Outdated census data, which does not accurately reflect contemporary urban reality, is frequently included in master plans. Due to a lack of evidence-based planning, resources have been misallocated and

²⁴ Spencer, R. (n.d.). *Why Xi Jinping's \$85 billion legacy city is standing empty*. The Times. <https://www.thetimes.com/world/asia/article/why-xi-jinpings-85-billion-legacy-city-is-standing-empty-j0rb3c5ps>

²⁵ Online, E. (2023, August 25). 17-year long wait for Dwarka Expressway likely to delay further. *The Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/17-year-long-wait-for-dwarka-expressway-likely-to-delay-further/articleshow/103057261.cms?from=mdr>

infrastructure has fallen short of real demands. A study by NITI Aayog emphasized that less than 15% of Indian cities have adopted GIS-based urban planning tools. In contrast, cities like Shanghai and Shenzhen utilize big data platforms for traffic control, zoning, and urban renewal²⁶. Environmental degradation has become a never-ending issue in India. The pollution level has become so dangerous that governments are forced to shut down schools and issue emergency alerts considering health hazards. Delhi regularly ranks among the most polluted capitals globally, with AQI levels frequently exceeding 300²⁷. Groundwater in Faridabad and Gurgaon is severely depleted, largely due to haphazard construction and unplanned borewell usage. According to a 2023 CPCB report, over 40% of urban water bodies in the Delhi-NCR region were either encroached upon or severely polluted. Real estate expansion has led to the destruction of wetlands and tree cover, worsening urban heat islands and flood vulnerability.²⁸

The people from upper-income groups are disproportionately benefitted while low-income communities are pushed to the informal settlements due to the unplanned urban development. In Gurgaon, for example, gleaming commercial hubs coexist with slums that lack piped water and sanitation. A report of 2011 by the Centre for Policy Research found that 25% of Delhi's population lives in unauthorized colonies, where residents often face eviction threats and lack access to legal utilities.²⁹ Even after over a decade, the situation has not improved much. This exclusion perpetuates cycles of poverty and undermines the goal of inclusive urban growth.

There are several relevant insights for India from China. Firstly, coordination with the region, including a unified authority for NCR, which mirrors centralized Chinese planning across transport, zoning, and environmental governance; second, putting mass transit first, which implies rapid metro expansion on the Delhi-Gurgaon-Faridabad corridors, which could make a big difference in reducing congestion and sprawl in cities. The third can be described as data-driven governance – City Brain-like systems for integrated digital platforms, which facilitate coordination between departments, enabling traffic management and citizen services. Fourth objective is affordable housing scale-up – a mix of building commitments per city or city corresponding to state average has the capacity to claw back informality when it is a disguise for unaffordability. Finally, there is also citizen engagement, which should not sacrifice

²⁶ Niti Ayog. (n.d.). *Strategy for New India @75: Smart cities for urban transformation*.

²⁷ IQAir. (n.d.). *2024 World Air Quality Report | IQAIR*. <https://www.iqair.com/in-en/world-air-quality-report>

²⁸ Central Pollution Control Board. (n.d.). *Annual Report 2022-23*.

²⁹ Cities of Delhi, Sheikh, S., & Banda, S. (2014). Unauthorized colonies (UACs) in Delhi. In *REGULARISING DELHI'S UNAUTHORISED COLONIES* [Policy Brief]. CITIES OF DELHI. <https://cprindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Regularising-Delhis-UACs.pdf>

efficiency and exclude public participation; otherwise, the regime may lose popular democratic legitimacy.

Both Shanghai and Shenzhen present examples of urban regeneration and transformation catalyzed by top-down planning, comprehensive infrastructure, and innovative smart-city tech on a large scale. Despite its achievements, the Chinese model is tainted with several drawbacks: social exclusion and stalled and underused mega-projects. Although politically distinct, India can benefit from China's experiences in transport and data platforms by overcoming its shortcomings to ensure fairness, visibility, and integration.

CONCLUSION

It is India's haphazard urbanization in cities like Delhi, Faridabad and Gurgaon that has raised concerns in terms of governmentality issues, the environment and society. These issues arise not only due to inadequate planning, but also because implementation is scattered and capacity remains weak. Bold new reforms are needed to address these issues on integrated regional planning, smarter governance and inclusive infrastructure as well as better public involvement. Without addressing these systemic problems, Indian cities will be at risk of becoming even more unlivable.

The uneven growth in Delhi, Faridabad, and Gurgaon is the product of systemic governance failures and policy fragmentation with socio-environmental indifference. The comparison with the Chinese world of cities, such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, reveals that planned and data-driven centralized urbanization has something to offer for Indian city-making (if radically repurposed in a democratic setup).

India must prioritize regional integration, empower urban local bodies, encourage participatory governance, and invest in inclusive and smart infrastructure to address these challenges. With a rapidly growing population, the urgency of comprehensive reforms is inevitable.