

‘FAILING TO PLAN, IS PLANNING TO FAIL’

BY SANGEETA PRASAD

AT its recently held Habitat III conference, the United Nations announced the adoption of a ‘New Urban Agenda’ which defines a global vision of sustainable urbanization for the next 20 years. As global focus on a sustainable urban future, the time is right for India to carefully and critically evaluate and plan its urban development journey.

To begin with, urbanisation in India must embrace social, economic and environmental growth in equal measure. In doing so, not only can we address current urban issues, but will also be able to secure a prosperous and harmonious future for generations to come.

Our approach to urbanisation stood us in good stead, as we embarked on the creation of India’s first sustainable integrated business city developed in public-private partnership – Mahindra World City, Chennai – in 2002. This was followed by the establishment of our second World City in Jaipur, in 2006. Our vision was clear - a sustainable urbanisation model must necessarily begin with the creation of economic nerve centres that would deliver on the all-encompassing promise of ‘Livelihood, Living and Life’.

Today, the Mahindra World City (MWC) developments in Chennai and Jaipur span 4,437 acres and have emerged as business destinations of choice for more than 125 leading transnational and Indian companies who have set up opera-



tions in these Cities and have together created employment for more than 49,000 persons and have generated exports worth more than Rs 50,000 Crore till date, contributing significantly to economic development and job creation in their home states. Sustainability is at the core of the Mahindra World City experience and we use the principles of healthy and green living by employing best in class environmental practices.

Sustainable urbanisation is increasingly being acknowledged as a possibly vital contributor to achieving global climate change goals. As India seeks to reduce its emissions intensity, planned and holistic urban development that embraces the environment and inclusive living will be key. A sharp focus on urban adaptation and resilience, driven by adequate infrastructural planning, clean energy, green construction, multi-format housing and technology as an ena-

bler can help drive India’s urban agenda in the right direction. This will require active participation by developers, policymakers, and academia to promote responsible urbanisation and evolve sustainable frameworks that can collectively nurture the future of our cities.

India’s plan to build 100 Smart Cities by 2022 is expected to inject new life into our urban centres via strong emphasis on improving the quality of life of all citizens.

It is heartening to see how India’s cities and their growth is receiving increasing importance from experts from the distinct ‘worlds’ of government, think-tanks, academia and civil society. Not only are we seeing a renewed commitment to a vision of ‘cities for all’, but we also seem to be at the cusp of an urban development revolution that is focused on equity, inclusivity and sustainability.

At this juncture, let us remind ourselves that intensive planning and effective implementation is critical to the success of a vision of the size and scope of the 100 Smart Cities Mission.

Today, we have a great opportunity to accord planning the importance it deserves in India’s urban development. In conclusion, I find myself optimistic and hopeful for our urban future. At the same time, I recall the words of Benjamin Franklin - “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” ■

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