

Smart City Research and Citizen Perspective Study, Pune (2019–2020)

MASHAL implemented a comprehensive research study on the Smart City Mission in Pune to assess its progress on the ground and understand the perspectives of citizens regarding the initiative. In line with MASHAL's pro-poor and inclusive development approach, the study adopted a holistic, collaborative, and people-centric methodology to evaluate the impact of the Smart City Mission and encourage citizen participation in urban development processes.

The research sought to engage a wide range of stakeholders across the city and document diverse viewpoints on the Smart City initiative. Through a mixed-method research framework, MASHAL incorporated innovative and participatory approaches, including artistic performances, transect walks, semi-structured interviews, stakeholder consultations, and questionnaires.

Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To explore the level of public awareness regarding various projects being implemented under the Smart City Mission and promote greater awareness wherever possible.
- To provide a platform for diverse citizen groups to express their perspectives, including alternative and critical narratives related to the Smart City agenda.
- To contribute to ongoing city-level planning and implementation processes by presenting citizen-led recommendations for more inclusive and participatory urban development practices.
- To analyse the themes, principles, and parameters of the Smart City discourse, including the original Pune Smart City Proposal, and compare them with citizens' experiences and implementation realities.
- To assess the implementation of Smart City projects from the perspective of citizens, particularly in relation to sustainability, inclusivity, accessibility, and efficiency.

Research Methodology

MASHAL designed and implemented a primary research methodology that connected broader Smart City Mission objectives with the lived experiences of various stakeholder groups. The study utilized multiple research tools, including:

- Online questionnaires to understand public awareness, engagement, and experiences related to Smart City projects in Pune.
- Semi-structured interviews and discussions with key stakeholders, including decision-makers, policy experts, government representatives, and individuals involved in mission implementation.
- Artistic workshops and performances with marginalized communities, particularly those with limited access to information and communication technology (ICT)-based services.
- Transect walks conducted within the Area-Based Development (ABD) locations of Aundh, Baner, and Balewadi to observe and document on-ground implementation and community perceptions.

Partnerships and Collaborative Engagement

Recognizing that Smart City development is a shared national agenda, MASHAL actively collaborated with institutions, researchers, civil society organizations, and urban development practitioners working on Smart City initiatives across India. The organization also participated in a Maharashtra-wide coalition focused on monitoring and evaluating the progress of the Smart City Mission within the state.

Through these partnerships, MASHAL facilitated knowledge exchange, shared research findings, and contributed to broader discussions on inclusive urban governance. The collaborative approach enabled the organization to draw lessons from other cities while ensuring that the findings from Pune reached a wider audience and informed future policy and planning processes.

Key Outcome

The findings and recommendations from the study were compiled into a comprehensive Smart City Report, which was officially released on 30 December 2019. The report provided valuable insights into citizens' experiences, highlighted gaps and opportunities within the Smart City Mission, and offered recommendations for making urban development more inclusive, participatory, and responsive to the needs of all sections of society.

Through this initiative, MASHAL demonstrated its commitment to citizen-centric urban governance, participatory planning, and evidence-based advocacy for equitable and sustainable city development.