

Ease of Living

Ease of living continues to be one of the key focus areas for India. Across the rural and urban populace, ease of living essentially refers to (a) infrastructure connectivity to / from the village or city; (b) availability of basic amenities like electricity, water, sanitation etc. at the household level; (c) ability of the citizen to avail Government services remotely with the need for physical interactions being reduced to a bare minimum and (d) availability of adequate livelihood opportunities. While the Government has occasionally distinguished between ease of living and ease of doing business (in case of farmers for example), it has more or less continued to focus on the issues outlined above in a comprehensive manner.

Accordingly, for Grameen Bharat or Rural India, the focus on schemes and initiatives like PMAY (Rural) for housing, Ujjwala for LPG connections, Saubhagya for electricity connections, Swachh Bharat for sanitation & waste management etc. continues. **A notable addition in Budget 2019-20 has been the Har Ghar Jal component under the Jal Jivan Mission, which aims to provide piped water to all households by 2024. Interestingly, given the emerging concerns around conservation and recycling of water, this scheme would be under the jurisdiction of the newly set up Jal Shakti Mantralaya and would adopt a holistic approach for managing both demand and supply of water including rain water harvesting, ground water recharge and recycling household water for use in irrigation etc.**

The Government also announced the PM Gram Sadak Yojana – III for upgrading another 125,000 Km of roads for improving physical connectivity at the village level, while announcing its intent to fast track the Bharat Net project for providing broadband connectivity at the Panchayat level by leveraging Universal Service Obligation (USO) funds as well as new models of public private partnership. Coming to the final aspect of sustainable livelihood opportunities, the Budget reflects the Government's continued focus on doubling farmers' income, since agriculture continues to be the mainstay of the rural economy. As expected, it has set the goal of setting up another 10,000 farmer producer organizations (FPOs) across the country for economies of scale, streamlining farm to market linkages by bring farmers / FPOs on to the NAM platform. **Two notable additions include (a) the PM Matsya Sampada Yojana for improving productivity in the fisheries sector and (b) setting up 100 additional clusters focused on traditional sectors like bamboo, honey, khadi etc. under the SFURTI scheme and another 100 business incubators under a redesigned ASPIRE scheme, both of which are targeted at redeployment of surplus manpower to non-farm based occupations.**

When it comes to Shahree Bharat or Urban India, the focus continues to be on existing schemes like PMAY (Urban) for housing, Swachh Bharat for sanitation, AMRUT etc. **However, if we look at the current design of urban development schemes, schemes like Swachh Bharat, PMAY (Urban) which are targeted at sanitation, cleanliness, housing etc. are available to all 4000+ cities across the country, whereas AMRUT which has water supply, e-Governance etc. as its key focus areas is limited to 500 cities. Finally we have the Smart Cities Mission, which is focused on using state-of-art technology for citizen services, targeted at the top 100 cities. With digital connectivity and the spirit of "Maximum Government, minimum Governance" being one of the cornerstones of Ease of Living, it remains to be seen how these two schemes are redesigned so that they are available for supporting a larger number of cities, given their limited budgetary outlays. The other scheme which is likely to be critical for achieving Ease of Living for Shahree Bharat is the National Urban Livelihood Mission.**