

URBAN *Innovations*

Civic engagement and Transparency for Good Governance

A case study of NGO Task Force, Mangalore

Gururaja Budhya, TIDE, Bangalore

Urban Management Programme for Asia & the Pacific

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'Civic engagement and Transparency for Good Governance',

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By Gururaja Budhya * ~, Bangalore.

1. Summary Introduction:

Mangalore has been one of the important coastal cities of Karnataka. The city has historically since the 9th Century been an active commercial area due to its location on the coast. The region also has nationalized banks and prominent industries. Mangalore is also famous for its deep-sea all weather port. Dakshina Kannada District has made invaluable contribution to the Indian banking sector by fostering 23 banks and producing a large number of bankers of professional excellence ¹.

Development issues:

As a trading center and as a head of District administration, the Mangalore region is facing rapid industrial development, population growth and significant change in land use. Several large scale industries are under construction, with several more proposed. The commissioning of the New Mangalore Port in 1974 has made a beginning for channeling the exportable surplus (including iron-ore from Kudremukh, manganese and iron ore from Bellary-Hospet), which were earlier routed through other ports in India. This has initiated the expansion in industrial production and better infrastructure development ². These developments are mooted by the State and National governments for the development of the region.

The urban areas are clustered around Mangalore and Udupi (another coastal city). 75% of the urban population is situated in or near these two cities. In 1991, the population of Mangalore and other urban areas constituted about 28% of the district's population. By 2002 it is estimated that about 35% will reside in urban areas. It is also projected that people will continue to migrate from rural to urban areas ³. The positioning between

The views expressed in this article are of author and not of the organization.

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¹ 'Eminent Bankers - Dakshina Kannada' by Dr.N.K.Thingalaya; Mangalore today, Vol.5, Issue 6, July/August 2001.

² The main reason for this seems lack of infrastructure at the hinterland of Mangalore region. Precisely for this a high level port hinterland development committee for the New Mangalore Port was set up in January 1977 at the instance of the Ministry of Shipping and Transport, Government of India.

³ It is important to mention here that the Government of Karnataka was prompted to prepare 'Environmental Management Plan for Dakshina Kannada District' consisting a framework and actions for ensuring that development activities take place without harming the environment (Managing Sustainable Development, Danida-DFEE Study on Environmental Management Plan for Dakshina Kannada District,

Western Ghats and the Arabian sea makes the region ecologically sensitive. The expansion in industrial production, infrastructure development and urbanization have put considerable stress on the utilization and management of natural resources.

The expansion of Mangalore city is adding to contamination of water sources, generation of solid waste etc. But the citizens and the elected body have opined 'underground drainage' as a main and important issue.

Management arrangements & Governance Overview:

The management arrangements and governance of the city have to be viewed at three levels by Mangalore City Corporation (MCC).

- Firstly, the responsibility of providing urban services within the boundary of City (both obligatory and discretionary in nature). This is normal with other cities.
- Secondly, the responsibility to meet the demands generated out of economic activities beyond city limits. For example, incoming and outgoing trucks transporting logs, granite stone, groceries generate employment for locals. The city has to respond to to provide minimum facilities in such a situation.
- Thirdly, involvement in to the infrastructure development activities initiated by the State Government. The expansion of economic activities beyond city limits can be due to the regional development plan of the State Government OR the idea of regional development is based on the expansion of economic activities of the area. These externalities are inter-linked.

Being a trading and cultural center since 9th century AD, the city has very well established ethnic, cultural, trade and civil society organizations. The general atmosphere within the communities (like Konkanas, Christians, Fishermen, Farmers etc) is always active. These civil society groups are functional on specific issues, but are part of extensive network beyond city, district and sometimes state. This historical background is reflected in the present civil society organizations.

The response from citizen groups on civic issues has been related to Solid waste management, Awareness related to Malaria, Environment etc. Few citizen groups have concentrated on bringing change in quality of life like counseling services, alcoholic de-addiction etc. The consumer and environmental movements have provided basic atmosphere for nurturing on going efforts to stay alive. The region is generally known to be active with entrepreneurial ability.

The dynamism of civil society is too visible in the Municipal Corporation and other local bodies in the Coastal region. Corporation has computerized some of the systems like receiving complaints, issuing birth and death certificates and a toll free phone for enquiries & grievances. Though the functioning of Corporation suffers from party politics, it is one of the better managed cities in India.

India, 1995), spending few crores. The decision to implement the recommendations of the report now lies with the Government since 1995.

2. Description of the Specific Topic Context and the Situation:

The on going consumer awareness efforts by civil society groups bring out discussions relevant to society. The coming together of people at city level could be traced to 'Study Circle' meetings during 1950s. Eventually, a District level federation of N.G.Os for Rural Development and Environment was formed.

The initial phase of activism was expressed on mega industries during 90s, after the famous 'Save Western Ghats March' lead by the great literatute Late.Dr.Shivaram Karanth in 1987. Inspired by the March, taluq level environmental federations have been initiated by environmental groups. The city and the region also witnessed few agitations⁴ against environmentally hazardous industries. The groups have also concentrated on issues like awareness programs on Malaria eradication, Solid waste management etc. The civil society is also active in general and certain issues are undertaken by them in particular. The main focus of groups in the region has been on environmental issues for nearly a decade.

The city based groups have come close recently in 1998 during few meetings organized by M/S B.V.NEDECO Consultants from Netherlands for preparing a proposal (Karnataka Coastal Environmental management and Urban Development) for infrastructure development covering 'Ten' coastal region, on be half of Karnataka Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation (KUIDFC)⁵ with financial assistance (a loan) from Asian Development Bank (ADB).

In 2000, After thorough consultations amongst the concerned individuals and groups, 'NGO Forum' meetings have been initiated to bring together groups working on issues concerning society . **Given the situation of society, effort to being together the groups is a special concern.** The motive behind these meetings is to develop an understanding between groups, that will result in beneficial actions for the development of Society. These meetings have resulted in the formation of 'NGO Task Force', which has begun raising public awareness about the Infrastructure development project and the financial implications of the ADB loan.

⁴ For one such instance, please refer to 'The Politics of Sustainable Development: the case of Bengare, Mangalore in coastal India – Sustainable Cities Revisited III by Gururaja Budhya and Dr.Solomon Benjamin' for Environment and Urbanization Journal (Vol. 12, No.2, October 2000 - published by the Human Settlements Program of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), UK. for a detailed account of the organizational structure of a local fishing community and their struggles against the barge-mounted power project.

⁵ Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation is a company incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956, with 100% equity participation from the State Government. The State Government has identified KUIDFC as the nodal agency to implement external aided projects for infrastructure development. This is the second A.D.B funded project where, this organization overlooks both financing and implementation of the project work. The first project is Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development Project is an integrated urban infrastructure and institutional strengthening program designed to provide and upgrade essential urban infrastructure and services in the four towns of Mysore, Chennapatna-Ramnagaram and Tumkur cities. (Annual Report - Urban Development Department, Government of Karnataka, 2000-2001).

The issues raised by NGO Task Force are relevant, as they *question the validity of the proposal, planning of various components, rigid financial allocations, tax implications, repayment of loan and finally non-availability of important documents*. The matters addressed are important, as the implications would affect the poor residents of Mangalore. Being citizens of Mangalore, the members of NGO Task Force have direct access to the Council through their Corporators. Their involvement is also with two retired engineers who are members of the technical committee constituted by MCC. The roots of the NGO Task Force is larger in terms of linkages with broader movements.

3. Experience of improving the city's urban management conditions

The position of MCC in terms of maintaining the conditions of city is restricted mainly to day-to-day management. The broader planning activities or developing a futuristic idea for creating better conditions have not been initiated by the Council. Though the Corporators and the Council are reasonably active, they are constrained to involve in larger issues due to the dominating presence of State in every stage.

- Firstly, the nominated Corporators (who are not elected) immensely influence the decision making process at Council on important matters.
- Secondly, the presence of Urban Development Authority (a state agency for regulating and systematizing the city growth) does not have enough local representation. This denies the access and control by the local urban government, for whose development the authority has been established.
- Thirdly, the role of a KUIDFC in regional development, is that it undermines the capacity of the urban local government. This special body assumes responsibility of obtaining external finances and executing the same for the urban local body. The urban local governments are forced to accept the loan, without having a '**debate**' and has to repay the loan with a burden of higher taxes on the citizens. Though not a planning organization, the development activities initiated by KUIDFC critically impact the economy and environment of the urban areas.

The implementation of the present infrastructure development project by KUIDFC is without any '**public debate**' in the region. **The citizens, citizen groups and the Corporators are in the dark without sufficient information.** KUIDFC invited the NGO Task Force for a meeting, only after they were referred by ADB.

Strategy/Action Planning:

A few members of NGO-Forum have begun interactions with urban groups in Bangalore and Mysore. This interaction has helped the members of NGO-Task Force to understand the implementation of similar project in Mysore City. The NGO Task Force studied the proposal, prepared an alternative sewage plan and financial analysis. They have also organized many public meetings and a workshop on traffic in Mangalore. The NGO Task Force educated the Corporators about technical aspects of the project.

4. Analysis of Experience:

The groups have been engaged on environmental issues involving the industries and the State. The latest project, affects the citizens and the city as a whole for paying higher taxes and the loan burden. The groups have quickly adopted to the situation to react to the crisis. There is a transition in the strategies of civic activism, from totally resisting to gaining a position for a dialogue⁶.

The mobilization and presence of diverse experts in NGO Task Force has been able to produce concrete alternatives (like alternate sewage treatment plan, financial analysis etc). The team has been able to put forward the facts about the project before people through directly by organizing public meetings. Adequate coverage of these issues by the press too has resulted in an atmosphere of discussion for the citizens of Mangalore. This has brought activeness in the Council meetings, where many Corporators raised pertinent questions in the Council.

It is to understand that the region has been under the 'pressure' of development and will continue to be there for a longer period. The major projects for development are being conceived and implemented by the State agencies. A closer look at the present project give an understanding of 'not reflecting the local needs'. The State agencies have to define their role to increase the understanding of the elected representatives and the council about the issues related to the broader development of the region. This would improve the involvement of the urban local government in regional development. **Non-performance of this role by the State agencies will continue to cause hardships for citizens and citizen groups.**

There is always a scope for dialogue within the democratic system, that responds to issues of content. This availability of space is ensured, if the matter is of local importance by managed by the local government.

Bottlenecks:

The main bottleneck for the citizens engagement for good governance has been lack of information to local government and civic groups from higher level bodies of the State and National authorities. The basic information requested by NGO Task Force has not been provided by the implementing agencies.

⁶ Refer 'Transitions in Civic activism, the case of Mangalore City, Coastal Karnataka, India' By Gururaja Budhya , Bangalore, presented at 'International Conference on Society, Politics, the Economy and the Environment - Implications for Socio-economic Progress in the 21st Century', organized by University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore and Texas A&M University, USA at Bangalore, July 2001.

Our intervention ⁷:

Three ward maps (with infrastructure marked) have been developed for Corporators. One of the Corporator (Ms. Judith Mascarenhas, Ex-Deputy Mayor) has been using the map in her ward meetings in deciding infrastructure allocations for the ward. We have also tried to understand the urban issues of other coastal cities through a small study. Our intervention has been to the response of citizens movements in providing technical solutions. In response to a demand made by the two members (retired engineers) of the technical committee of MCC, We have developed a cardboard contour model of city, to enable discussions related to the sewage treatment system of the city. After discussing with the members again, we are now developing a thermocol model (4ft X 4.5ft). We are presently in the process of developing a methodology for preparing citizen based ward development plan.

5. Lessons learned / Suggested ways forward:

The main lessons from the case experience are :

- Civil society groups do take active role in the issues of city.
- Civil society groups do provide technical and financial alternatives.
- There is scope for developing a city development plan, utilizing civic capacities available in the city.
- Various actors are involved in the process (Citizens, Corporators, N.G.Os, Local associations etc).
- Local institutions respond to the local issues.
- Higher institutions impose programs and decisions.
- Higher institutions are seen as a way of controlling by the State.
- External non-state financial agencies influence the state agencies in decision making.
- External non-state financial agencies completely depend on the information provided by the state agencies which need not be locally ratified.
- External non-state financial agencies do not provide information and lack transparency.
- Neither of the groups are really worried about consultations with the Elected Representatives and citizens.
- State level Political parties and Bureaucracy have less incentive to build the capacity of the urban local bodies.

If they were to start again, the city and its local partners would:

- Pressurize the State and other agencies to provide information.
- Involving citizens actively in understanding the situation.

⁷ TIDE (the organization with which the author is working) is implementing a project 'Urban Governance, Civil Society and Local Economic Development' in Mangalore. The focus of the project is to bring better understanding between Citizens, NGOs, Corporators and the Council. The project has been working at two wards of the Corporation, Working with NGO networking at city level and bringing out information booklets for dissemination.

The additional support might be helpful in overcoming the difficulties are:

- More Volunteers, Resources for functioning, availability of more Time.
- Linkages between groups of other affected cities for learning strategies.
- Linkages with different groups working at state capital (who have experience of interacting with the state level machinery).
- Linkages between National and International groups for dissemination and sharing of information.
- More willingness on part of State agencies to build capacity of the city.

Warnings or suggestions to other cities:

- The Council should strengthen its management capacity to handle issues.
- The Corporators should understand the 74th Constitutional Amendment to reinforce and empower their role.
- Availability of information and consultations should be a reality and made mandatory for the planning process.
- The agencies (external and state) should make available information on 'information pools like websites (conditionalities, etc...).
- The cities have to be alert constantly to interact with other cities to ensure information flow from capital to district to city.
- Networking should be a matter of concern for cities for survival and retaining autonomy.