

Minutes of Meeting of NCHSE Environment Helpline held on 30th June 2016

The media reports on the celebration of completion of one year of Smart City Mission in Bhopal on 25th June 2016 mentioned issues regarding Government vs Citizens in governance particularly in planning and implementation of Smart City project in the context of citizens voicing concerns which government accepted. In order to discuss the issues involved and to outline process to facilitate dialogue for cooperation of government and citizens particularly proactive information, consultation and to see that gaps and non consultation and opaqueness as noticed in the earlier exercise is not repeated in new locations for smart city in Bhopal, a meeting of NCHSE Environment Helpline was held on 30th June 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.

While welcoming the participants Mrs. Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh & Head of NCHSE Environment Helpline said that the expressions of some concerned officials of the state government as reported in the media alleging the citizens being the hurdle for smart city project implementation is one sided and without any substance. She said that some functionaries seem to be reluctant to understand the importance of fully grown trees, which cannot be replaced just by planting few new saplings and the gestation period of decades for a plant even if survive becomes a tree. She pointed out that there seems to be resistance from the local citizens for the Area Based Development in the new site in TT Nagar also which must be addressed by concerned authorities suitably. She further said that citizens are not against the Smart City Project and would like to cooperate with the government to ensure that project implementation is citizen centric and the outcomes are environmentally sustainable. She further said that we had earlier written to the government extending support for a citizen centric city development agenda. We will continue to make endeavour to extend this support to the concerned authorities. She said that we had invited Principal Secretary, UADD to address today's meeting on how the government would like the citizens to cooperate in future; but he could not make it due to his busy schedule.

Mrs Buch also said that she has written a letter to the Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh extending technical support for the protection of trees at the new Smart City Project site as well. The letter was also read in the meeting. She emphasized that we will continue to extend our support and believe that we will succeed to build trust with the government.

In the meeting the media reports were discussed in details and following conclusions were emerged:

1. It seems that government is not very keen to take views of the citizens. Even on the occasion of celebration of completion of one year of Smart city Mission on 25th June 2016 by the government, the organisers did not invite citizens at the event and allow them to express their views. Therefore, the event turned out to be a one sided affair where the government used the platform to further alienate the citizens from the development agenda.

2. Government should appreciate that the citizens are not against the Bhopal Smart City Project, but have some issues about the manner of its planning and implementation. There is enough scope for proper dialogue to eliminate misunderstanding between the government and the people.
3. There is need for efforts to neutralise the lack of trust on the part of state government. Unless there is trust, it will be difficult to ensure citizens' participation in the development process. We may write to public representatives expressing our cooperation for the implementation of need based development plan for the city.
4. It appears that the attitude of the government towards transparency, ensuring people's participation and addressing environmental issues remains the same in the case of Smart city project at the new site as well. People have no clear idea as to the actual land area and its boundaries for the smart city project in TT Nagar.
5. On media report of award of contract for the survey of the new site in TT Nagar and DPR preparation, it was felt necessary that the consultant should consult people and give due importance to the people's needs while developing DPR. As per the Guidelines of Smart City Mission as well as Manual on Environmental Clearance issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, GoI for development projects like the Area based development in Bhopal, consultation/ peoples hearing is must. Therefore, the development plan should be prepared in consultation with the citizens.
6. Citizens want to cooperate with the government, and government also needs to ensure peoples participation. Main objective should be to ensure development where people's needs and environmental issues are addressed fully to ensure carbon neutral development. Environment Help line may help the government in mapping the trees with their GPS location for developing a demand oriented and carbon neutral smart city plan for the new location.
7. It was pointed out that Supreme Court in its order dated on 29 July, 2015 in the case of Rajendra Shankar Shukla and Others vs. State Of Chhattisgarh and Others etc. regarding validity of Kamal Vihar Township Development Scheme in Chattisgarh has ruled that in the absence of a Zonal plan, a Town Development Scheme cannot be framed. Thus the development plan for Smart city in Bhopal also can't be made without a zonal plan, which also mandates public consultation. This may be brought to attention of concerned authorities.
8. Questions were raised on the launch of Pan City smart solutions by BMC without any announcement for plan for public awareness so as to reach out to the public, especially those who don't use smart phones. It was pointed out that less than 50% of the citizens of Bhopal use smart phones. It was felt that without a proper plan to reach out to all sections of the society, the PAN City initiative may not yield desired result.

9. Smart City Mission provides an opportunity to improve the city wide urban basic services, like clean drinking water and sanitation systems, efficient solid waste management and mass transportation system with last minute connectivity for all.

It was decided that a letter may be written to the Chief Secretary highlighting these aspects and the need and offer of consultation and cooperation as well as with request to issue instructions to the concerned officials to ensure that:-

1. Appropriate steps are taken to address all environmental issues and that the development plans for the smart city in the new location is demand oriented and carbon neutral; and
2. Guidance is given to the consultants entrusted to undertake survey and developing DPR for the new site with clear instructions about area to be taken; trees and features to be protected and to have consultations with local residents where needed through their staff.

Meeting ended with vote of thanks to all.



Pradip Nandi
Coordinator,

NCHSE Environment Helpline

Annexure –I

List of participants at the meeting held on 30th June 2016

1. Mrs. Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh & Chairperson, NCHSE, Bhopal
2. Shri G.S.Shukla, IAS (Retd).
3. Shri A.K. Pandya, IAS (Retd)
4. Mrs. Anita Das, IAS (Retd.)
5. Shri Arun Gurtoo, Former DGP (DGP), Madhya Pradesh
6. Shri L.S. Hardenia, Sr. Journalist, Bhopal
7. Shri. N.K.Singh, Senior Journalist, Bhopal
8. Shri Rajendra Kothari, Social Activist, Bhopal
9. Prof Sabita Raje, SPA, Bhopal
10. Prof Nitin Raje, Academician and naturalist
11. Shri Ajai Kataria, Architect
12. Shri Avnish Saxena, Architect & Town Planner
13. Shri Shasidhar Kapoor, Journalist
14. Shri Suneel Awasarkar, Architect
15. Shri Rakesh Dewan, Journalist
16. Shri Sahid Khan, Resident of Bhopal
17. Shri S.K.S Raghuvanshi, Engineer, Bhopal
18. Dr Sudesh Waghmare, Forestry Expert
19. Shri Neelav Shrivastava, Horticulturist
20. Shri. Raghuraj Singh, MCM, Bhopal
21. Ms. Rashmi Saraswat, General Secretary, Mahila Chetna Manch, Bhopal
22. Shri Neelesh Dubey, MCM
23. Shri Satyajeet Das, MCM
24. Dr Ashok Kumar Gupta, DG, NCHSE
25. Dr. Pradip Nandi, NCHSE, Bhopal
26. Shri Avinash Shrivastava, NCHSE, Bhopal