

Minutes of Meeting on Bhopal Smart City Project held on 30th March 2016

The second meeting on Bhopal Smart City Proposal was held on 30th March 2016 at NCHSE with Mrs. Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary Madhya Pradesh chairing the meeting. In the meeting follow up action on the decisions of consultation organized on 18th January 2016 and the development post 18th January were discussed. The list of participants is at Annex –I.

While welcoming the participants, Mrs. Buch informed that as per the consensus decision in the consultation held on 18th January 2016, the peoples' concern arising out of BMC's approach in developing the Smart City proposal without proper public consultation was communicated to the Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh and Principal Secretary, Urban Development and Environment Department (UDED) on 19th January 2016 and to the Secretary, MUD, Gol on 21st January 2016 with the request to take appropriate and urgent action to ensure that the selection of site for development under Smart Cities Mission is based on proper public consultation and that the development plan is citizen centric, inclusive and environmentally and financially sustainable.

Mrs. Buch also informed that recently the State government through Principal Secretary, Urban development and Environment Department has conveyed that "since the smart city proposal preparation is only a beginning towards making Bhopal smart, we would like to welcome more of your suggestions and would be delighted to incorporate the same in the implementation process".

Mrs. Buch further informed that the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India has taken note of the peoples' concern about the selection of Shivaji Nagar for Area based Development and has thorough their letter dated 22nd March 2016 to the Chief Secretary, GoMP advised that "as the area to be developed under Smart City Mission, has to be identified and also as the Smart City Proposal is to be prepared by the City/State after Citizen consultations, the concerns may be considered on merit under intimation to the Ministry".

Above referred both the letters were circulated among the participants as well as read out before them.

Mrs. Buch requested participants to give their views so as to put them on records for conveying them to the state government.

Besides the views of the participants present in the meeting, the views communicated by senior journalists Mr. L.S. Hardenia and Mr. Chandrakant Naidu were also discussed and documented. Major points that emerged from the discussions are as follows:

1. Members present in the meeting confirmed that none of them were invited by the BMC or their consultants to participate in the consultation meetings or FGDs. Even the former bureaucrats, sector specialists, well known NGOs or people having interest on urban developments were invited. Experience does not support either the claim of BMC or that stated in the Letter of PS, UDED about conducting consultations/FGDs on a daily basis by BMC.


2. The Government has not contradicted the news report as published in the Dainik Bhaskar on 1st March 2016 regarding manipulation in numbers of total people's responses for the smart city selection.
3. The choices for the development of areas put up on the BMC web site for voting were faulty and not appropriate and the consultations, wherever arranged by BMC, were not genuine.
4. Proposal was not available on the website of BMC before the announcement of inclusion of Bhopal in the first list of selected cities by the GOI. It should have been available before and in time for citizens to join.
5. The selection of Shivaji Nagar for developing as residential cum commercial area seems faulty and the financial part is not realistic and economically sustainable. There are other commercial areas like, MP Nagar, New Market and the under construction Central Business District (CBD) in South TT Nagar being developed by Gammon India within a short distance. It is well known that both commercial and residential areas being developed by Gammon India remained unsold. It is likely that the residential and commercial areas proposed to be developed in Shivaji Nagar, if come up, would also meet the same fate.
6. Heavy investment in a centralized area in the fast expanding Bhopal seems to be a strategically wrong decision. In Bhopal new residential areas with its own commercial areas are being developed by the private developers. Since what people require is now mostly available in their neighborhood, it is unlikely that those people residing at a distance from Shivaji Nagar would like to travel the distance for their needs.
7. There is no investment climate in Bhopal. There is no demand for high cost residential and commercial areas either. Therefore, another Business District as proposed in Shivaji Nagar may not be financially viable.
8. Government is for the welfare of the people. Therefore, there is need for BMC to first take initiative to improve the city wide basic services like water supply, solid and liquid waste management and provide enough parking spaces near the existing business districts for the entire city and not only for the areas which are already developed and have the required facilities.
9. Reports have appeared that an estimated 30,000 trees will have to be felled to accommodate the smart city in Shivaji Nagar. These areas are perhaps one of the greenest ones in Bhopal and present a beautiful and soothing ambiance. To root out this greenery is not good for the people and their city which is already facing the impact of deteriorating micro climate. Authorities seem to take repeatedly wrong steps as far as protection of the greenery of Bhopal is concerned. The Gammon's CBD Project required felling more than a thousand trees. The undertaking given by Gammon India of planting as many trees in place of those which were eliminated from the site has not been honoured. Neither the municipality nor the government seems to have insisted on

Gammon India to do the compensatory planting as promised. Likewise, for the BRTS project again some 3,000 to 5,000 trees were felled. It was also informed that former Mayor of Bhopal Mrs Bibha Patel in a talk show of Dainik Bhaskar said that the replantation done by BMC to compensate the loss for BRTS did not survive. BMC seems to follow the same step by removing the green cover in Shivaji Nagar.

10. If Government feels the need for unlocking the value of government land, it could be done by developing the land present under slums for the dual purpose of generating revenue as well as for providing in situ affordable housing with a better environment for the weaker section. This could be done by utilizing the green field development option under the Smart City Mission.
11. A view was also expressed that Smart city should be developed by the smart people with proven records. If one assesses the performance of BMC over the years, which has left an enormous lot to be desired, one finds that it just did not have the capability to develop and run a smart city. But it was mentioned that perhaps the proposed SPV and appropriate selection of manpower may help in it.

It was also decided to request the State Government to consider the above mentioned points/issues and to take suitable action for the following:

1. Revisit the process of selection of the project area;
2. Revisit the basis of financial aspect of the project; since one view is that computation for financial viability of the project seems erroneous;
3. All the development related to Smart city should be put into public domain and updated regularly;
4. Inform the citizens on every stages of development of DPR for the Smart City and ensure that every activity is finalized in appropriate consultation with the public;
5. Since BMC has claimed that no trees will be cut during project implementation, provide supporting details and mechanism that no trees are cut to allow construction under the project;
6. Provide detailed plan to explain how the project activities will help improving green cover in the project area;
7. Provide details on development agenda for providing shelter for the weaker section/ slums in the project area;
8. Government may also like to consider Green Field Development Option for providing affordable housing for the weaker section.



Pradip Nandi
NCHSE Environment Helpline

Annex -I

List of participants at the Consultation on Bhopal Smart City Project held on 30th March 2016

1. Mrs. Nirmala Buch, Former Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh & Chairperson, NCHSE, Bhopal
2. Mrs. Anshu Vaish , IAS (Retd), Member, Friends of the Environment, Bhopal
3. Mr. Arun Gurtoo, Former (DGP), Madhya Pradesh
4. Mr. L.S. Hardenia, Sr. Journalist, Bhopal
5. Mr. N. K. Singh, Sr Journalist, Bhopal
6. Mr. Chandrakant Naidu, Sr. Journalist, Bhopal
7. Mr. Shasidhar Kapoor, Editor, www.mediaplatform.com
8. Mr. Harish K. Bhawnani, Convener, Bhopal Citizens' Forum
9. Mr. D. K. Dixit, Ex Defence Personnel & Member , Bhopal Citizens' Forum, Bhopal
10. Dr. S.K. Saxena, Former Civil Surgeon, Bhopal
11. Mr. Rajendra Kothari, Philanthropist , Bhopal
12. Mr. Azad Jain , Ex-SBI Executive, Bhopal
13. Prof. Neelima Varma, Sarojini Naidu PG College, Bhopal
14. Mr. Sunil Deshpande, Director, Institute of Quality Management & Research, Bhopal
15. Ms Rashmi Saraswat, General Secretary, Mahila Chetna Manch, Bhopal
16. Mr. Raghuraj Singh, Incharge- Communication & Microfinance, MCM, Bhopal
17. Dr. A.K.Gupta, Director General, NCHSE, Bhopal
18. Dr Pradip Nandi, Sr. Fellow, NCHSE, Bhopal