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# An overview of the AMRUT scheme | Explained

**What was the purpose of the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation? What was the revenue set aside for the scheme? What has been its progress so far? What are the various shortcomings and how should they be addressed?**

**Updated** - May 29, 2024 11:27 pm IST **Published** - May 29, 2024 11:14 pm IST

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Lions Park on Kozhikode beach which is being renovated under AMRUT-2 by Kozhikode Corporation. | Photo Credit: K Ragesh

**The story so far:** Around **36% of India's population** is living in cities and by 2047 it will be more than 50%. The World Bank estimates that around **\$840 billion is required to fund** the bare minimum urban infrastructure over the next 15 years. The AMRUT (Atal Mission for

Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) scheme was a flagship programme launched by the NDA-1 government in June 2015, with its 2.0 version launched on October 1, 2021.

## What is the AMRUT scheme?

Some of the challenges in infrastructure development with respect to water, mobility, and pollution were to be met by this scheme with some financial assistance from the Centre and the rest of the share mobilised by both States and respective cities. The mission was drawn to cover 500 cities and towns with a population of over one lakh with notified municipalities. The purpose of the AMRUT mission was to (i) ensure that every household has access to a tap with assured supply of water and a sewerage connection (ii) increase the value of cities by developing greenery and well-maintained open spaces such as parks and (iii) reduce pollution by switching to public transport or constructing facilities for non-motorised transport. The total outlay for AMRUT was ₹50,000 crore for five years from FY 2015-16 to FY 2019-20.

AMRUT 2.0 was aimed at making cities 'water secure' and providing functional water tap connections to all households in all statutory towns. Ambitious targets were set up such as providing 100% sewage management in 500 AMRUT cities. The total outlay for AMRUT 2.0 is ₹2,99,000 crore, with the Central outlay being ₹76,760 crore for five years, and the rest of the amount to be mobilised by the States and cities.

## How much money has been utilised?

The AMRUT dashboard shows that as of May 19, 2024, a sum of ₹83,357 crore has been dispersed so far. This amount has been utilised to provide a total of 58,66,237 tap connections, and 37,49,467 sewerage connections. A total of 2,411 parks have been developed, and 62,78,571 LED lights have been replaced. These works include the contributions made by States and cities.

## What is the reality?

It is estimated that about 2,00,000 people die every year due to inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene. In 2016, the disease burden due to unsafe water and sanitation per person was 40 times higher in India than in China. This has not improved much. Huge amounts of waste water and little treatment enhances the vulnerability and incidence of diseases. The 150 reservoirs monitored by the central government, which supplies water

for drinking and irrigation, and are the country's key source of hydro-electricity, were filled to just 40% of its capacity a few weeks ago. Around 21 major cities are going to run out of ground water. In a **NITI Aayog report** it was stated that 40% of India's population will have no access to drinking water by 2030. Nearly 31% of urban Indian households do not have piped water; 67.3% are not connected to a piped sewerage discharge system; and average water supply per person in urban India is 69.25 litres/day, whereas the required amount is 135 litres.

Additionally, air quality in AMRUT cities and in other large urban settlements continue to worsen. A National Clean Air Programme was launched by the central government in 2019, as AMRUT 2.0 focused only on water and sewerage and because the air quality concerns of AMRUT 1.0 were far from addressed.

## What went wrong?

The basic fundamental of the scheme was erroneously constructed. Instead of a holistic approach, it took on a project-oriented attitude. Furthermore, AMRUT was made for cities with no participation from the cities. It was quite mechanical in design, with hardly any organic participation of the elected city governments, and driven by mostly private interests. The project was owned by bureaucrats, parastatals, and large technology-based companies. For example, in the governance architecture, the apex committee is headed by the secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MOHUA) and all the members are non-elected. Similarly, the State level high powered committee is headed by the chief secretary with a private nexus of consultants and professionals. Peoples' representatives are completely missing, in violation of the 74th constitutional amendment.

Moreover, water management in cities **must factor in climate and rainfall patterns** of the area and existing infrastructure of combined sewers. It is no big surprise that most of the sewage treatment plants are designed in such a way that the travel distance of average faecal matter is more than the average commute of a worker to work! Since the drivers are large private players and builders, real estate development has become a proxy for urban planning — disappearance of water bodies and lakes, disrupted storm water flows, and absence of storm water drainage is very common.

The scheme needs nature based solutions and a comprehensive methodology with a people centric approach and empowering local bodies.

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