Urban development calls for ‘leadership’ that can ‘organise, engage, and experiment,’ to unleash the full potential of the city. More specifically, it is the leadership that enables and spearheads collaboration, strategic thinking, effective foresight and builds alliances and partnerships across various levels of governance. Clearly, leadership in today’s times has gone beyond the domain of a single person. Cities across the world are developing networks of leaders to put them on a spectrum of leadership skills that are diverse enough to address the complexity of the urban systems.

Urban leadership is situational, difficult to generalise and be subjected to universal advice. Keeping these thoughts at the core of the discussion, four speakers came together to reflect upon the meaning of ‘Urban Leadership’ to them, what role does it play in successful implementation of urban projects and what kind of challenges/difficulties are faced by urban leaders while driving an urban settlement.

Key Learnings

There is a difference between leadership and being in-charge. Leadership values are developed over the years and is a combination of personal growth and family values. Leader needs to be politically away but should understand political practices.

Urban development is not a ‘one-man show’. All initiatives, that are planned and implemented, involve a network of networks. Leadership comes from bringing out the best from each participant of such networks.

Role of a leader is to engage with all the stakeholders by being authentic and committed, particularly to staff members. Absence of enabling / nurturing environment to develop human resilience.

Leadership is not about the designation or position but about developing the right set of skill sets. Failure are a critical part of the urban ecosystem. Leaders are not expected to show vulnerability, however, there is a need for one to be honest about his/her own limitations and express vulnerabilities.

In order to grasp the complexities of urban actions, it is critical to be able to empathize with others.

Opting for a structured way to show learnings and demonstrate accountability. Urban leaders from Urban Local Bodies require capacity-building. Need to rethink and re-strategize capacity-building exercises.

Modus Operandi is Participatory Planning, enabling and empowering others to be able to participate in problem-solving exercises.

Current system does not allow equal participation by all because of the sense of deep-rooted hierarchy.