

Urban Chronicles

A Monthly Newsletter

By Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of Assam



In this newsletter you can expect

Initiative of the Month: Page 2

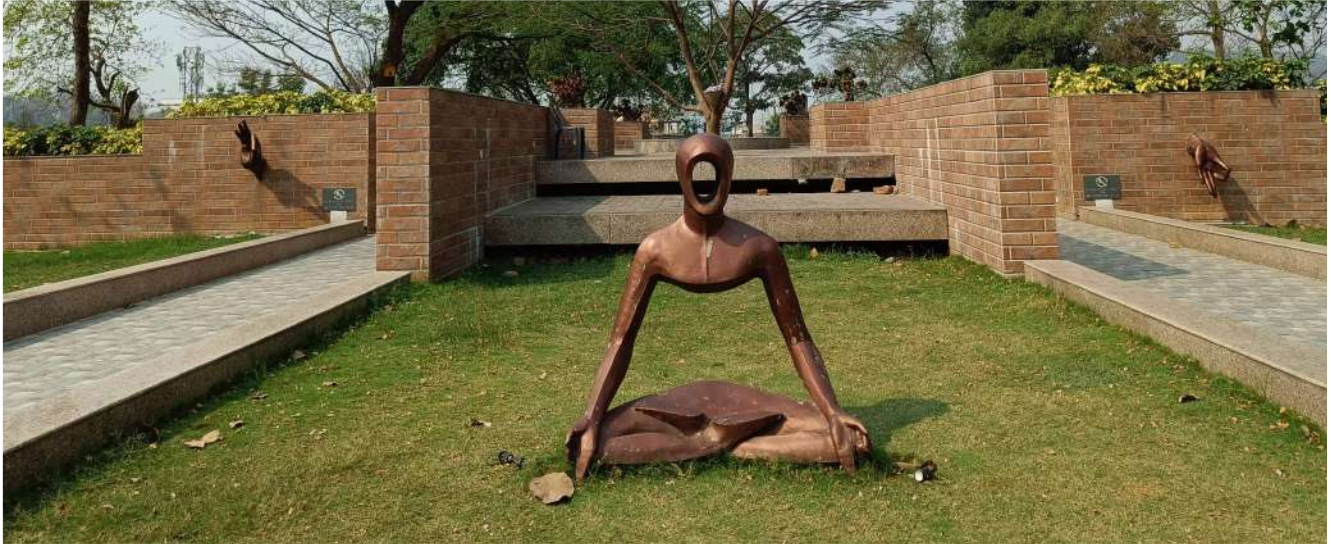
Buzz from the ULBs: Page 3

Voices from the First Mile: Page 4

Envisioning Urban: India and Beyond: Page 5-6

Urban Lexicon: Page 7

Feature of the month: Page 8



Amrit Udyan at Hengrabari, Guwahati

FOREWORD

From the
Hon'ble Minister's
Desk



Dear Readers,

It is with great enthusiasm that I present the January edition of Urban Chronicles, a newsletter dedicated to exploring the ever-evolving landscape of urban development. As the new Minister of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, Assam, I am deeply committed to fostering sustainable, inclusive and resilient urban spaces that empower communities and enrich lives.

This issue highlights our shared vision of building cities that harmonize growth with sustainability. From innovative drone-based LiDAR surveys to people-centric local initiatives, the articles herein reflect the strides we are taking in creating equitable and thriving urban spaces.

Let this newsletter serve not just as a record of progress but also an inspiration for collaborative action. Together, we can create cities that stand as beacons of innovation, equity and opportunity for all.

Warm regards,

Shri Jayanta Malla Baruah

Minister, Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, GoA

Initiative of the Month

Revolutionizing Urban Planning in Assam with GIS GeoHub

The Directorate of Town and Country Planning (T&CP), Assam, under the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, primarily prepares Master Plans for urban areas under the Assam Town & Country Planning Act, 1959. It embarked on a transformative journey in urban planning with the establishment of GIS GeoHub— a techno-analytical wing under the Directorate which is a cutting-edge initiative that integrates Geographical Information System (GIS) technology into the preparation of Master Plans and urban projects.

Core Components of GIS GeoHub

- 1. GIS-Based Data Portal:** A centralized platform hosting 65 finalized Master Plans, featuring detailed information on land use, infrastructure, road networks and flood mapping. The portal's real-time change detection capabilities monitor urban sprawl, with planned integrations for property tax and building permissions systems to enhance governance efficiency.
- 2. Advanced Survey Techniques:** Leveraging drone-based LiDAR surveys in 12 towns of Assam, the techniques have produced highly accurate digital models of Town Master Plans, including Digital Surface, Terrain and Elevation Models. This data has been instrumental in preparing Drainage Master Plans, further augmented by Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS) surveys to map drain depths and improve accuracy.
- 3. Expert Team:** A dedicated team of GIS and IT professionals ensure seamless implementation of GeoHub's initiatives.

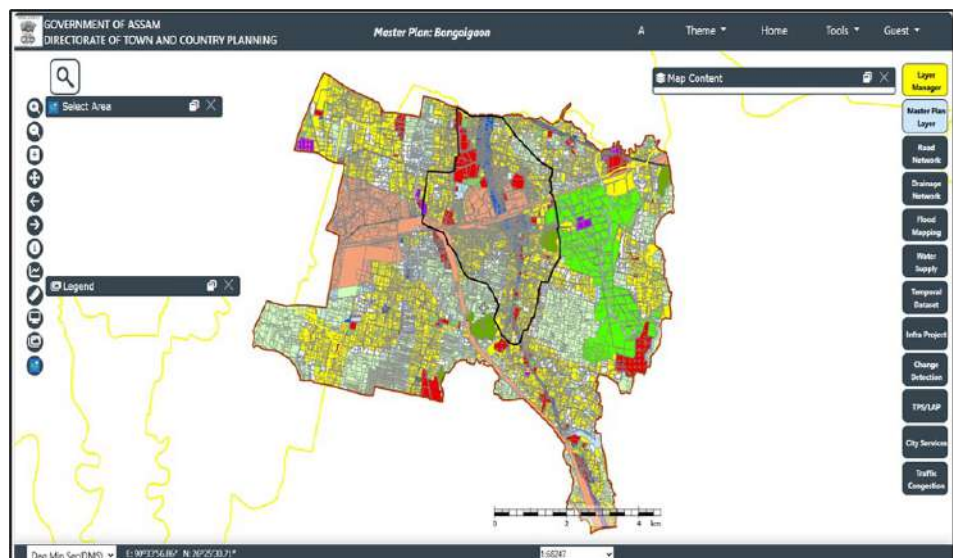
Key Achievements and Future Focus

The GeoHub's innovations enhance transparency, efficiency and sustainability in urban planning. Notable advancements include:

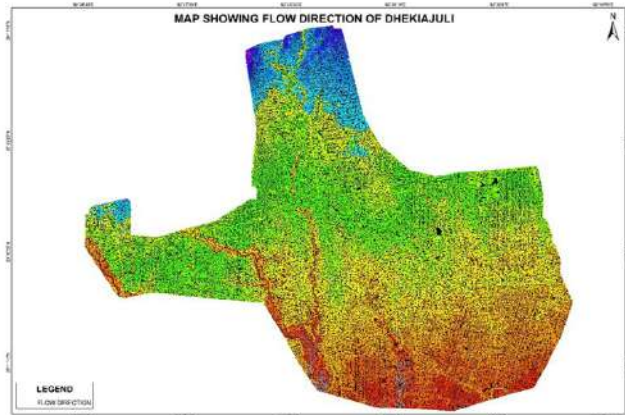
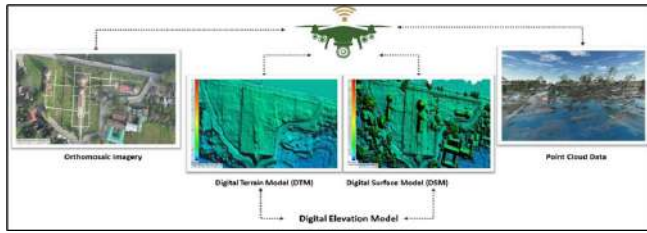
- **Change Detection Capability:** It enables real-time tracking of urban growth and sprawl.
- **Integrated Systems:** Future integrations with the Urban Property Tax portal and the Online Building Permission System (OBPS) aim to create a comprehensive property inventory, enhance tax management and monitor unauthorized constructions.
- **Water Body Conservation:** A web application is being developed in collaboration with the Assam State Space Application Centre to map and create a comprehensive inventory of water bodies across Assam towns. This is in line with the Assam Water Bodies Conservation and Preservation Act, 2024 to ensure their sustainable management.

The Road Ahead

GIS GeoHub sets a new benchmark for urban governance in Assam. With plans to expand coverage and integrate more functionalities, this initiative promises to drive sustainable development, robust infrastructure planning and environmental conservation across the state.



The image shows the Master Plan of Bongaigaon



The image shows the flow direction of Dhekiajuli

Assam Urban Knowledge Hub: Driving Urban Reforms in Assam



The team of Assam Urban Knowledge Hub

The Assam Urban Knowledge Hub (AUKH), under the Directorate of Town & Country Planning, serves as a “think tank” and repository of urban expertise for implementing various reforms undertaken by DoHUA. Operational since February 2024, it comprises a core team of 5 planners (on a 2-3 year tenure) and 18 recruited urban planners. Supervised by the T&CP Director and Assistant Directors, the team is divided into three groups focusing on urban planning, mobility and drainage management.

AUKH has already initiated key field projects in

Guwahati to address pressing urban challenges:

- **Tactical Urbanism at Ganeshguri Junction:** A tactical urbanism approach was used to redesign Ganeshguri Junction, improving traffic flow and pedestrian safety. Traffic islands were created, signal cycles were adjusted, and conflict points eliminated, resulting in better traffic volume and reduced wait times.
- **Paltan Bazar Redesign:** AUKH is leading a tactical urbanism initiative at Paltan Bazar to alleviate traffic congestion, improve pedestrian safety, and revitalize the local market. Temporary changes will test the design, which will eventually include permanent pedestrian-friendly features, such as bus stops, ride-sharing points, shaded walkways, and landscaping to enhance mobility and livability.
- **Drainage Master Plan:** AUKH conducted a survey of Guwahati’s drainage systems in flood-prone areas like Hatigaon and Beltola. Using GIS mapping and ground surveys, the team proposed both short- and long-term solutions to manage water flow and mitigate urban flooding.
- **Affordable Housing:** AUKH completed the conceptual design and cost estimation for an Affordable Housing Project to relocate residents from the Silsako Beel area, providing them with safe and affordable housing, while ensuring dignity and inclusivity in urban resettlement.

Through these initiatives, AUKH aims to position itself as a catalyst for sustainable and innovative urban transformation in Assam.



Tactical urbanism initiative at Ganeshguri Junction

Buzz from the ULBs

Transforming Lives Through Enterprise: Mangaldoi Mahila Bazaar

Inaugurated on July 6, 2019 in the heart of Mangaldoi town, with 27 SHGs showcasing their handmade and indigenous products, the Mangaldoi Mahila Bazaar has since evolved into a thriving marketplace. Currently hosting around 500 women SHG members, this initiative has become a cornerstone of socio-economic transformation in Darrang district, one of India's aspirational districts. Under the NULM initiative, financial aid has been extended to SHG members to establish their shops. Furthermore, the Mangaldai Municipal Board has supported the endeavor by providing essentials such as umbrellas and tents for the makeshift women's market.

The Bazaar has significantly bolstered financial autonomy among participants, with daily turnover surging from ₹50,000–₹1,00,000 to an impressive ₹10–₹12 lakh. Initially designed for urban SHGs, it now unites rural and urban groups, enhancing financial resilience through diverse micro-enterprises and encouraging women empowerment.

Beyond economic benefits, the Bazaar enriches the community by offering fresh produce and unique artisanal products, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem that uplifts local producers and serves consumers with high-quality goods.



Mahila Bazar of Mangaldai- A NULM Initiative

From Waste to Wonder : GVP Transformed into 'Tulsi Bheti' This Kati Bihu!"

On the auspicious occasion of Kati Bihu, a Garbage Vulnerable Point (GVP) near Bapuji Stadium in Mariani has undergone a remarkable transformation into a "Tulsi Bheti." The initiative was inaugurated by the Co-District Commissioner, who celebrated the revitalization of this space. In a show of community spirit, two local citizens have stepped forward to adopt the site for ongoing maintenance, ensuring its upkeep and continued beauty. This project highlights the importance of community involvement in environmental sustainability and aims to foster a cleaner, greener Mariani.



CTU transformed into Tulsi Bheti in Mariani Town

Stories from the First Mile

From Masks to Mushrooms: Darpana SHG’s Journey of Resilience and Growth

Founded in 2019, Darpana Self-Help Group (SHG) in Doomdooma Municipality, Assam, is a model of resilience and entrepreneurship. Led by Smti Noni Deka and Smti Harini Talukdar, the group began with nine members committed to self-reliance.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the group began producing face masks, addressing a critical need. They also ventured into newborn clothing, earning financial success and community appreciation.

Oyster Mushroom Farming

In December 2023, Darpana SHG expanded into Oyster Mushroom farming. The group, guided by Smti Noni Deka, Smti Harini Talukdar, Smti Digangana Borkakoty and Smti Indrani Talukdar learned farming techniques online and harvested 20 kilograms of mushrooms in just one month. They sold them to local stores at 200– 250 per kilogram.

Support and Funding

Darpana SHG received online training and guidance from ULB NULM CO, along with Revolving Fund grants of 10,000 under the SMID component. Supplementing this with 15,000 of their own funds,

the group enhanced their marketing network and scaled up operations. With a new harvest starting this month, they aim to achieve a production target of 40 kilograms this season.

A Model of Empowerment

Darpana SHG's journey—transforming from mask-making to mushroom farming—demonstrates the power of collective action, innovation and women's empowerment and illustrates the impact of SHGs in building sustainable livelihoods.



Oyster Mushroom farming by Darpana SHG

Envisioning Urban: India and Beyond

Transforming Urban Water Supply: Odisha's 'Drink from Tap' Initiative

Odisha has become India's first state to provide 24x7 potable water directly through household taps under its "Drink from Tap" initiative. Covering 107 urban local bodies and targeting 1.1 million households, the program focuses on modernisation of pipe fittings, real-time water quality surveillance and geo-mapping on GIS platforms of assets and consumers. Funded by state resources, municipal budgets and external aid like UNICEF, it reduces reliance on bottled water, lowers household costs and curbs waterborne diseases. The project is being implemented by WATCO (Water Corporation of Odisha) which has developed significant expertise in execution and monitoring of water supply projects. Special emphasis is on engaging SHG members as Jal Sathis who focus on behavioural change of the community. They are engaged in an incentive based model focused on water fees collection, water quality testing at user end, sensitisation and grievance redressal.

This model offers valuable lessons for Assam, where severe challenges persist such as arsenic and fluoride contamination, expenditure on overhead

tanks and RO filters and over-reliance on water tankers for drinking water. By adopting real-time monitoring, leveraging community participation and prioritizing inclusive access, Assam can enhance its water infrastructure, improve public health and ensure safe drinking water for all.

Full article can be read here :
Down to Earth



Building Resilience: Lessons from Cambodia's Water Security Model



A Cambodian woman collects water from a covered container.

Cambodia is witnessing the harsh realities of climate change, with erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts and intensified floods disrupting livelihoods. Farmers face growing uncertainty about their crops and drinking water ultimately affecting their families' futures.

To combat these challenges, the Royal Government of Cambodia, supported by UNICEF, has initiated climate-resilient water supply projects. The methodology emphasises on risk assessment followed by a series of tests to ensure a sustainable water source. Reliable water source management methods, including solar-powered pumps, climate contingency plans and resilient infrastructure with backups, ensure minimal disruption during floods and droughts.

With a devastating annual flood season and disruptive rainfall patterns, Assam has consistently ranked among the most vulnerable states of India as per the Climate Vulnerability Index. This reflects an urgent need for incorporating climate resilience in its infrastructure projects. Cambodia's water security model offers Assam solutions to ensure resilient and sustainable water supply for its citizens.



The images above showcase Jal Sathis actively performing tasks such as water testing and water bill collection.

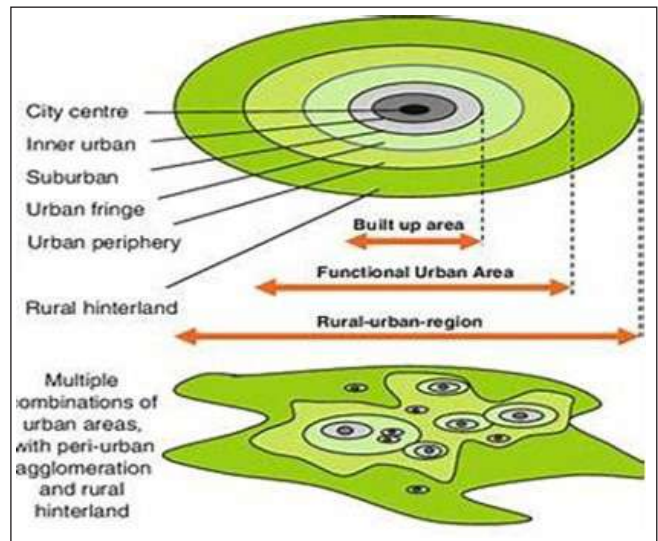
Urban Lexicon: Emerging Terminologies shaping Urban Life

It refers to the **transformation of rural areas into spaces that mix both rural and urban characteristics**. This term is particularly relevant in the **Global South**, where urban areas are expanding and merging with nearby rural regions. The concept has evolved to recognize that these changes are complex and should not be viewed through a one-size-fits-all lens. Instead, scholars now understand peri-urbanization as involving territorial, functional and transitional shifts. Notable scholars like David Satterthwaite, Hugh Clout, and Tony Houghton have helped shape this idea, especially in relation to urban growth in places like the Global South.

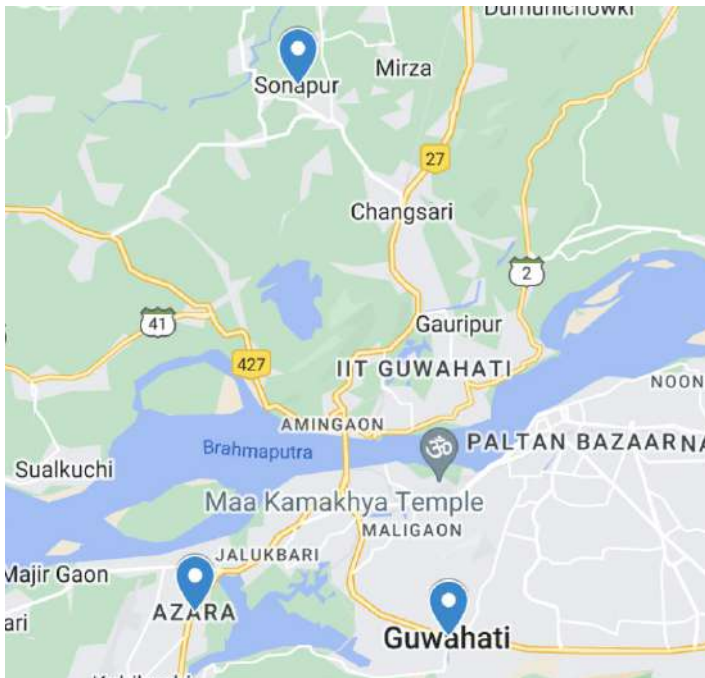
A clear example of peri-urbanization can be seen in Guwahati, Assam, where rapid population growth is pushing the city to expand into the surrounding rural areas. **Neighbourhoods like Azara, Rani and Sonapur are gradually becoming urbanized**, with more roads, markets, and services being added, though they still maintain some rural characteristics. This urban sprawl is also affecting agriculture in nearby areas such as Nalbari, Barpeta and Kamrup, **where farmland is being converted into housing and industrial zones**. This shift is creating tensions

between traditional farming practices and the need for urban development.

Additionally, **migration from rural hinterlands of Assam is contributing to the rise of informal settlements in Guwahati's peri-urban areas**. These settlements, often lacking basic infrastructure, add challenges to urban planning and put pressure on limited municipal resources.



An illustrative image of the concept of Peri-Urbanization



Google map showing peri-urban areas

A short film produced by Institute of Rural Management Anand on issues of peri-urban areas can be watched by clicking on the QR:



Revolving **EDITOR'S DESK** Feature of the Month



Paramananda Nath
Executive Officer, Silapathar Municipal Board

Silapathar's Journey to Sustainability

Transforming Waste Management Through Jan Bhagidari

About the author:

The author, an Executive Officer with the Silapathar Municipal Board from the Assam Urban Administrative Service cadre (2022). Prior to joining civil services, he spent a few years in teaching and later joined as an Assistant Manager in Assam's Industries and Commerce Department through APSC CCE 2021.

Silapathar: A Growing Hub with Waste Management Challenges

The Silapathar Municipal Board (SMB) in Assam's Dhemaji district has **emerged as a trailblazer in sustainable urban waste management**. Known for its vibrant commerce and strategic connectivity to Arunachal Pradesh and Dibrugarh via the Bogibeel Bridge, the town has experienced rapid economic growth. However, this progress also led to increased waste generation, compounded by the absence of dedicated waste management facilities in the past.

A Transformative Step in 2024

Under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), SMB addressed this issue in 2024 by commissioning a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) and a Waste-to-Compost (W2C) plant. This marked a pivotal move in implementing an effective Solid Waste Management (SWM) system within the town.

Community Engagement: Building Awareness

Collaboration with the Swachh Brahmaputra Valley Foundation played a key role in SMB's success. Outreach initiatives such as door-to-door campaigns, school drives and stakeholder meetings emphasized source segregation and proper waste disposal. These efforts laid the foundation for active citizen participation.

Innovative Waste Collection Measures

SMB retrofitted its waste collection vehicles to ensure the separate collection of dry, wet, hazardous and sanitary waste. Additionally, the establishment of plastic banks across the town reduced plastic pollution

by promoting safe and efficient disposal.

Citizen Participation Drives Behavioral Change

The systematic approach yielded positive results, with residents adopting source segregation and systematic disposal practices. A dedicated helpline further improved coordination between citizens and municipal authorities, fostering greater involvement in the initiative.

Collaborative Governance for Sustainability: For long-term sustainability, SMB signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Army Head Station at Likabali to oversee waste management operations. This partnership set an example of **collaborative governance** in addressing urban challenges.

A vision for a cleaner Silapathar

SMB's efforts highlight the power of collective action in achieving urban cleanliness and sustainability. The board emphasizes that **maintaining cleanliness is a shared responsibility**, urging residents to remain active participants in waste management efforts. By continuing to work together, Silapathar can become a model for other towns and cities in India, showcasing the potential of **community-driven solutions for urban waste management**.

This column is a part of our Revolving Editor's Desk featuring monthly articles which highlights diverse perspectives of officers of DoHUA.



A Material Recovery Facility in Silapathar

For sharing your thoughts on the Urban Space in Assam, please mail us at: dohaurbanchronicles@gmail.com

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