

Urban Initiatives in Ahmedabad: Managing City Center Growth
Lunch time Seminar
by
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The seminar by Dr Bimal Patel highlighted the planning initiatives taken by urban local bodies in Gujarat, especially in Ahmedabad, in order to make planning process for cities more effective and successful. Given his extensive work in Ahmedabad, Dr Patel was well placed to provide a detailed account of the planning exercise done by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) and Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority for the city centre, and presented the progress of the plan so far. He provided a brief history of past plans in Ahmedabad, and the present day challenges, and then outlined the attempt by the authorities to respond to the challenges of increased structural pressures, congestion, by come up with a long term plan for the city centre. The planning process has tried to take the market forces into account. Dr Patel provided examples of good planning practices from international cities like Curitiba and San Francisco and asserted that any Increase in Floor Area Ratio (FAR) should be accompanied by a concurrent increase in public transport. The challenge is to ensure that higher FAR should not lead to stressed infrastructure and higher congestion. This is of paramount importance, given the projections for urban growth in coming decades and need to prepare for it.

The process of planning will be successful only if: the process is fair (and distributes costs and benefits as evenly as possible), respects property rights, is financially and legally viable, and should improve the city. After explaining the technical details of the planning process for Ahmedabad city centre, the crucial role played by a robust road network was stressed by giving international examples. Along with poor road networks in Indian cities, our planning process also leads to inefficient and under-utilization of land. However, this could be used to our advantage and with good planning strategies with strong legal sanctity; this land could be opened up for better uses. However, this would not be possible without communicating the intentions and processes of the plans to the public in a transparent manner, and seek feedback and support.

Discussions which followed Dr. Patel's presentation dealt with problems of urban governance, jurisdictional conflict in an urban regions and it's resolution. Dr. Patel stressed the need for plans to follow sound economic rationale, legal backing, and availability of finances. It is imperative to allow market mechanism to facilitate price discovery. The questions from the audience also dealt with varied issues like land acquisition, dovetailing solid waste management and sewerage plans with city plans, and an urgent need for a perspective which is specific to India. The seminar was attended by government officials, urban practitioners, architects, and members of the urban team at ICRIER.