

Minutes of Meeting of NCHSE Environment Helpline held on 14th December 2016

The meeting of Environment Helpline was held on 14th December 2016 to review the outcomes of citizen's action in Bhopal in 2016, discuss the present issues and decide on the next step of action. Participants of the meeting included environmentalists, Architect and Town Planner, Engineers, social activists, senior journalists, former senior bureaucrats, and common citizen. The list of participants is at Annex –I.

Discussion started with the citizen's action during 2016 against the approach for city development adopted by the authorities and the announcements by the Hon'ble Chief Minister favouring demand of the citizens regarding developments under smart city project and the protection of Upper Lake. No response from the state government or BMC to open up dialogue with the citizens despite several initiatives of Environment Helpline extending cooperation and technical support for the environmentally sustainable development of Bhopal was also discussed. Participants felt that government or the BMC has not made any sincere effort to make the city development participatory and the so called consultations pertaining to city development seem to involve only a select group of people, who are neither true representative of the citizens of Bhopal or have proper knowledge of Bhopal. Members demanded that development plan for TT Nagar under the smart city project should be made public to allow the citizens an opportunity to analyse and comment on the plan. Participants felt that there seems to be mistrust between the government and the citizens. Therefore, unless this mistrust is removed, a healthy system of dialogue may not take place.

Mrs Buch observed that state government and/or BMC should develop a procedure of informing the citizens about the city development plan for citizens to react. They may also organise open public consultations for every development plans for the city, where the citizens could give their suggestions.

During the follow up discussion following points emerged:

1. Bhopal Development Plan (BDP) 2005 has lapsed. The draft plan 2015 was rejected by the citizens; consequently it was dropped by the state government. The new plan has not been drafted yet, but various development works, including that of Smart City Project, Cable stay bridge connecting Kamla Park and Retghat, cable stay bridge over Lower Lake connecting Ginnori, beautification works at various locations are in various stages of implementation. There are no prior consultations in true sense regarding these works. Therefore, implementations of all major development works are liable to be challenged legally in absence of an approved BDP.
2. T & CP should incorporate Smart City Project Plans, recommendations of CEPT report, Metro Rail project, etc in the Bhopal Development Plan.
3. State Government is planning metro rail for the city. Experts felt that for the city like Bhopal, which has a population far less than 40 lakhs, the Metro Rail may not be viable.

4. Reasons for failure of BRTS were discussed. It emerged that the dimension of the buses plying at present are not suitable for Bhopal. It was pointed out that BMC took over 4 years to now realise that appropriate buses for Bhopal will be smaller buses.
5. BMC seems to have plans to tap resources from AMRUT, a mission for infrastructure development in select urban areas, for the completion of unfinished works for sewerage, water supply etc. It was pointed out that experience so far shows that BMC despite investing huge sum for bringing Narmada Water to the city through loan from ADB and grant from Central Government under JNNURM have failed to provide drinking water to the citizens of Bhopal. Same is true for sewerage system as well. Facility created under Bhoj Wetland project has not been operationalised allowing inflow of sewage to the upper lake.
6. Concern regarding beautification work along V I P Road at a cost of Rs. 1.68 crores as per media reports was raised. Questions were raised regarding the budget allocation and process of sanctioning such projects, which seems to be prioritised over improving essential services, which falls under the domain of responsibilities of Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC).
7. Heritage Building like Taj Mahal, Sadar Manjil, and Benajeer Palace has been neglected. There should be a proper comprehensive heritage conservation Plan. It was mentioned that a group of senior Architects once submitted a Comprehensive Central Heritage District conservation Plan to the BMC, who has not taken any action so far.
8. Concern over likely mortality of trees due to laying of concrete blocks in the pavements by the BMC was raised. Participants felt the need to prevent the action.
9. It was pointed out that BMC has plans to construct low cost houses for the poor leveraging funds from missions like Smart City, AMRUT, Shelter for all, etc. However, there is no clarity over the location of such developments. Experts present in the meeting opined that the location of such housing schemes should be based on population density of the area.

It was decided to write to CM and CS requesting them to look into the above mentioned issues and issue appropriate instructions to ensure sustainable development of Bhopal and to involve **citizen's consultation and participation** when the plans are conceived to avoid decisions leading to waste and ignoring priority works and taking up so called "beautification" works e.g. proposed work on VIP road which is inappropriate too.

Meeting ended with vote of thanks to all.



Coordinator,
NCHSE Environment Helpline

Annexure –I

List of participants of the meeting held on 14th December 2016

1. Mrs Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh & Chairperson, NCHSE, Bhopal
2. Mrs Anita Das, IAS (Retd),
3. Shri L S Hardenia, Senior Journalist,
4. Shri Chandra Kant Naidu, Senior Journalist
5. Shri N K Singh, Senior Journalist
6. Shri Rajendra Kothari, Social Activist
7. Shri Ajai Kataria, Architect
8. Prof. H. M. Mishra, Sociologist
9. Shri Harish Bhawnani, Engineer & Social Activist
10. Shri Surendra Tiwari, Engineer & Social Activist
11. Shri AC Chandra, IRS (Retd)
12. Shri Shashidhar Kapur, Engineer & Media Expert
13. Shri Suneel Awasarkar, Architect
14. Dr. Sudesh Waghmare, Forestry Expert
15. Ms. Rashmi Saraswat, General Secretary, Mahila Chetna Manch, Bhopal
16. Shri Raghuraj Singh, MCM, Bhopal
17. Shri Kushal Singh, Information Technology Student
18. Dr. Pradip Nandi, Environmentalist, NCHSE, Bhopal
19. Shri Ramesh Chandra, Director, DCIC, NCHSE.
20. Dr D D Banerjee, Director, NCHSE
21. Shri Avinash Shrivastava, Dy Director (Computer expert), NCHSE