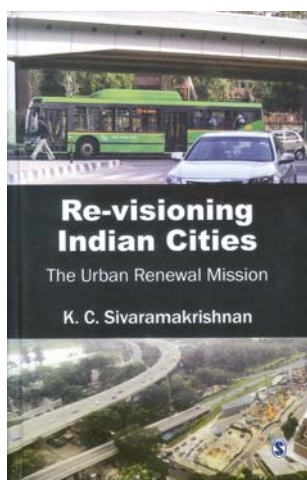


BOOK REVIEWS

cannot give a proper understanding of these developments in India. The author being a non-scientist, and a journalist in his own right, in political science, the book is easy to read, in spite of its length (over 600 pages). In addition, he has listed several references which should be interesting to pursue for those who wish to write yet another book on this subject.

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Re-visioning Indian Cities: The Urban Renewal Mission. K. C. Sivaramakrishnan. SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044. 2011. xxvi + 278 pp. Price: Rs 695.

The chaos that is ubiquitous in Indian cities is accompanied by the inability of successive governments to come up with a comprehensive and effective urban policy. For decades after independence the city was seen as an unavoidable evil. The task of the government was believed to be to decongest cities and to provide housing for those who happened to remain in urban centres. The 1988 report of the National Commission of Urbanization marked an analytical break from this practice, making the case for seeing cities as engines of growth. But the efforts to transform this idea into a comprehensive urban policy have largely failed, to the point that a series of projects under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) is now being treated as the de facto urban policy.

There are few better placed than K. C. Sivaramakrishnan to tell us the story of

this long-term failure. He has been an important part of India's urban policy making establishment for decades, from the time of the 74th Amendment to the Constitution in 1992 providing a greater role for urban local bodies, to being a member of the Technical Advisory Group of JNNURM. When he looks at JNNURM, Sivaramakrishnan can do so with the benefit of having seen the difficulties of urban policy making first-hand. It is only to be expected that this book provides a ring-side view of the working of JNNURM. This insider account is honest enough to point to the weaknesses that are already becoming evident in the Mission, but it stops short of recognizing that these limitations are inherent in the effort to use a series of large, expensive projects as a proxy for urban policy. In the process it does not bring us any closer to understanding the way forward in urban policy making.

The JNNURM was launched in December 2005 to provide a fresh thrust to urban policy making through what is sometimes called the mission mode. An investment of Rs 100,000 crores in 65 cities (the Central Government providing half of this amount) makes the programme a large one by any standards; a size that demands close scrutiny not just of the procedures being followed, but also their impact on the urban crisis.

The Mission seeks to use the incentives and instruments of control built into large government projects to bring about a fundamental transformation in the manner in which cities govern themselves. The exercise is designed to begin with cities coming up with their City Development Plans (CDPs). These plans are to be developed with the close involvement of the urban local bodies. It would then be possible to identify specific projects that would be supported by JNNURM. And this support would be conditional on the city bringing in reforms in its governance systems.

The prioritization of specific projects is built into the four components of JNNURM. First, the severe infrastructure bottlenecks in the major cities mean Urban Infrastructure and Governance had to be one of the primary goals of JNNURM. Second, the challenge of urban infrastructure was not confined to the large cities. This made a case for the Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme for Small and Medium Towns. This component subsumed two earlier schemes that

were operating in this area. Third, the very significant degree of urban poverty formed the basis for the Basic Services for Urban Poor component. And fourth, the Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme retained a focus on the fact that for all our urban planning, slums remain a major challenge.

For an insider's view of this process, Sivaramakrishnan provides a remarkably frank picture of a Mission that is far from being accomplished. He identifies three major disconnects that have become evident in the functioning of the Mission. The first is between CDPs and the Urban Local Bodies. As most cities did not have these plans, the task of preparing them was handed over to consultants. The consultants were 'familiar with the methodology and techniques of CDP, and, more particularly, their presentation. Almost every CDP, therefore, contains a one or two page reference to "stakeholder consultation" more as a formality' (p. 79). But there was very little meaningful involvement of the Urban Local Bodies in the process. They did have to endorse the plans. But with the large funds being promised to them under the JNNURM, they were presumably more than willing to sign on the dotted line.

The second disconnect was between CDPs and the Detailed Project Reports. It was expected that the Detailed Project Reports would flow from CDPs. But most cities already had projects that were waiting for funds. 'Once again the compulsion to quickly obtain funds became dominant ... Here again consultants were used in preparing or updating or just polishing up previously prepared project reports' (pp. 79–80). Not surprisingly, it was found that in many cases the project reports did not relate to CDP.

The third disconnect is between the project and the Urban Local Body. The JNNURM was expected to break the tendency for State Government departments or parastatal bodies to bypass the elected municipal bodies. But this was not done. The usual arguments about the lack of competence of the municipality were used to hand over the implementation of the projects to parastatal bodies. Thus, despite the statements to the contrary, the 'disconnect between city governments and projects has been amplified and deepened in many cases as a consequence of JNNURM' (p. 81).

In addition to these fundamental inadequacies, the book also points to a

number of other weaknesses in the implementation of JNNURM, particularly the excessive emphasis on New Delhi. It inevitably leads to a confirmation of 'the belief that programmes of public expenditure, however massive, are not the best way to change the processes' (p. 195). Sivaramakrishnan also recognizes that in the past there have been local municipal initiatives that made a difference in India. The obvious question then is what has changed since then? And what can we do to reverse this process?

It can be no one's case that there are easy answers to these questions. But it does not require too great an insight to recognize some of the elements of the old municipalities that are missing today. The control of the municipalities was very much more in local hands. Their administrators decided policies, implemented them and received credit for their achievements. In the post-Independence years this simple mechanism has been weakened. Policy making has been centralized on the basis that there is inadequate knowledge at the local level. The far from desirable effects on urban policy of centralized knowledge are there to see in virtually every Indian city.

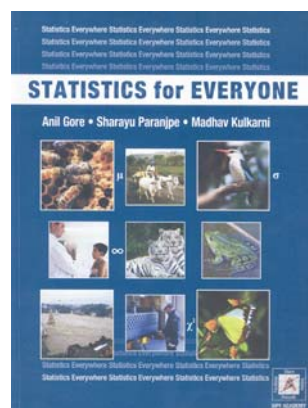
On the face of it JNNURM recognizes the need for decentralization. It calls for an effective role for the urban local bodies. In theory projects are not to be funded unless these bodies are involved. But with JNNURM prescribing the best way for decentralized organizations to function, we have a contradiction in terms: centralized decentralization. Not surprisingly, most urban local bodies promise to do what is required to get their funds, and then go on to find ways not to do so.

In order to explore these larger processes we need to understand the entire dynamics of urbanization, recognizing the role that each one plays in a city. Who are the elected representatives? What are their interests in the city outside their elected office? What is the role of the other players in current urban management, including corporate houses and civil society? What is the relationship between the different interest groups and policy making? Sivaramakrishnan explores in considerable detail, the differences between the expectations of those who framed JNNURM and what has resulted in practice. But his unwillingness to get into the more hazy area of the other interests of those involved in

the implementation of JNNURM, even perfunctorily, leaves the book with an unfinished touch.

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Statistics for Everyone. Anil Gore, Sharayu Paranjpe and Madhav Kulkarni. SIFP Academy Publishers and Consultants, Nalinee, Plot No. 13B, S. No. 810/A, Pakhal Road, A/P Gandhinagar, Nashik 422 101. 2009. 159 pp. Price: Rs 150.

In today's world an enormous amount of data are available, but it is getting harder to absorb everything. Statistical analysis is no longer a tool reserved for mathematicians, but one used frequently by people of varied backgrounds. There is a surplus of books on statistics catering to the needs of researchers and experts. However, a book that provides a peep into the world of statistics for a layman, one that provides the required foundation for the theory of statistical methods minus mathematical rigour has been sorely missing.

This book is aimed to motivate the use of statistics and popularize its importance. The authors, each of whom is an experienced statistician, have written the book in a style accessible to anyone with a high-school background. What sets this book apart from the plethora of texts on statistics is that common statistical concepts, tools and experimental techniques used by scientists are introduced in a perceptive and jargon-free manner. The chapters have been written keeping in

mind the needs of those who want to familiarize themselves with the concepts of statistical methods without going through dense formulas and equations. The book is modestly priced, making it accessible to a larger audience.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section is aptly called 'Numeracy for Everyone', in which the authors start out with emphasizing on understanding the importance of quantification and the different ways in which information can be represented. As the book progresses, the authors take on a hands-on approach to introduce important concepts in statistics, such as measures of central tendency, dispersion and the importance of variation. Most ideas are presented in an intuitive manner with relevant examples. For instance, using the example of the chance of getting two sons in a row, the authors cleverly introduce the concept of probability to the reader. The concept of different types of distribution, however, is tossed midway through the text, and the introduction provided in the preceding material seems inadequate. Conversely, the book is not supposed to teach you statistics, it instead provides you with the flavour of the subject. The authors go on to introduce the theory of correlation and regression and statistical testing using the chi-square test, addressing critical issues such as that of statistical inference and the risks of extrapolation. The chapters in this section end with some easy and fun-to-do exercises.

In this section I was delighted to find that one chapter has been dedicated exclusively to ecologists. The authors give a brief outline of statistical and other quantitative methods commonly used in ecology, such as diversity indices and different census techniques, and the limitations thereof. Here again, the authors are gentle in their approach and consciously avoid using technical mumbo-jumbo.

In the early years of my research, the questions that bothered me the most were about deciding how much and how to sample in order to optimize sampling effort. The authors address this concern and explain using examples how the choice of sampling strategy and experimental design depends on the question being asked. An introduction to some sampling techniques and experimental designs is provided to elaborate on this issue. This section is of particular use to