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Towards Sustainable Cities: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract

A city is a sizable and enduring human settlement distinguished by its intricate network of structures, infrastructure, and social, economic, and cultural institutions. Cities play a vital role in a country's global economic growth and development, fostering agglomeration of economies, serving as centres of innovation and technological advancement, acting as major hubs for finances and employment, and facilitating infrastructure development while providing access to broader markets. Often specializing in specific industries or sectors, cities offer amenities such as healthcare, education, employment, and recreational opportunities that enhance their appeal to residents seeking a high quality of life. However, the majority of unplanned cities grapple with the challenge of balancing economic, social, and environmental perspectives. Key issues include rapid population growth, urban sprawl, inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, conflicting interests among stakeholders-particularly regarding development versus conservation and pressing environmental concerns like pollution, improper waste management, health issues, and climate change. Addressing these challenges requires cities to evolve into 'Living Cities,' where human settlements can flourish indefinitely as part of nature's beauty and diversity. Achieving this balance involves integrating economic, social, and environmental perspectives. This paper presents detailed strategies under various subheadings, including Integrated Urban Planning with a focus on promoting public transport, increasing green spaces, and conserving biodiversity. It also covers Water Conservation, measures to enhance resilience to climate change impacts, such as strategic infrastructure siting and nature-based solutions, and the promotion of renewable energy and green building concepts to conserve finite resources. Efficient waste management is highlighted to ensure a waste-free urban environment. The paper underscores the importance of stakeholder engagement, involving the public, private sector, NGOs, and communities in the decision-making process through participatory planning and citizen engagement. While acknowledging existing supportive policies and strategies in the country, the paper emphasizes the need for their enforcement and proper implementation to achieve the desired target of sustainable cities-living cities where human populations thrive harmoniously as part of nature's beauty and diversity.

Keywords: Living city, Sustainable city, Urban, Settlement, Integrated planning