

**“Ward Committee Roles and Responsibilities for a Greener, Cleaner, Safer,
Water secure and Healthy Bengaluru”**

Organised by

Environment Support Group

To commemorate

International Day for Biodiversity

Workshop Report

May 22nd 2014



For the past few years Bengaluru has been facing multi-dimensional problems of rapid, inconsistent and ungoverned urbanization. Serene green roads have made way for the so called elevated expressways; footpaths of today are reminiscences of once wide promenades, street intersections once identified by eye catchy corner “under the tree shops” are replaced by dumps of garbage escorted by stench stretching beyond street boundaries. To worsen the matters, never ending encroachment of public spaces, civic amenities, lakes, with unconventional building practices only resulted in deficit social cohesion. Thus, the bygone days of humble “Garden city” made way to a satire “world class city” to eventually become “garbage city”.

Lack of governance locally will lead development to chaos. Healthy governance is the crux of a viable community. For sustaining communities, there has to be a pragmatic commitment to participatory governance within civil society as well as government, which in fact has been given legal standing and encouragement through Constitution. At the state level, formal participatory processes in local governance has to be implemented through a hierarchy of developments which

is reflected in an impressive host of laws and policy documents. One such example is the key guarantee of the Karnataka Municipal Corporation Act, 1976 and the Nagarapalika Act, 1992 which is Ward Committees involving local residents headed by the Corporator must become the basic functional unit of civic governance. Ward Committees should function as a key institutional mechanism in bridging people-centered communities and the political and administrative local governance structures of municipalities. They must be enabled with necessary capacity and resources to fulfill their critical role as the “voice” of communities.



The United Nations proclaimed 22nd of May as the International Day of Biodiversity. The basic purpose is to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues and promote progressive public, corporate and government responses to contain loss of biological diversity. In regard to this and to highlight the roles and responsibilities of ward committee members towards sustaining, rejuvenating, replenishing and conserving local biodiversity, Environment Support Group (ESG) held the workshop “Ward Committee Roles and Responsibilities for a Greener, Cleaner, Safer, Water secure and Healthy Bengaluru” on 24th of May, 2014, at the Regional Institute of Cooperative Training in Bangalore which began with a welcome by Leo Saldanha, Co-ordinator, ESG.

Decentralisation and Devolution of Urban Governance

Leo set the tone for the workshop by introducing the many historical layers of various council formations. 1970s saw the birth of city central authorities across India, starting with Delhi Development Authority which was considered to be a prototype for development authorities. In formation of such development authorities one would wonder what happened to municipal councils which essentially was to govern the local city management. Post-independence saw reflections of the British governments “divide and rule” policies in many instances including the fundamental ordinance of the municipal councils becoming a reflection of caste and communalism rather than a platform for public participation and opinions. This is evidently seen in Bengaluru. For example, Basavanagudi was clearly developed for upper caste people despite the earlier inhabitation of people from lower caste. People from lower caste eventually vanished

from Basavangudi and forcibly relocated to Guttahalli. This division was very similar to the times during Colonial rule, when Indians were not allowed to live in Cantonment area, and could only live in the present day Shivajinagar.



Leo continued an interesting discussion about the 1976 Municipal Corporation Act, which in fact has very few modifications from the pre-independence Municipal Council Act. He mentioned that Municipal Council Act functioned and catered better than the Municipal Corporation Act. He gave an example as to how it was mandatory to put up “public notices” regarding urban developments or propositions such as road widening way back in 1920s and 1930s. That was the time when council and public both were accounted for. Even though this was efficiently carried to the 1976 Municipal Council Act, such interaction with public and common man was never implemented. Further, with organizations like Bangalore Development Authority being established, Municipal Corporation lost its significance of envisioning cities. Moreover, cities became reminiscent of the British rule with their policies being blindly adopted without understanding the complexity of an urban Indian city.

Leo also spoke about the lack of amalgamation of the urban poor with the rich since the beginning of the development boards. He said even though, the poor constitute for a great percentage of populations, provisions have never been made for planning for the poor in terms of housing, compensation for land acquisitions nor recognizing the simplest needs of the poor. Leo concluded by saying, regardless of the shortcomings that one of various Acts, amendments and policies Ward Committees should function for the welfare of people by providing an unbiased stage for discussion.

Roles and Responsibilities of Ward Committees: Bhargavi S.Rao

Bhargavi S. Rao, Education Co-ordinator, ESG followed the conversation of Decentralisation and Devolution of Urban Governance by giving a well narrated presentation of Roles and Responsibilities of Ward Committees. She spoke about how ward committees should play a role

in dialogue between people and government by creating a unique interactive platform. She insisted active public involvement in planning process and ward projects with ward committees can result in effective decision making from government.



Bhargavi briefly discussed the most important provisions for the Functions of the Ward committee as per the Karnataka Municipality Act, 1976. According to the Act, ward committees consist of ten individuals plus the ward councillor who must be the chairperson of the committee. Comprehensive topics such as Ward Development Scheme to ensure allocation of funds, proper utilization of these funds, supervision of programmes and projects thus implemented was made aware to the audience. Ensuring provision and maintenance of public water supply, sewerage system, solid waste, sanitation, green spaces, parks, pedestrian friendly streets, and rain water harvesting were mentioned.



Bhargavi also elaborated on the roles and responsibilities as a ward committee member. She insisted the needs for regular interaction between ward members and people to identify problems of the public, advising the councillor with grievances and complaints, to be an active leader and participant and socially responsible in interest of respective wards. For the benefit of audience, several ideas were put forth under the main functions of the Ward Committees. Successful municipality operations at a small-scale in Punjab and Kerala were illustrated. Bhargavi also briefed upon developing a ward profile, thus initiating a ward vision plan and an annual action plan for wards with involvement from local public and educational institutions.

Overview of Relevant Urban Policies: Shashikala Iyer

Shashikala Iyer, Outreach Co-ordinator ESG spoke about various urban policies which if implemented in wards can help create constructive planning for effective strategies and

functioning of various urban scenarios at ward level. Some of the policies discussed during this presentation were National Environment Policy (2006), National Urban Transport Policy (2006), National Water Policy (2012), National Forest Policy (1988), National Policy on Urban Street Vendors (2009), National Urban Housing & Habitat Policy (2007), and Urban Development Policy of Karnataka (2009).



Under National Environment Policy (2006), Shashikala discussed the importance of conservation of critical resources, livelihood security for poor; necessitating decentralization of power to local authorities. At ward levels, encouraging rain water harvesting and artificial recharge in urban areas, promoting initiatives of local bodies for segregation, recycling & reuse of Municipal Solid Waste. This was followed by National Urban Transport Policy (2006) which stresses upon equitable allocation of road space, prioritizes use of public and non-motorized transport, mandatory high parking fee enforcement to discourage private vehicle use in inner city, inflation of travel increases difficulty for poor people, suggests people centric and not vehicle centric cities and lastly promotes carbon neutral travel to contain pollution.

National Water Policy (2012) addresses concerns of rapid urbanization and mismanagement of water resources leading to water stress, reminding that unequal spread of water access is an impending disaster. It also warns against ground water exploitation and its inequitable access, along with about adverse consequences of encroachment of natural water bodies and drainage channels, encouraging prudent use of water, particularly use of water, particularly in urban and industrial scenarios. At a regional level thus resulting in an increase interstate, interregional water disputes. Problematically promotes water as a commodity and also privatisation of its distribution. National Forest Policy (1988) promotes planting of trees along roads, railway lines, rivers, streams and canals; appropriate regulations needed to govern felling of trees even in private land; and thus promotes forests and trees as national asset.

National Policy on Urban Street Vendors (2009) acknowledges the right to practice any profession, occupation, trade or business as a Fundamental Right. It also promotes setting up Town Vending Committee for planning, organisation & regulation of street vending activities. It clearly rejects move to limit number of street vendors. And socially encourages vendor markets in every city. This policy requires City Master Plan to have specific requirements for vending markets during finalization/revision of Master Plan. Hence democratic Urban Governance can be promoted through elected ward committees with provisions for grievance cell, involving local communities in budgeting, demarcation of vending zones and incorporating provision of civic amenities for vendors.

National Urban Housing & Habitat Policy (2007) mentions affordable housing for all with emphasis on vulnerable sections, regional planning with decentralization approach, preparation of District Plan by District Planning Committee, promotes role of Government as facilitator and regulator and symbiotic development of rural and urban areas. It also acknowledges that there is substantive gap between demand & supply of basic services. The policy promotes development of medium and small towns and also encourages urban local bodies to update Master plan periodically. Housing and basic services for urban poor should be top priority.

Urban Development Policy of Karnataka (2009) importantly recognizes various challenges such as disparities in spatial distribution of land across classes is a problem, historical neglect of welfare of urban poor, serious shortfall in social and urban infrastructure and deficit in basic services such as water, sanitation, hospitals, etc. The policy proposes Proposed Interventions higher financial allocations for urban areas. It mentions urban employment assistance, especially for the poor, urges establishment of Metropolitan Planning Committees for Bangalore & District Planning Committees in other districts, by abolishing Urban Development Authorities (Eg. BDA, BMRDA, BMICAPA, etc.)



During an intense question and answer session a variety of topics ranging from road widening to waste accumulation, lake encroachment to policy implementations. In regard to the discussion of current resources and strengths, it was noted that the contestation around some issues within the body of knowledge about the Roles and Responsibilities of

Ward committee members. Lake encroachment in both urban and rural scenarios; development on lakes including large scale real estate, ward committee constitution, lack of accountability, untimely road widening and lack of pedestrian crossing facilities, issues with and of street vendors, lack of public involvement/consultation with respect to drafting laws and rules and importantly ward committee budget allocation were some of the issues raised yesterday.



They also expressed their apprehension about lack of information and powers provided to them by governing bodies. Workshop participants noted the importance of consistent and ongoing problems of lack of coordination amongst the ward members. Regular interaction is an important means of advocacy. They also agreed that it is important to collaborate and share resources to achieve

best planning strategies.

Ideas towards developing a ward vision plan

Integrating Street vendors in ward vision planning: Vinay Sreenivasa, ALF

Vinay Sreenivasa, Alternate Law Forum (ALF), who is currently working towards the protection of street vendors rights spoke about integrating street vendors in the Ward Vision Plan. He highlighted the problems of street vendors and also explained how these problems are also related to pedestrians and cyclists. These problems include lack of tree shade because of the increasing trend in tree cutting, lack of footpaths, hazards of crossing a road and ever increasing rates of public transport. There are about 2 lakhs street vendors and about 60 malls in the city,

The Street vendors cater to the needs of more than 60% of the city because not everyone can afford to shop in malls and supermarkets.



To work through these situations include remedies like setting up Town Vending Committees under the street Vendors Protecting Provision Act at each ward level and this will include about 60% of street vendors where they can establish their businesses according to the Act. In response to the troubles of the pedestrian's, solutions like Pelican crossing- traffic signals which allow the pedestrians to cross the road. According to Vinay, there are wards where this has been worked out and the traffic police are ready to be of assistance if a request is made. Each ward can also have a grievance redressal meeting with the BMTC on request, to discuss problems regarding bus connectivity, etc in the respective ward. He concluded with the importance of having good footpaths and public transport which is as essential to the city as the smooth circulation of blood in our body.

Revisioning our wards : Brinda Sastry, Vijay Narnapatti, Akshatha Venkatesha



Brinda Sastry, Urban Planner gave an overview of conducting public participation in local ward committees by providing a comprehensive example which was undertaken in Goa. She spoke about the importance of understanding the concept of neighborhood through various aspects such as legal mandates, issues and concerns, opportunities and assets. This process would involve elaborate process of data collection-qualitative and quantitative, documenting information etc. She also explained the process of recording factors of change such as the trends of urban growth and decay, accompanied by several influencing forces of economic, social, demographics, environmental characteristics etc. Further, based on the context either an idealistic or a realistic vision is can be constructed.



Along the same line, Vijay Narnapatti, Architect spoke about road widening issues in Bangalore. He mentioned that vehicular traffic is supposedly growing at 8% per year for which it would be absurd to widen roads by the same amount as a response. He said many urban challenges such as road widening, construction of flyovers and expressways, tree felling are interlinked which require investigations that reveal an uncommon ground beyond statistics and open out possibilities for restructuring public space, both physical as well as social. Master plans should be used as tools, and stressed on the fact that short term solutions such as underpasses, flyovers and road widening cannot address such challenges at a micro-level as they are about governance and control, rather than exploration and imagination. Vijay also questioned the need for road widening, when in fact, what Bengaluru needs is plans for decongestion and not more asphalt when vehicular traffic is already overcrowding. He spoke about Hasiru Usiru's alternative proposal for Sheshadri Road, which involved effective utilization of then existing road width, incorporating footpaths, street vendor plazas, cycle lane, bus stop without a need for uprooting a single tree. This proposal was however overlooked; road widening took place as initial plans resulting in mass tree felling and wider roads holding more vehicular traffic with ever increasing traffic jams. He concluded saying that solutions fail to engage with the complexity inherent in the dynamics of the city particularly in the public spaces that include our streets and commons- such as the tanks, parks, nullahs and residual open spaces.

Akshatha Venkatesha, ESG, presented a case study of Manila, Philippines which has demographics identical to Bengaluru. Manila has no separate storm water and sewerage systems. Wastewater from septic systems freely mixes with the storm water. The installation and maintenance of drainage systems (along with roads and water systems), is a one of the major initiatives undertaken by local wards along with several NGOs. Bioremediation was aggressively used to restore lost biodiversity. This resulted in resettlement of shanty towns in Pasig River and rehabilitation of environmental management with waste-water management and urban renewal. She proposed a similar bioremediation for storm water drains in Bengaluru which was

represented by photo-simulations. Bioremediation according to the EPA, bioremediation is a “treatment that uses naturally occurring organisms to break down hazardous substances into less toxic or non-toxic substances”. Since it can occur naturally, it is highly cost effective.

Akshatha said due to the size and density of population in Bengaluru, the stresses inherent in developing urban life are magnified. Urban environmental issues are exacerbated by rapid economic growth and mass migration into this city. Thus, it is essential for transformation of a city's attitude from one of negative hopelessness to one of pride and hope, developing a model for urban improvement based on the equal rights of all people to transportation, education, and public spaces. Public efforts has to be made in marginal neighborhoods through citizen involvement; the vision of the city center's renovation has to be based on the prospect that the center has to consolidate as the most important historical, cultural, touristic, residential, administrative, and commercial space and thus urban spaces should be designed for people and not traffic. She also proposed streets to be designed and developed into safe, walkable and enjoyable public places, where it aims to provide a free flowing movement network to include hawkers, vendors, cyclists, auto rickshaws, cars and buses. A photo-simulation of Brigade Road was presented as a part of street design proposal for pedestrians and cyclists without vehicular traffic. She concluded by proposing an increase in comfort for current walking population, reduction in dependency on the car thus lesser congestion and pollution, prioritization of public transport and non-motorized private modes in street design and most importantly equity in the provision of comfortable public spaces and amenities to all sections of society for a better and healthier Bengaluru.

Possibilities of Rain water harvesting in every ward: Shivakumar S

Shivakumar S, Senior Fellow, KSCST, made a very interesting presentation on Rain water harvesting. He started by discussing the ground water saturation in urban Bengaluru and the dire consequences of this. Thus to ensure sustainability, there is a need for applying innovative technologies for water sources management. Rain Water Harvesting is one of the most effective, cost saving, indigenous methods to secure water. With water harvesting one can understand the value of rain, and to make optimum use of rainwater at the place where it falls.



He insisted every ward can harvest rainwater effectively by planning construction of house, modification of house, existing house, in schools, hospitals, hotels, shopping malls etc from rooftops. Public parks, playgrounds, civic amenities etc in the local wards can be designed to incorporate rain water harvesting.

Rainwater can be stored direct use in above ground, in sumps, overhead tanks and used directly for flushing, gardening, washing etc. For ground water recharge rainwater can also be recharged to ground through recharge pits, dug wells, bore wells. Shivakumar also suggested in an area of 2,400 Sq.ft. or 223 Sq.mt. (40 ft. X 60 ft. site) around 2,23,000 liters of rainwater can be harvested. He further said that rainwater harvesting is no longer an option but a need considering water is becoming scarce, it is the need of the day to attain self-sufficiency to fulfill the water needs; urban water supply system is under tremendous pressure for supplying water to ever increasing population, groundwater is getting depleted and polluted, soil erosion is resulting from the unchecked runoff and most importantly health hazards due to consumption of polluted water. He did conclude with a very optimistic note of rainwater harvesting just by taking a few initiatives.

Initiatives for Solid Waste Management at Ward Level: Davis George Thomas

Davis Thomas, Research Associate, ESG gave the audience the role of ESG's initiative in Bangalore's Waste Management. He said that the years from 2000 to 2012 witnessed what civil society had been warning about the Waste Management System in Bangalore. In 2012 the people of Mavallipura village, driven to protests and demonstrations due to the apathy of the BBMP and citizens of Bangalore, prompted the KSPCB to shut down one of Bangalore City's largest and most polluting landfills sited in the village; Bangaloreans soon saw their own waste piling up within the city. Soon after, the very same year, Environment Support Group filed a petition (W.P 46523/2012) in the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka which, along with other connected cases, (please find all the orders here <http://www.esgindia.org/education/community-outreach/resources/esgs-initiatives-socially-just-and-ecolo.html>) has produced landmark changes in policy and law that are steadily moving towards creation of a sensible waste management

system and its governance to correct decades of mismanagement of municipal solid waste; cities across the country are beginning to emulate this. As a consequence of these petitions, Karnataka has become the first state in India to make segregation of Municipal Solid Waste at source mandatory, several amendments have been made to the Karnataka Municipal Corporation Act, 1976 to this effect (<http://dpal.kar.nic.in/ao2013/55of2013%28E%29.pdf>) including penalisation of offenders (Section 431, Schedule XIII. For Bulk generators see <http://218.248.45.169/download/swm/publicnotice1.pdf>). The entire governance of the City is now being decentralized with the constitution of 198 Ward Committees, Municipal Solid Waste Management being one of their responsibilities (section 13I (i) http://dpal.kar.nic.in/pdf_files/14%20of%201977%20%28E%29.pdf) the Ward Committee Rules are being reviewed and shall soon come into effect.



Davis continued with an optimistic note about the progressive reforms in waste management where in Ward Committees plays an active role. He said that citizens, through the constitution and functioning of their Ward Committees, now have the power to become a part of and completely alter the governance of the city and its affairs for the better. With respect to municipal waste management, Ward Committees will now be able to determine and enforce the changes that need to be made in their Ward to not only make their Ward waste-free, but also to use this 'waste' as a resource. Segregation at source can now be enforced by Ward Committees and citizens and once waste is segregated into organic, recyclable, hazardous/biodegradable (and others) by every household, apartment complex and other waste generators in the Ward, each of these can be used to generate a variety of resources, the limit being only the residents' and Ward Committees' creativity and will. Organic waste can be composted/vermi-composted at the house/apartment/street level (eg: <http://www.dailydump.org/>) or at composting sites in the Ward. This will not only eliminate 65-70% of Bangalore City's municipal solid waste but also provide excellent manure for terrace/community gardening that can provide cheap, pesticide-free vegetables, fruits and other produce within the Ward/household! Recyclable waste, which constitutes 15-20% of the city's municipal solid waste, can be collected at Dry waste collection centres in the Ward, as directed by the Hon'ble Karnataka High Court, and sent for recycling thus

reducing the need to produce new quantities of the same. Rag-pickers can also be included in this process making the process mutually beneficial. Biomedical waste can be sent into the biomedical waste stream for processing and disposal and the same for e-/hazardous waste.

Davis established by saying that the efficient and creative functioning of Ward Committees will ensure that Bangalore becomes a waste-free city. Production of cheap vegetables, food, reduced consumption and generation of plastics and other recyclables will solve many of the nightmares most cities and its residents face today and secure a healthy future for our children. Awareness about these needs and capabilities needs to be generated among residents of wards.

Collaborations with educational institutions/corporate companies in their Corporate Social Responsibility are some other ways in which we can move forward in this process; the ideas are limitless. The Courts and government have recognised the need to make citizens fully participate in governance, the absence of which has led to disasters, mismanagement, corruption and huge loss of our public money. We as citizens now need to make full use of this change in policy that has been brought about."

The workshop was concluded by Leo ascertaining the importance of ward committees in a city such as Bangalore. He said for effective functioning of cities at a regional scale, there is an absolute need for wards to serve as a platform for open discussion with public. For which Leo appealed to the participants of the meeting to go through the Ward Committee Rules 2014 and send recommendations to the court within two-three days to help in the process of developing an pro-active ward committee rules.

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