

## Urban Development in Uttarakhand: Challenges, Government Initiatives & Future

Neerja Tripathi\*

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### ABSTRACT

*Urban development in Uttarakhand faces significant challenges due to rapid and often unplanned urban expansion, limited infrastructure, and pressures from tourism-driven growth. Key issues include disorganized city growth, inadequate roads and public services, waste management difficulties, water scarcity, and limited recreational green spaces. The state government has introduced various initiatives aimed at sustainable and efficient urban planning, infrastructure upgrades, and environmental management. While progress has been made in areas such as road connectivity and solid waste improvements, effective implementation and broader community involvement remain crucial for long-term sustainability. Continued focus on innovative strategies, enhanced governance, and resource management can help Uttarakhand overcome these obstacles and achieve balanced urban growth.*

Keywords: Uttarakhand, Urban Development, Future Strategies, Public Policy

### COMMENTARY

Urban development in Uttarakhand, despite facing many hurdles, has seen some significant progress in recent times due to the efforts of the state government, ably led by Shri Pushkar Singh Dhami. With the increasing urban population and the speedy urban transformation, the state government has undertaken wide-ranging efforts to meet emerging challenges. However, the challenges that remain highlight the sectors where amplified focus, heightened emphasis from the policymakers, and innovative solutions are required to make certain sustainable urban development in the future. While the Uttarakhand government has been working on these aspects, there are still essential zones that require timely intervention with a resilient approach.

One of the foremost challenges that the state faces is the issue of disorganized and unplanned urban expansion in cities like Halawani, Haridwar, Dehradun, Roorkee, Rudrapur, Kashipur, etc. Even though the government has made substantial efforts to implement urban planning directives, the unsynchronized and often rapid expansion of cities has made it complicated to stay in sync with the demand for new-age infrastructure and easygoing services. The urban development officials, despite their best attempts, are sometimes restricted by limited resources and developing

\*Neerja Tripathi is a Ph.D. scholar in Political Science at Soban Singh Jeena University, Almora. She holds a master's degree in political science and an M.Sc. in Physics, bringing an interdisciplinary perspective to her research.

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administrative capacities. The Government of Uttarakhand, through various initiatives, has made significant efforts to introduce more sustainable, pro-planet, and efficient urban planning strategies, but the implementation has been sluggish in certain areas, particularly in smaller hill stations and towns with rural proximity. Advancement in the urban landscape within the state also faces the issue of inadequate infrastructure in key areas like roads, sewage systems, and flyovers. Although there has been a noticeable upgradation in urban infrastructure, most of the cities still struggle with meager public services. For example, road congestion, vehicular crowding, and traffic pileups in cities like Dehradun and Nainital continue to impede productivity and economic growth. Nonetheless, the state government has persistently worked to upgrade road connectivity and has allocated substantial budgetary resources for infrastructure projects targeted at mitigating these challenges. Important projects like the development of bypass roads, flyovers, and the expansion of existing roadways are constructive measures toward responding to these key concerns. The problem of waste management (disposal as well as solid waste control) and pollution is another area where the state government has taken commendable steps yet holds potential for growth.

Tourist cities like Mussoorie, Nainital, etc., which captivate considerable tourism, have faced challenges in administering waste disposal and pollution control. However, the state government has tried to improve the situation through Swachh Bharat Mission. There has been notable improvement in waste management post-Swachh Bharat Mission, which emphasizes creating cleaner and more sustainable cities (green cities) in the country. The difficulty, nevertheless, resides in the enforcement of these policy measures and guaranteeing that they extend to every corner of urban settlements, especially around more remote and tourist-heavy areas in the state.

The issue of waste management has become particularly alarming in Uttarakhand, as travelers often encounter heaps of garbage along the roads while journeying to hill stations. This has been a recurring problem in both the Kumaon and Garhwal regions, with reports of such cases frequently appearing in the news. The sight of unmanaged waste not only tarnishes the natural beauty of the state but also leaves a negative impression on tourists, potentially affecting the state's reputation as a tourist destination. While the responsibility for managing waste falls primarily on the government, the state alone cannot fully resolve this issue. A collaborative effort involving local communities, voluntary organizations, and even visiting tourists is crucial for tackling this menace. By fostering awareness, encouraging responsible waste disposal, and promoting sustainable tourism practices, we can mitigate the environmental impact and ensure that Uttarakhand remains an attractive, clean, and sustainable destination for generations to come. Similarly, the unavailability of recreational spaces, such as parks and community amenities, is an unresolved challenge.

While some urban areas have benefited from the creation of public spaces, others still lack adequate green spaces, which are quintessential for the overall well-being of the urban population. Acknowledging this, the government has introduced certain policies promoting the development of parks and recreational areas. Even so, the pressure of rising populations and finite urban land makes it tough to allocate space for such facilities in every

city. Water scarcity and the depletion of groundwater levels have become gradually concerning issues. The state government, through water management strategies, is gaining momentum in addressing these problems. In recent years, the Uttarakhand government has commenced efforts to establish a unified agency focused on the conservation and revival of rivers and natural springs that hold cultural and traditional significance in Uttarakhand. As part of this initiative, steps are being taken to create the Spring Shed and River Rejuvenation Agency (SARA) to lead and coordinate these restoration activities at the state level. Therefore, initiatives like SARA, though rural in orientation, can have a positive and long-term impact on addressing urban water scarcity, especially in the growing hill towns of the state. However, the growing urban population and over-extraction of groundwater remain critical challenges, requiring more concerted efforts toward sustainable water management practices. The dependence on state and central government funding for sustainable urban advancement is another domain where substantial improvements are needed.

While the government's role in securing budgetary support for urban development initiatives is praiseworthy, a heightened priority on yielding regional revenue sources and self-reliance (Aatmanirbharta) or self-sufficiency for urban spaces will be crucial in the long term. The government's emphasis on democratising or decentralizing urban planning and including local authorities more proactively in decision-making will help to encourage them and reduce their dependence on external funds. To sum up, the government of Uttarakhand has been making collaborative measures to address multiple challenges related to environmentally friendly urban development, even though certain issues remain unresolved. While there are shortcomings and inconsistencies in implementation and areas requiring improvement, the Government of Uttarakhand's approach in the direction of infrastructural development, waste management, and urban planning has paved the way for future growth. With continued focus on innovative urban development, enhanced community involvement, and a commitment to sustainable development goals, Uttarakhand can conquer these challenges and emerge as a model for other states battling with similar urban issues.