

Urban Chronicles

A Monthly Newsletter

By Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of Assam

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Government of Assam

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Brahmaputra Riverfront, Panbazar, Guwahati

FOREWORD

*From the desk of the
Chief Executive Officer,
Guwahati Metropolitan
Development Authority
(GMDA)*



Urban Chronicles is more than just a newsletter as we navigate the challenges of rapid urbanization, the stories captured in this edition serve as beacons of hope, showcasing how cities across India and beyond are reimagining urban living through forward-thinking governance.

Guwahati, our beloved riverine city, is at the heart of this transformation. The GMDA's relentless efforts to revive and conserve our water-bodies whether through the ambitious restoration of Silsako Beel or the innovative bioremediation of urban ponds, reflect our vision of a greener, flood-resilient future. These initiatives are not just about ecological revival; they are about reclaiming our heritage, enhancing public spaces and fostering a deeper connection between citizens and their environment.

Beyond Guwahati, we draw inspiration from the remarkable strides made by cities like Nagaon, where community-driven waste management has turned challenges into opportunities. The "Trash into Treasure" initiative exemplifies how behavioral change, coupled with grassroots participation, can create lasting impact. Similarly, Mumbai's Water Metro and Barcelona's Superblocks remind us that sustainable mobility and people-centric urban design are not just aspirations but achievable realities.

At the core of these success stories lies a common thread the power of dignity, empowerment, and inclusive governance. As May commemorates International Labour Day, Bongaigaon's transformation, where sanitation workers are now honored as change-makers highlights the dignity of labour and the essential role of grassroots workers in municipal services. Meanwhile, women-led SHGs are fostering civic engagement, underscoring the principle that true progress stems from valuing and empowering every citizen.

As we share these narratives in Urban Chronicles, I urge all stakeholders to collaborate, learn, and act. The road to sustainable urbanization is paved with challenges but together, we can turn our cities into thriving, equitable and livable spaces for generations to come.

Let this edition inspire you to be part of the change.

Chief Executive Officer
Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA)

Initiative of the Month

Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority Leads Waterbody Conservation Efforts

Guwahati is witnessing a transformative wave of ecological restoration as the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) implements a multi-pronged strategy to revive the city's vital waterbodies. Anchored by the Guwahati Waterbodies (Preservation & Conservation) Act, 2008, these efforts combine large-scale infrastructure projects with innovative treatment solutions to address decades of neglect and pollution.

Silsako Beel: A Flagship Restoration Project

The most ambitious initiative focuses on Silsako Beel, a key wetland ecosystem. Backed by a ₹237 crore investment under PMKSY-HKPP, the project approved by the Ministry of Jal Shakti, includes encroachment removal, bioremediation, and long-term conservation measures. This large-scale revival aims to restore the Beel's ecological functions while mitigating urban flooding risks.

Innovative Solutions for Urban Waterbodies

Alongside Silsako, GMDA is piloting cutting-edge sewage treatment technologies to tackle pollution in

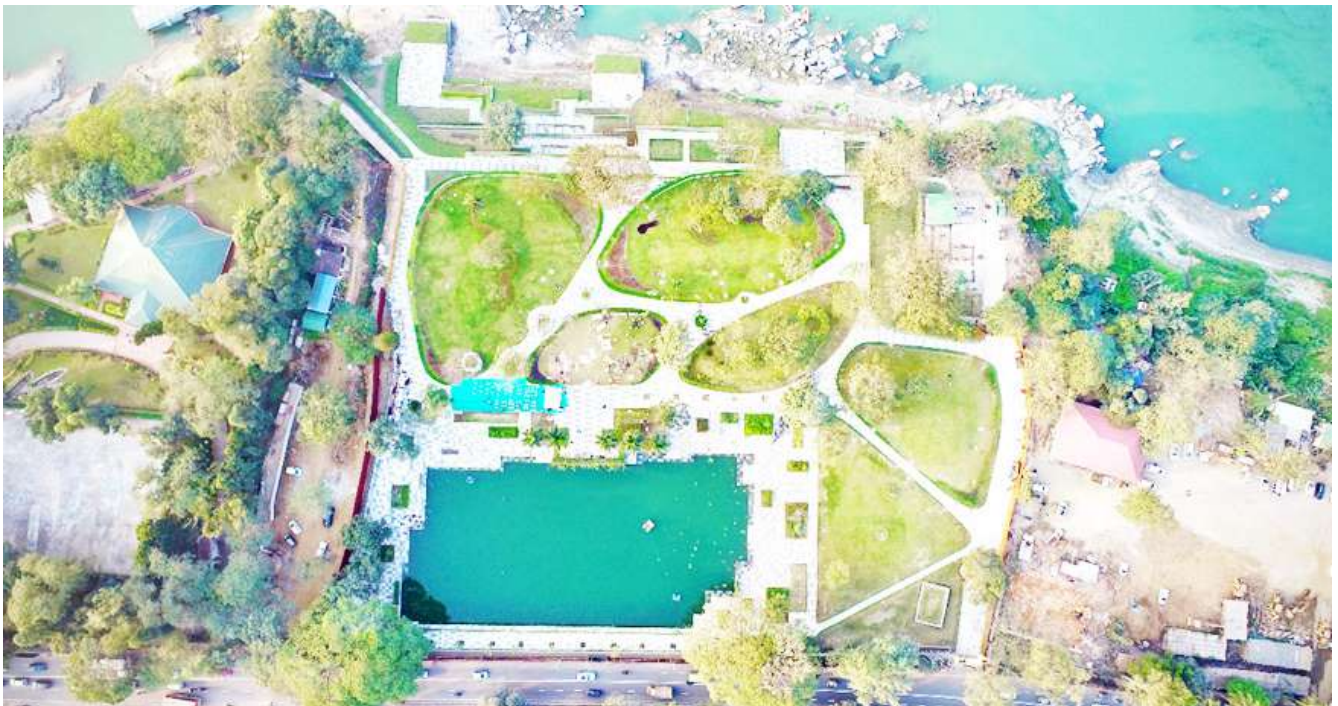
smaller waterbodies. A prime example is the Upflow Anaerobic Sludge Blanket (UASB)-based plant at Borsola Beel (₹5.50 crore), designed to efficiently treat wastewater while minimizing energy use. Similarly, Sarusola Beel is undergoing bioremediation (₹1.49 crore), using natural processes to purify contaminated water.

Beautification and Community Spaces

Beyond pollution control, GMDA is enhancing the city's waterbodies as public amenities. The ongoing rejuvenation and beautification of Gauhati University Pond (₹4.82 crore) will transform it into a scenic spot while ensuring ecological sustainability.

A Sustainable Vision for Guwahati's Future

These interconnected initiatives reflect GMDA's integrated approach to waterbody conservation – combining restoration, technology, and community engagement. By addressing both large wetlands and smaller urban ponds, the authority aims to create a healthier, flood-resilient, and aesthetically vibrant Guwahati.



Buzz from the ULBs

Nagaon's Green Revolution: Turning Trash into Treasure Through Community Action



Nagaon, a vibrant town in Assam, has emerged as a beacon of cleanliness and sustainable waste management under the **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Urban**. Spearheaded by the **Solid Waste Management Service (SWMS)**, the town has harnessed the power of **Information, Education, and Communication (IEC)** activities to transform public behavior, foster community participation, and create a cleaner, greener environment.

Awareness: The Catalyst for Change

The SWMS team has implemented a series of innovative awareness programs, including:

- ◉ **Community meetings and rallies** to educate residents on proper waste disposal.
- ◉ **School campaigns** to instill eco-consciousness in young minds, including demonstrations of the three-bin segregation system.
- ◉ **Wall paintings** across the city, turning public spaces into visual reminders of the importance of waste segregation.

These efforts have not only raised awareness but also inspired collective action, making sustainability a shared responsibility.

Jan Bhagidari: Community at the Heart of Cleanliness

Nagaon's success lies in its **people-powered initiatives**:

- ◉ **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** have led the **Swachh Poduli Swachh Sahar** campaign, driving neighborhood cleanliness drives.
- ◉ Schools, colleges, and local organizations have joined hands to amplify the message of waste reduction.
- ◉ **Monthly ward rankings** by the municipal board have fostered healthy competition, motivating residents to maintain cleaner streets and adopt sustainable practices.

Innovative Waste Management: From Eyesores to Assets

One of Nagaon's standout achievements is its **"Trash into Treasure"** initiative, where:

- ◉ **Garbage Vulnerable Points (GVPs)** have been transformed into aesthetically pleasing spaces.
- ◉ **Yellow spots** (illegal dumping areas) have been revitalized, enhancing the town's beauty.
- ◉ **Plastic-free rallies** have encouraged citizens to ditch single-use plastics for eco-friendly alternatives.

Impact: A Cleaner, Greener Nagaon

The collaboration between the **Nagaon Municipal Board** and **SWMS** has yielded remarkable results:

- ◉ **Behavioral shifts** toward responsible waste disposal.
- ◉ **Increased public participation** in cleanliness drives.
- ◉ **A visible reduction in litter**, contributing to a healthier urban ecosystem.

Nagaon's journey proves that **sustainability starts with awareness and thrives on community action**. By turning challenges into opportunities, the town is paving the way for a cleaner, more sustainable future—one where trash truly becomes treasure.



Yellow Spot transformation in Panigaon



Transformed GVP on R.K.B Road, Christianpatty.



Wall paintings at Marwari Hindi High School promoting segregation



Three-bin system demonstration at a local school



Community meetings driving waste management awareness.

Voices from the First Mile

A Celebration of Artistry and Empowerment: USHAKIRON SHG Shines at National Stage

In the heart of Assam's historic Sivasagar district, a remarkable story of creativity and resilience unfolded. USHAKIRON SHG, a dynamic collective of women artisans from Ward No-11, earned the prestigious opportunity to showcase their exquisite handicrafts at the DAY-NULM Winter Annuals 2025 in Amrit Udyan, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. This distinguished recognition not only honored their exceptional craftsmanship but also highlighted the transformative power of community-driven enterprise.

For nearly four years, these skilled artisans had been weaving magic with jute, bamboo, wood, and water hyacinth, creating everything from elegant home decor to traditional Assamese attire. Their journey from a small self-help group to a thriving livelihood

initiative with an annual turnover of ₹6-7 lakhs stood as a testament to perseverance, innovation, and the enduring spirit of Assam's artisan heritage.

As they presented their work on one of India's most revered platforms, their story inspired countless others, proving that when tradition met opportunity, extraordinary possibilities emerged. This moment was not just a milestone for USHAKIRON SHG, but a proud chapter for Assam's rich legacy of handicrafts and women-led entrepreneurship.

The nation witnessed the splendor of their creations, and the world saw the beauty born from their hands, hearts and unwavering dedication. Their participation left an indelible mark, celebrating both their achievements and Assam's vibrant cultural legacy.



Ushakiron SHG members with their displayed products



Products made by Ushakiron SHG



Envisioning Urban – India and Beyond

Mumbai's Water Metro Set to Ease Commute with New Routes

Mumbai's coastal travel is getting a boost as the city prepares to launch new water metro routes, connecting key locations like Nariman Point, Borivali, and Thane. Aimed at decongesting roads and reducing travel time, these ferry services will complement the existing public transport network.

Operated by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), the project includes modern, eco-friendly vessels with amenities like Wi-Fi and GPS tracking. The first phase is expected to begin operations by mid-2025, with fares kept affordable to encourage public uptake.

This initiative aligns with the city's broader plan to enhance sustainable mobility and ease traffic pressures. If successful, it could pave the way for expanded water transit networks across the region.

Read full article:



Barcelona's Superblocks: Reclaiming Streets for People

The Concept

Barcelona's pioneering Superblocks (Superilles) initiative reimagines urban spaces by restricting

vehicle traffic in designated zones, transforming streets into pedestrian-friendly hubs. The goal? Cleaner air, safer public spaces, and a stronger sense of community.

How it Works

- ◉ 9-block clusters become low-traffic zones, with cars rerouted to perimeter roads.
- ◉ Freed-up space is repurposed for walking, cycling, playgrounds, and green areas.
- ◉ Local businesses thrive as foot traffic increases.

Impact & Challenges

- ◉ 60%+ drop in air pollution in some areas
- ◉ Noise reduction and more social interactions
- ◉ Initial resistance from drivers and businesses (later mitigated through engagement).

Lessons for Indian Cities

- ◉ Cities like Guwahati can place mini-superblocks in and create car-free zones in crowded markets/residential areas (Fancy Bazaar, Ganeshguri) to reduce congestion and pollution. Pertinent to note that phased implementation and public awareness are key to success.



Superblocks can transform the urban landscape. They create more welcoming and inviting spaces that are more pedestrian-friendly and less car-dependent

URBAN LEXICON

Emerging Terminologies shaping Urban life

This month, in this section we decode the Census of India’s framework for classifying urban areas, a key tool for governance, planning, and service delivery.

Urban areas in India are categorized into distinct administrative units based on population, economic activity, and infrastructure. Here’s a quick breakdown:

1. Statutory Towns

- ◉ Legally recognized urban units (e.g., Municipalities, Corporations, Cantonments).
- ◉ Criteria:
 - Minimum population of 5,000*.
 - ≥75% of male workers in non-agricultural jobs.
 - Population density of ≥400 persons/sq. km.

2. Census Towns

- ◉ Villages meeting urban thresholds:
 - Population ≥4,000 (as per 2001 Census).
 - Density ≥400 persons/sq. km.

- ≥75% male workers in non-farming roles.

3. Cities

- ◉ Towns with a population of 1,00,000 or more.

4. Urban Agglomeration (UA)

- ◉ A continuous urban spread combining a statutory town and its adjoining outgrowths (OGs), or multiple contiguous towns.
- ◉ Minimum UA population: 20,000 (2001 Census).
- ◉ Examples: Greater Mumbai UA, Delhi UA.

5. Outgrowth (OG)

- ◉ Semi-urban units near statutory towns (e.g., university campuses, military camps) with urban amenities (roads, drainage, schools) and physical contiguity.

Note: For Census Towns, 2001 data was used as the baseline for classification.

This framework helps planners and policymakers address urban development needs effectively.

Number of UAs/Towns and OGs in India

	Type of Urban Units	2011 Census	2001 Census
1.	Towns:	7,935	5,161
	(a) Statutory Towns	4,041	3,799
	(b) Census Towns	3,894	1,362
2.	Urban Agglomerations	475	384
3.	Out Growths (OGs)	981	953

(Source: Census of India)

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



Prashanti Bhattacharyya

Executive Officer, Bongaigaon Municipal Board

Special May Day feature

Doorstep Delivery of Public Service: Empowering Women and Upholding Dignity

The author is the Executive Officer of the Bongaigaon Municipal Board. She is a visionary leader with a Master's in Geography and an unwavering passion for public service. Her journey in the Assam Urban Administrative Service has been marked by transformative governance and innovative solutions. Driven by curiosity, she thrives on exploring new places, learning constantly, and unraveling complex challenges to craft sustainable development strategies. Over the past year, her relentless dedication has reshaped municipal administration, leaving a lasting impact on urban progress.

In the quiet corners of Bongaigaon, a remarkable change is taking shape one that bridges the fight for women's empowerment with the struggle to restore dignity for sanitation workers (Safai Karmacharis). Sparked by a resident's insensitive remarks about garbage collectors, this movement has since evolved into a powerful, community-driven initiative, uplifting lives and redefining social respect.

A Spark of Change

The journey began when a resident's words, "We sprinkle holy water when the garbage collector comes..." prompted the Bongaigaon Municipal Board to reflect on the deep-seated stigma faced by sanitation workers. Determined to address this, the Board along with Executive Officer embarked on a mission to protect the dignity of Safai Karmacharis while improving public services.

Dignity in Action

The first step was equipping sanitation workers with proper safety gear and redefining their roles to focus

solely on garbage collection from designated bins. This small but significant change reduced direct interactions that often led to humiliation. Beyond this, the Board raised salaries, introduced regular health check-ups, and offered loans for personal needs. Damaged houses were repaired promptly, and plans for a dedicated housing colony are underway—all to ensure a dignified livelihood for these essential workers.

The Power of Self-Help Groups

The Board's masterstroke was engaging Self-Help Groups (SHGs), predominantly women, to bridge the gap between the public and sanitation workers. These women spread awareness about the critical role of garbage collectors, fostering empathy and respect. Their efforts bore fruit: user fee collections surged from ₹10.85 lakh in 2023-24 to ₹16.22 lakh in just eight months.

SHG members also identified and transformed neglected areas into picturesque municipal parks, now bustling with life. These spaces have become hubs for community bonding, proving that cleanliness and beauty go hand in hand.

Beyond Sanitation: A Ripple Effect

The initiative's success spilled over into other domains. SHG members were trained to collect property taxes, boosting municipal revenue. The adoption of an accrual-based double accounting system brought financial transparency and efficiency. Meanwhile, the Board's focus on providing tap water and promptly addressing pipe leaks further strengthened public trust.

A Vision for the Future

Bongaigaon's story is one of collective responsibility and empowerment. Through murals and slogans like "**Amar Bongaigaon, Amar Daiytto, Swachhata-e-Dharma**" (Our Bongaigaon, Our Responsibility, Cleanliness is Our Duty), the Board has ingrained the ethos of Swachh Bharat Mission into the community's conscience.

Women's empowerment lies at the core of this transformation. By fostering financial independence

and dismantling societal barriers, Bongaigaon is paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future.

As we celebrate these milestones, we are reminded that change begins with empathy and that every small step can lead to a brighter, cleaner and more inclusive tomorrow.

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



Health check-ups for Safair Karmacharis under the aegis of Bongaigaon Municipal Board



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

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