AMRUT SCHEME - GS II MAINS

Q. The AMRUT scheme was launched to address the needs of urban infrastructure. Bring out the challenges persisting in the urban development and discuss the measures taken to make the scheme sustainable. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *An overview of the AMRUT scheme | Explained*

What's in the news?

- By 2047, over 50% of India's population will be urban.
- The AMRUT scheme launched in 2015 and updated in 2021, addresses urban infrastructure needs.

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) Scheme:

- It is a flagship urban development scheme launched by the government of India in June **2015**.
- The mission is being operated as a **centrally sponsored scheme.**

Aim:

- To provide **basic urban infrastructure** to improve the quality of life in cities and towns.

Objectives:

- Ensure that every household has access to a tap with an assured **water supply and a sewerage connection.**
- Increase the **green areas** in the cities.
- **Reduce pollution** by promoting public transport and constructing facilities for non-motorized transport.

Funding:

- It is divided among States/UTs in an equitable formula in which 50:50 weightage.
- The mission covers **500 cities** including all cities and towns with a population of over one lakh with notified Municipalities.

Revenue Set Aside for the Scheme:

AMRUT 1.0:

- Total outlay was ₹50,000 crore for five years from FY 2015-16 to FY 2019-20.

AMRUT 2.0:

- Total outlay is ₹2,99,000 crore, with a central outlay of ₹76,760 crore for five years, starting from October 1, 2021.

Achievements by AMRUT Mission:

1. Financial Utilization:

- As of May 19, 2024, a total of ₹83,357 crore has been disbursed under the AMRUT scheme, combining contributions from the central government, states, and cities.

2. Infrastructure Achievements:

a. Tap Connections:

- A total of 58,66,237 households have been provided with tap connections, ensuring access to a reliable water supply.

b. Sewerage Connections:

- 37,49,467 households have been connected to the sewerage system, improving sanitation and hygiene.

c. Parks Development:

- 2,411 parks have been developed, enhancing urban green spaces and recreational areas.

d. LED Street Lights:

- 62,78,571 LED street lights have been replaced, contributing to energy efficiency and better urban lighting.

Present Challenges:

1. Public Health Crisis:

- Approximately 2,00,000 deaths annually due to inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene.
- The disease burden from unsafe water and sanitation in India was 40 times higher per person than in China as of 2016.

2. Water and Sanitation Issues:

- Significant untreated wastewater increases vulnerability to diseases.
- Major reservoirs are at just 40% capacity, threatening water supply for drinking, irrigation, and hydro-electricity.
- 21 major cities are projected to run out of groundwater soon.

Causes for the Present Shortcomings:

1. Non-Comprehensive Approach:

- The scheme adopted a project-oriented rather than a holistic approach, failing to integrate comprehensive urban planning.
- For example, cities had no significant participation in the scheme's design or implementation, reducing its effectiveness.

2. Lack of Participation from Local Elected Members:

- The governance was led by bureaucrats and private interests with little involvement of elected city governments, violating the 74th constitutional amendment.

3. Inadequate Water Management:

- The scheme did not adequately factor in local climate, rainfall patterns, or existing infrastructure, leading to inefficient water and sewage management.
- Urban planning became dominated by real estate development interests, resulting in the disappearance of water bodies, disrupted stormwater flows, and poor drainage systems.
- Continued inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene contribute to significant public health problems, including high disease burden and mortality rates.

Way Forward:

1. Comprehensive Approach:

- **Shift from a project-oriented to an extensive urban planning approach** that includes all aspects of infrastructure development.
- Ensure active participation of city governments and local bodies in planning and implementation to reflect local needs and conditions.
- Strengthen the **role of local elected representatives** in decision-making processes to ensure accountability and community involvement.

2. Nature-Based Solutions:

- Incorporate **sustainable urban planning**, including preserving and restoring water bodies and green spaces.
- **Integrate climate and rainfall pattern** considerations into water and sewage management to enhance efficiency and resilience.
- Prioritize water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure improvements to reduce disease burden and improve public health outcomes.

The need to take a balanced approach combining holistic urban planning, enhanced city participation, empowerment of local bodies, nature-based solutions, climate-responsive strategies, and a strong public health focus is essential for sustainable urban development.