

PARTICIPATORY EVOLUTION OF CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGIES OF INDIAN METROPOLISES

Report on Workshop on Urban Infrastructure in a Changing Climate



Environment Support Group

supported by the Commonwealth Foundation



The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation established by Heads of Government in support of the belief that the Commonwealth is as much an association of peoples as it is of governments. It is the Commonwealth agency for civil society; a unique, stand-alone organisation established by, funded by, and reporting to governments. The Foundation is dedicated to strengthening people's participation in all aspects of public dialogue, to act together and learn from each other to build democratic societies.

ESG conducted a one day workshop on the current trends and attitude towards urban infrastructure, planning and mega projects and its impact on climate change. This workshop was scheduled on the 20th January 2024 at the ESG office. To explore the current attitude of stakeholders and city planners towards urban infrastructure, the film 'Our Metropolis' by Gautam Sondhi and Usha Rao was screened. The film highlighted the persisting lack and importance of community involvement and public participation in sanctioning mega projects such as the Bengaluru Metro Rail project. The film then followed a discussion by the participants on interesting questions such as what really constitutes 'public interest' and are aspects of climate change and its implications factored in during such sanctions. The film also showed how due to the large number of parastatal agencies, the role of judgements by Courts become difficult to implement and enforce. In this context, ESG mentioned their efforts in enhancing transparency and public involvement by discussing the Public Interest litigation initiated by them along with Hasiru Usiru to question the arbitrary road widening and cutting of trees in the city of Bengaluru.



The participants of the discussion invoked a lot of interesting and relevant points as to understanding the concept and meaning of 'public spaces', whether the metro rail project really is a 'public space' while talking about accessibility of such transport. For instance, the difficulty of transgenders to use the metro was mentioned as their mere presence was presumed to be solicitation of business by the police. Usha, who has conducted an extensive study on the accessibility of public spaces, stated that

such projects which lacked inclusivity were not really servicing the population of the city, but just building the city and that there was a substantial difference between the two.



Another matter that gained all of their attention was how the film showed the power and impact of activism especially during the first phase of the Metro project and how that sense of activism and public involvement has subsided in recent times. The reason for the same was commonly suspected to be the attitude of the judiciary, administration as well as the public wherein 'what's happened has happened' and that it is too late to act on it or reverse the process.



The next segment of the workshop was held post lunch, wherein Mr. Ebenizer, a member of the All Saints Church in Bengaluru, shared his story of how a negotiation with the investors of the Metro Rail project led to the protection and preservation of the church which housed culturally and scientifically significant biodiversity. He mentioned how an out of court settlement, i.e, an arbitration mode of dispute settlement was used to retrieve the allocated land. An important point to note was how the investors were assured that ample public consultation would be held before sanctioning the project, where in reality, none was held.

The workshop concluded with participants sharing their opinions, outcomes and feedback of the session and how they could contribute to the movement against arbitrary and unscientific city planning in the midst of an evident climate crisis.