

## Urban planning: Building resilient cities for the future

### What is the issue?

- More than 52 towns of Odisha were impacted from the 'extremely severe' Cyclone Fani, which had a landfall in Puri recently.
- While the intensity of the cyclone was the same as that of the 1999 super cyclone, the deaths due to Cyclone Fani have been far less.

### What is helpful and praiseworthy?

- The evacuation of people, coupled with the setting up of many disaster relief centres and continuous communication, helped save many lives.
- With the help of **technology and strong policy measures**, India's disaster response mechanism, and specifically Odisha's, has improved significantly, over the past couple of decades.
- It is praiseworthy how the **administration in Odisha** has been able to minimise the impact of cyclones on human life.

### What is the area on which India needs to work on?

- However, as a country, India has to still work on **strengthening the resilience of its cities** which are vulnerable.
- Resilient cities - Can swiftly bounce back to normalcy post a disaster.
- The deaths were minimised in Odisha, but the infrastructure and ecology has been severely affected and the rebuild efforts are likely to take time.
- Indian cities are vulnerable to earthquakes, severe cyclones, floods, rising sea levels, avalanches, tsunami and even man-made disasters.

### What does it mean to build resilient cities?

- Building resilient cities is not a one-off effort but a continuous dialogue.
- It involves multiple stakeholders focusing on robust policymaking, strong administrative action agenda and positive behavioural change.
- **Empowering city municipalities** to be the first line of mitigation and response to disasters
- **Challenges faced by cities** - Related to poverty, housing, education, health and transportation, putting disaster risk resilience on a back seat.
- It is important for cities to have **a strong institutional framework** and a **comprehensive climate action plan**.

## What is the benchmark action agenda?

- **Rio de Janeiro's 'Resilient Rio Strategy'** focusing on disaster recovery, promotion of circular economy and citizen education is a benchmark action agenda.
- **Proactive planning for resilience and disaster management funding** - A disaster risk resilience plan cannot be carried out until dedicated resources and a budget is allocated to the same.
- It is important to create a fund proactively rather than ponder over it post the occurrence of a disaster.
- **Resilient critical infrastructure** - Collapsed buildings and unstable structures are the leading cause of mortality during disasters.
- Hence, it is critical that building codes and appropriate construction norms are adhered to while building residential structures.
- It is particularly important to build disaster-resilient schools and healthcare facilities.
- Special attention also needs to be given to a city's critical infrastructure such as roads, airports, electrical, water and communication systems.
- In the long run, efficient and resilient transportation systems enable cities to quickly bounce back in economic activities.
- **Preparing citizens to respond to situations** - Adequate investment in technology and early warning systems can enable city institutions deliver warnings in a timely and effective manner.
- Trainings such as risk mitigation and rescue programmes need to be designed for crucial city personnel such as fire rescuers, police and health professionals, and also for citizens and communities.
- **Recovery as an opportunity to rebuild better** - To rebuild in a safe and sustainable manner by learning from past mistakes.
- It is essential to include a recovery plan in a city's disaster reduction strategy and involve all the stakeholders who are pillars for recovery.

## What is the conclusion?

- While cities in India have started to move towards resilience, there is still a long way to go.
- A radical shift is needed in our approach on disaster mitigation and management.
- Many of the initiatives are often taken immediately after disaster strikes, instead of being planned in advance.
- It is imperative to launch a continuous dialogue and inculcate a sense of responsibility amongst city administrators and its citizens to build resilience in every aspect.

**Source: Financial Express**

