

Tamil Nadu

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Planning for a city's growth



Photo: M. Periasamy



Karuna Gopal —



Cities are increasingly becoming topics of discussion for people of all age groups and all sections of society. So, "let us talk about cities," said Karuna Gopal, President of Foundation for Futuristic Cities, Hyderabad, to M. Soundariya Preetha, during a visit to Coimbatore on Friday to participate in an Entrepreneurship Development Programme organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry. Foundation for Futuristic Cities is a three-year-old organisation that provides urban advisory services, especially technical advisory support to local bodies in implementing the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

Cities are the money bags of the nation since their contribution to the country's economic growth is substantial. However, in India, "we are apprehensive of urbanisation because we are not able to capitalise on the labour that migrates to the cities," she says. "We need to develop the right ways to make use of the manpower that comes to the cities."

Ms. Gopal says, "We need manpower for agriculture, industries and services. People who come into cities should be trained as the potential manpower for all sectors."

The Government can do a lot in this issue. For instance, it can tie-up with educational institutions to use their spare capacities for training. Urbanisation should be leveraged as an opportunity to use the talent that comes into it.

Though several cities are growing, many are also dying simultaneously as the quality of life suffers. A city's infrastructure is the Government's mandate. The private sector usually triggers a city's economic development. But, the growth and scaling up will happen only if the Government steps in.

The Government should define land use, create specialised zones and provide tax breaks. In some places the Government plans to develop a city and then invites businesses to step in. Any city should be planned so that it has a ripple effect on the rural areas. The urban growth should not be at the cost of the rural.

In the past, India remained rural-focused. "Only now are we talking of cities," she says. Hence, the local bodies should prioritise issues and follow-up these aggressively. The country should have at least 10 or 20 cities of global standards. All global cities are sustainable with economic prosperity, provide equitable quality of life and ensure environmental balance.

The JNNURM is to renew and rejuvenate cities. It is more than funds. "Cities should become efficient by bringing in reforms." Under the JNNURM reform-linked incentives are given to the local body. Funds are given under the scheme for infrastructure and services along with the contribution by the respective local bodies. Yet, many are unable to do so because of internal inefficiencies and losses in tax collections.

Most of the local bodies - barring some like Ahmedabad, Mysore and Hubli - just have islands of automation. The local bodies should use technology properly, have field-level validations and build efficiency. The JNNURM programme should be navigated properly. It needs people, process and technology.

The youth can associate themselves in city development by taking-up city related projects. It will also give new entrepreneurship ideas, she says.