

## Minutes of Meeting of NCHSE Environment Helpline held on 12th July 2016

Heavy rains especially on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2016 caused serious misery to the citizens of Bhopal. Media reports highlighted inundation of many parts of the city including areas which were never expected to face such a situation, and loss of lives and property. But the media report about the casual response of the Municipal Commissioner, Bhopal as “BMC has no capacity or infrastructure to handle such a situation and it will fail again if the city receives similar showers again” and its endorsement by honb’le Mayor, was more shocking and painful. In view of the emerging situations, members of the NCHSE Environment Helpline discussed the issues in its urgent meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2016. Participants of the meeting included environmentalists, Architect and Town Planner, social activists, senior journalists, former senior bureaucrats and common citizen. The list of participants is at Annex –I.

Mrs. Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh & Head of NCHSE Environment Helpline while explaining the reasons for convening the meeting said that Bhopal flood was not a natural calamity as reported in some quarters but an entirely avoidable misery to the people caused mainly due to lack of monsoon preparedness by the BMC. She further said that though the city was also flooded due to heavy rains in 1973, no human life was lost because of proper monsoon preparedness and implementation of rescue operation with public participation.

In the meeting, the members reported the flood situations in different parts of the city as seen on the ground, the possible factors for such calamity and discussed the emerging situations as reported in the media on flood situations and human misery. There was unanimous opinion that BMC has the major role and responsibility in this matter. It has not learnt any lessons from the critical situations arising from heavy rainfall of 1973 and 2006 and had even not bothered to work on any recommendations emerging out of the situation of 2006. Members also expressed their concern about the lack of action on the part of authorities to safeguard lives and property of the people of Bhopal, despite the fact that forecast of likely heavy rains was available. **The members felt that it was time for concerted action to make concerned authorities accountable for their duties in this respect, which are not only under government’s executive instructions but also under the law of the land and mandate and directions of the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment pertaining to the responsibilities of urban local bodies.**

In the meeting, members also pointed out following issues:

1. Encroachment and construction on nallahs, non removal of obstacles on nallahs and storm water drains, inadequate disposal of solid waste and dumping it on roads and its going back to the nallahs, wrong building permission, no supervision, no pre-monsoon preparedness and virtually complete failure on the part of BMC to take any planning steps to help citizens in case of even normal rainfall are the major causes and factors of flooding in Bhopal.
2. The situation emerged due to not following laws and rules regarding roads and buildings, drainage, collection and disposal of garbage and removing encroachment which are at the heart of the current crises. The authorities who have violated the rules include BMC, Housing Board, and BDA besides the general public.

3. Actions were completely lacking on the part of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) to carry out their responsibility given to them specially under Section 66 and 67 of the MP Municipal Corporation Act 1956 for providing basic services of drainage system, sanitation, maintenance of sewerage system, construction of road and culverts within city area, drinking water, fire brigade and security of lives and property of citizens.
4. Despite availability of data on topography, drainage, and expected runoff, BMC is not doing enough to manage the liquid waste and run off while granting building permissions.
5. There are several examples of unplanned activities which have become a problem or have potential to create problems in future, which include:-
  - i. Construction behind Ravindra Bhawan which has caused constriction of Banganga Nallah and has potential to create problem in future.
  - ii. Encroachment of Panchsheel Nallah which carries effluent/runoff from the neighbourhood to Shahpura Lake has caused narrowing of the nallah and reduction of its carrying capacity;
  - iii. Raising of height of spill way in Shahpura Lake has become cause of recurring flooding of road connecting 1100 Qtrs. and Manisha Market.
  - iv. Planning and design of Habibganj Railway Bridge as well as that being constructed near Kamla Park are faulty as far as traffic management and safety are concerned.
  - v. Construction of 2.5 km road from Khanugaon to Karbala within the FTL of Upper Lake in clear violation of Lake Conservation plan would encourage encroachment of the lake area and aggravate pollution problem of the lake.
  - vi. Constructions of concrete side walls of Kaliasote irrigation canal and roads along both banks of the canal have blocked the natural drainage and caused flooding in the catchment of the canal.
  - vii. Development of Bag Mugalia without a plan for management of overflow of Hathaikhera dam.
6. BMC is spending a lot of its resources and time on works which can be easily entrusted to other agencies and which are not in the basic duties of the BMC, like BRTS, railway over bridge, metro rail project and which are not within its capacity and take away from its basic duties which no one else can perform. These projects can be entrusted to other specially created bodies. BMC is not the PWD of state government for entrusting mega construction work and their involvement is at the cost of BMC's responsibilities. This critical issue needs to be corrected in the interest of citizens of Bhopal.

Members also suggested the following points for consideration of the state government:

1. Problem areas affected now should be identified and preventive actions taken up sufficiently before the next monsoon to prevent recurrence of this year's crisis. Potential threat points

are identified and regular public preparedness drill be held at least in quarter preceding monsoon with coordination of all actors, notification of escape routes, critical infrastructures, evacuation shelters, emergency services, life line and delivery of relief supplies.

2. Encroachments over drains/nallahs should be removed on priority. Re-sectioning and cleaning of nallahs/drains should be undertaken and cross drainage (above or underground as the case may be) in case of blockage of natural drainage due to construction activities provided much before next monsoon to facilitate their natural flow. In case of encroachment and illegal construction over natural drainage, personnel responsible for granting permission and whoever constructed and sold them e.g. BDA, Housing Board and private builders violating rules be punished. Buffer zone along the nallahs as per provisions in the Bhopal Master Plan where no construction is permissible (e.g. 3 meters, 9 meters and 15 meters from small to big nallahs) should be strictly maintained.
3. BMC staff must inspect all areas in the field regularly to prevent violations in time instead of waking up when these present a crisis and take corrective action. Citizens must be able to see them in the field.
4. Expected surface runoff of a particular area should be assessed for planning new development and grant of building permission. Structures for redirecting flood run off can be planned by seeking views of experts and citizens/local stakeholders to manage and control movement of flood water.
5. Flood map of the city be prepared and database of losses be updated for risk assessment, suitable solutions and future land use planning to cope with the urbanisation and adverse effects of climate change. Formulation of flood proofing strategy to prevent/protect/mitigate the heavy flood with the participation of concerned agencies and other stakeholders.
6. Plan for protection of natural eco systems, natural buffers as well as rejuvenation of water bodies be prepared incorporating eco system based flood reduction measures into engineering solutions and implemented to mitigate the vulnerability to such disasters.
7. BMC should improve its solid waste management capacity and manage it efficiently. Reportedly at present about 2/3rd of solid waste generated in the city is not collected and disposed off, most of which finds its way back to the drains blocking their flow.
8. Effective preparedness for early warning, response, monitoring, follow up and accountability mechanism should be incorporated in the strategy and place it in public domain. Building capacities of BMC for making it inclusive, competent and accountable local body. Assign budget for infrastructure and allocation plan to deal with disasters.
9. Action taken by BMC must be regularly put in public domain for citizens to see and give feedback. Citizens' participation processes for oversight and information dissemination within the BMC should be formalized and coordination among number of agencies working in the area of construction, maintenance of services is ensured.

10. NCHSE Environment Helpline may initiate steps to activate citizen's groups at local level to see the problems in their area and report for timely action. NCHSE Help Line will receive feedback from its volunteers in the field in different parts of Bhopal and send it to concerned authorities and extend full co-operation in the interest of citizen's safety of life and property.
11. The state Government may be requested to consider relieving BMC from the burden of responsibility of implementation of mega projects like, BRTS, Road and Bridge construction, Smart city, Metro Rail projects, etc. and allow them to improve their capacity and efficiency in delivering urban basic services.

It was decided that a letter may be written to the Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh highlighting the above issues and suggestions for consideration of the state government.

Meeting ended with vote of thanks to all.



Coordinator,  
NCHSE Environment Helpline

**Annexure –I**

**List of participants at the meeting held on 12th July 2016**

1. Mrs. Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh & Chairperson, NCHSE, Bhopal
2. Shri L.S. Hardenia, Sr. Journalist, Bhopal
3. Shri Chandra Kant Naidu, Senior Journalist
4. Shri Rajendra Kothari, Social Activist, Bhopal
5. Prof Sabita Raje, SPA, Bhopal
6. Shri Ajai Kataria, Architect
7. Shri A C Chandra, Resident of Bhopal
8. Shri Harish Bhawnani, Marine Engineer
9. Shri Suneel Awasarkar, Architect
10. Dr. Sudesh Waghmare, Forestry Expert
11. Shri T K Das, PWPL, Bhopal
12. Mrs Veenal Sukhwani, Bhopal
13. Ms. Rashmi Saraswat, General Secretary, Mahila Chetna Manch, Bhopal
14. Shri Raghuraj Singh, MCM, Bhopal
15. Shri Neelesh Dubey, MCM
16. Dr Ashok Kumar Gupta, DG, NCHSE
17. Dr. Pradip Nandi, NCHSE, Bhopal