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WEBINAR

by

Elets Technomedia

Hitesh Vaidya, Director, NIUA

talks on

**Tackling Coronavirus:
Challenges in Urban Spectrum**

Date: April 12, 2020



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“COVID-19 IS NOT THE LAST PANDEMIC, WE NEED TO BE MORE PREPARED”

In this hour of worldwide crisis due to the outbreak of COVID-19, cities across the globe are putting all they have to contain the viral spread. Similarly, Indian cities are putting their best foot forward to meet the cause. A question arises here, are the smart technologies we have been implementing to empower our cities and make them smart can be of any help? To throw light on such aspects of the COVID-19 situation and significance of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in controlling the pandemic in city areas, **Hitesh Vaidya, Director, NIUA** participated in a webinar hosted by **Dr Ravi Gupta, Founder and CEO, Elets Technomedia.**

Vaidya started off by acknowledging the efforts the civic bodies are taking to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. He said, the ULBs took the situation on a war footing and came out with spontaneous and effective solutions to prevent the virus from further spreading.

OUR PREPAREDNESS IN QUESTION

Vaidya emphasized on making resilient cities. While addressing the questions on the viral pandemic he said, “COVID-19 is not the last disaster or pandemic we are facing. There will be more coming our way. We need to question, how prepared are we to tackle such disasters.”

Elaborating on the topic he said, there has been a huge loss of life not only in India but worldwide and this is the time to ponder on where



HITESH VAIDYA
Director
National Institute of Urban Affairs

we are lacking. To improve the present actions and our preparedness, there is a need to go back to basics. Cities need to be made more responsible for citizens and therefore, a citizen-centric approach is what is needed, said Vaidya.

A bottom-up approach can answer to enhance our efforts and point them in the right direction, said Vaidya. “We have to start going back to the



DR RAVI GUPTA
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neighbourhood level, ward level for effective planning for such situations”, he added.

ROLE OF TECH AND SMART CITY INTERVENTIONS IN CONTAINING THE PANDEMIC

Addressing the smart city question Vaidya said, at the time when the corporations and SPVs were coming up with ideas and plan to smarten the cities by integrating functions with advance technology, a lot

of people criticised the move taken by the Government of India introducing the concept of smart cities. Many called it a mere wastage of money. But, today those investments are giving returns. The Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCC) are playing crucial roles in containing the pandemic, he added. "We must address that tech has been a great enabler for us to fight the COVID-19. I would say that in India the way we are flattening the curve, we are moving towards a better future as we're developing with time.", said Vaidya.

Detailing on the role of ICCCs Vaidya said, "ICCCs are now functioning as COVID-19 war rooms." Cities are using the command centres to monitor the lockdown situation, tracking and trailing infected people, monitoring those under quarantine, facilitating the logistics of essential commodities, and much more, added Vaidya.

He also mentioned about the Arogya Setu mobile app which has posed as a tool for people as well as authorities to track COVID-19 infected person in near proximity. Further, he also mentioned about the police department using drones for keeping an eye on the movement of people to ensure the lockdown norms are being taken care of, making public

“Citizen participation in city planning has to be given importance”

announcements, spraying disinfectants, delivery of medicines, and so on.

"We have gathered a lot of information in recent days and now it's important to see how we use it and to what extent we use it...How tech can bridge the gap with bettering capacity, we need to look at that and implement things accordingly. Technology can bring convergence, it's on us how we go with it", Vaidya said.

NEED TO REFORM CITY GOVERNANCE

Hitesh Vaidya, an expert in the urban spectrum, is of the view that this is the time the authorities must look forward to bring in structural reforms in the city governance and also in making the cities more resilient and ready for disasters like COVID-19 in future. Adding on to his paradigm of structural reform he said, "We need to create protocols for citizen-centric governance systems...New things had to be thought about. It's time we need to rethink where we are lacking that such huge

damage has been caused."

Vaidya addressed the 74th Amendment Act which empowers the municipal bodies and local governments saying, "We need to go back to the basics and see why it didn't work. We need to find out how we can improve things and make them work as we expect."

Further, the discussion took a turn and brought in picture the urban planners, their curriculum and their role in enhancing city governance. Addressing the point, Vaidya said, "Curriculum for planners has not changed through the years and we are still looking at old things. We need to start updating things."

Talking about the state of urban planners in India he said, "The role of urban planners have been taken up by the engineers, management people and others. The ratio of planners versus citizens in India is 1-2 planner per a lakh of population, which is disheartening."

Stressing on the need for more and better-skilled planners Vaidya said, "Odisha has recently started municipal cadre system, Gujarat, Maharashtra has also stepped in. So, we need to make people realise that working in ULBs is a profession and we need more young minds to strengthen our ULBs." ●