**Why are Cities Important?**

● The substantial contribution of urban areas to India's GDP, expected to reach 75% by 2030, underscoring the critical role of cities in driving economic growth and development (NITI Aayog, 2018).

● Disturbingly low numbers pertaining to the presence of master plans in urban settlements, with only 2216 urban settlements equipped with master plans and a mere 627 settlements possessing updated ( in the last 20 years) master plans, highlighting the deficiencies in urban planning and governance (TCPO, 2021).

● Moreover, India's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, the New Urban Agenda, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction by 2030 emphasises the imperative of addressing the pressing urban challenges to foster sustainable and resilient urban landscapes.

**Keys to Uncovering the Urban Planning Challenge**

A.The Legislation and Urban Governance ​, Majorly outdated acts on which decisions taken till date. ​​9 out of 35 Capital Cities have Sectoral Plans supporting Master Plan

B. The Institutional Capacity

Ratio of urban planners ranges from 1:5,00,000 to 1:10,00,000 against a recommended ratio of 1:30,000 to 1:50,000 (Generalised)

Urban Planning and Services need extremely adaptive local governance and administrators.

Urban capacity situation is abysmal in hill areas like Uttarakhand, NorthEast, coastal, forest and Island areas

Due to non-availability of urban planning capacities and capabilities, States and Cities are unable to leverage the opportunities linked to urbanization.

C. The Local Governance Problem

Failure in Implementation of 74th CAA- No structured administration/ definition of power in terms of planning and decision making.

Mayors/ Comissioners Legally have no say over the MP, just consultants - will work with big cities , not for 4000 odd towns.

**What is Urban? Is the definition now Valid for the current Indian Context?**

Fundamental Source of Confusion, What is Urban, what should we plan for, Metropolitan Cities (Million Plus) -53, Statutory towns - 4,041 or Census Towns - 3,784. Is it just a population play?

Do we have enough resources, Planners-Administrators - analysts to monitor and control the growth

Do we have resources/ tools to deploy master plans at scale?

Can Master Plans , when done, actually harbinger sustainable development? Can they lead to sustainable, resilient, equitable, adaptive future?

Summarising this,

Very few cities have plans and many of them are expired. Very few even get used.

Hardly 30% of India's "Urban" Settlements have Plans, and Incidental Governance

Even if they have plans, They are restricted to Land Use, which is not ideal.

India has a serious Capacity Issue in both in Planning, Governance and Implementation

What India Desperately needs, is its towns to have a Master Plans tha, which can actually be a Statutory, Data Driven Decision Making Framework that unifies all the departmental themes

**What is a Master Plan? and What Does a Planner Do?**

A Master Plan, serving as a statutory document, constitutes a fundamental tool in delineating the spatial framework of a city and guiding its development and land management over a defined period. In India, the concept of a Master Plan, typically formulated for a duration of 20 years, plays a pivotal role in orchestrating coherent and sustainable urban growth. The planning hierarchy in India encompasses various levels, including perspective plans, regional plans, master plans, and local area plans, each catering to specific aspects of urban development and governance. The development and implementation of a comprehensive master plan form the cornerstone of a strategic approach towards fostering holistic and sustainable urban development.

So Essentially, it is just a Policy, with a spatial implication, and this is not just a city or a master plan that has a similar setup.

What makes a master plan different - is that it is Statuatory in Nature, it has always evolved as this tool that governs or guides a city's growth , on which services , infrastructure, societies, economies and not to forget, ecosystems are built. It is a document with colours that pertain to specific set of rules on what to do, and what not to do spatially, and translates that to each land parcel through Land Use Regulations and Development Control Regulations, or commonly referred to as Building Bye Laws

Ideally,

* The master plan consists of future directions of development, policy and implantation of the same.
* It sets out how a particular area can develop and redevelop into the future.
* A high-level plan intended to set out objectives and strategies to manage development and change over time.
* A process that defines what is important about a place and how its character and quality can be conserved, improved and enhanced.

**Who administers this Land Use?**

Zooming out of Urban Level, THere are many actors that can still directly/ indirectly control, administer/ steward land use . An example of this, hierarchically over over 3 tier governance system is shown below

Indian Cities and their "Organic" Growth - How are cities currently expanding, adapting and improving?

Apart than the Obvious Migration and Economic and Employment growth,

The Process of urban development in India is rather chaotic, unorganised coming from the colonial roots driven by by several key factors broadly arranged as

**Overarching Political Vision**: The formulation of a comprehensive vision by governmental entities at the central or state level is instrumental in steering the growth trajectory of cities. Leveraging existing drivers of growth, such as capital and fiscal resources, governmental bodies conceptualize and catalyze the development of urban centers.

**The Not So Planned Interventions**: Infrastructure development serves as the bedrock of urban progress, with tailored interventions designed to address the specific needs and contexts of local communities. Large-scale projects, such as Metro Rails, Outer Ring Roads (ORRs), and Transit Hubs, emerge as pivotal drivers of growth, aiming to mitigate the infrastructural deficits prevalent in urban areas.

Large Scale Policy and Resource Deployment: Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, AMRUT, JNNURM, and UIDSSMT, although aimed at bolstering service delivery and enhancing capacities, often fall short in integrating a comprehensive regional perspective. The lack of holistic planning and implementation strategies undermines the efficacy of these interventions, hindering their potential impact on urban development.

**"Planned Development":** In contrast to greenfield cities such as Chandigarh, Gandhinagar, and Naya Raipur, where the implementation of a Master Plan has guided urban growth, the majority of Indian cities lack a comprehensive framework for planned development. The absence of robust master planning exacerbates the challenges associated with uncontrolled urbanisation and hampers sustainable growth

**Whats Broken?**

A. Systemic Problems

Long-term focus neglects short-term actions, reducing effectiveness in a rapidly changing environment.

Master Plan is treated as a static end product, lacking adaptability as a continuous process.

Little to no Public / Citizen Involvement

B. Capacity Problems

Lengthy preparation and approval times lead to outdated documents and frequent changes in land use.

Lack of symbiosis between socio-economic dynamism and the physical determination of a city.

Absence of integration between physical and fiscal planning efforts.

C. Implementation Problems

High and difficult-to-achieve norms and standards for land use and facilities provision.

Ineffective public participation in the planning process.

Irregular and ineffective monitoring and review mechanisms.

Emphasis on control rather than promotion of development.

Inefficiency in development management, insufficient catering to the demands of the informal sector, and occasional political interference resulting in irrational proposals and implementation decisions.

**Problem Statement**

Cities are Not well planned due to Lack of Capacity to Create a Master Plan. In case a city has a Master Plan, it is Very One Dimensional In Nature, not data driven often leading to its negligence.

The gateway for a Citizen to Access / comply with cities development is with Building and Services. These services and permissions ideally are to be derivatives from the masterplan, initiating a feedback loop , that currently lacking in the system

**What Can we Address - Where Can AI Plugin**

Many cities, municipalities and governments outside urban administration in fact recognize that the way they operate and especially review development is very fragmented. The document often goes from department to department, office to office, with each separately looking at the proposal only from their silo's perspective. Without understanding, or even necessarily caring about, the trade-offs between different departmental objectives, it can be very easy for this kind of review to generate a long list of department-specific concerns, prohibitions and "must haves." This problem gets magnified when you realise the fact that this process is being followed for decision of every magnitude, irrespective of its impact, for example the process of approving a commercial license to a large shopping mall suffers from similar issues to a large product like the expansion of a metro rail

Breaking down silos in municipalities towards a more multidisciplinary and holistic perspective on city planning/ management and making requires extensive unison between departments and various power dynamics

1. **Approach 1**- decentralisation of powers

Often involves decentralising administrative powers, fiscal powers and political powers. Only a near perfect venn intersection of the three can help achieving a proper communication window that might truly facilitate interoperability

1. **Approach 2**

This includes the creation of larger agencies, of which a large responsibility involves bringing together multiple disciplines across the table to consider development proposals together. A similar approach is actually followed by Metropolitan developmental agencies in India such as HMDA ( Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority), CMDA ( Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority), BMRDA ( Bengaluru Metropolitan Regional Development Authority) tried to do, but not have been fruitful due to plenty of aforementioned reasons like dilution of powers etc

**The ‘Plan’ and the ‘Planning’**

The key component of this truth engine enables the fact that A plan is not a static document. It is a strategic, dynamic and a long term process that is constantly evolving and changing. The key here lies in this shift from static nature to dynamic nature. This is partially due to data availability being extremely segmented in silos

**What would still remain as a problem?**

**What would the ideal “Slit” through the silos look like?**

The ideal decision making scenario would ideally require the departments having access over the transparent decision making pipelines. The first idea is to make the silos transparent

Let's assume the case of the government of kerala, where they had an initiative called the people's plan, where public participation involved a yearly process that had meetings and multiple stages of government, which involved phases of ideation and problem identification through communal brainstorming……….

**The Climate Angle**

At the local level, politicians and planners are faced with both the effects of a changing climate and the recognition that people’s daily lives have an effect on emissions. Likewise, people’s daily lives are shaped and structured by the infrastructures and services in their home communities. Understanding climate change as a wicked problem also influences how it is perceived and dealt with at the local level. What this would enable is the ability to look at climate adaptation and mitigation to climate change as a local targeted issue instead of how it is generally the other way around where it is top down where international agreements and treaties affect the policies of nations which shape climate action. This cascading manner of authoritative and decision flow can often lead to diluted and dissolved solutions being handed over to the last mile