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### PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF HUBLI - DHARWAD CORPORATION EXPERIENCE

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*As local governments lack sufficient capacities, efforts to promote good local governance need to include the participation of local civil society. In fact, for good governance to be sustainable, it requires partnerships between government and civil society. This article presents an overview of citizen participation in local government and governance in Hubli-Dharwad experiment study.*

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION scholars and practitioners attribute an important role to citizen participation in the decision-making processes of state and local government. Yet meaningful authentic participation is rarely found. There are many public officials who are reluctant to include citizens in decision-making and some of them do so reluctantly, many of them typically involve citizens after the issues have been framed and decisions have been made.

Citizens are often frustrated by such shallow participation efforts that engender more anger toward government and distrust in the ability of public officials to do the right thing. This often results in political apathy leading to docile democratic performance. Some key questions, therefore, demand attention at this stage. They include; why do some local governments involve citizens more than others? What factors affect government decisions regarding citizen involvement?

This article addresses the efforts of Hubli-Dharwad Corporation as a case study and examines experiences in this direction of involving citizens more and more in administrative processes. In particular, it is an attempt to explore the following questions: What social groups in the community promote citizen involvement, which groups are likely to succeed, what obstructs citizen involvement and the efforts of administrators in succeeding with citizen involvement in their development projects.

Citizen committee initiative began with HDMC Commissioner Manivannan. In this article, the term citizen involvement efforts refer to

120 / INDIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
VOL. LVI, NO. 1, JANUARY-MARCH 2010

activities initiated by government to encourage citizen participation in administrative decision-making and supervisory activities. Based on the extensive study of citizen participation in the whole processes of administration and community association the author shares the considered opinion of the scholars in the areas of urban studies that there are fewer studies of this kind especially in the developing world and particularly in a society where there is already a case of disparity of a sub-region (north Karnataka). However this does not mean to say that there are no such studies at all. As explained earlier such studies are restricted to the developed world where the level of citizen involvement efforts initiated by governments in the administrative decision-making is not seen as a new wave of thought nor is it seen as an experiment. Some studies have included items to measure citizen involvement in specific contexts, such as budgeting and performance measurement, but systematic assessment of the whole gamut of urban government activities is rare, and a carefully specified model does not exist.

This article therefore focuses merely on the community level participation and seeks to answer the questions raised above. The hypothesis that is put to test here assumes that the decision to involve citizens in administrative processes reflects administrative responsiveness to salient community stakeholders, normative value associated with participation, and administrative practicality.

#### *Citizen Involvement and Bureaucratic Responsiveness*

The commissioner (bureaucratic head of the corporation) in the corporation jurisdiction has discretion over decisions regarding when and how citizen involvement should be initiated and structured. They influence the structure and meaning of citizen government interactions by the decisions they make or fail to make. To help the bureaucrats make decisions favouring citizen's involvement, scholars have developed various normative models and, more recently, have called for an examination of the instrumental values that shape such decisions. Scholars have also empirically assessed the factors that affect involvement decisions at the community. In case of Hubli - Dharwad both the citizen involvement and bureaucratic responsiveness were in its low ebb before this experimentation began. Docile nature of the population in general, historically neglected the positions of these twin cities and perhaps the non-enthusiastic officers who were posted to head this may all have been responsible for this. However, a beginning was made and it is important to understand the same as academic.

#### *Stakeholder Concept and its Impact on Citizen Participation*

Administrators often feel the pressure from stakeholder groups to act and respond in the best interests of the group. There is a constant push and

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:35 - Last Updated Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:51

pull. For example, business groups may push to keep taxes stable, whereas parent groups may pull to have school funding increased. For the purposes of this research, we do not look at a single independent variable as a measure of external pressure; rather, we look at a series of independent variables that relate to different stakeholders. Stakeholders who most enthusiastically promote citizen involvement may not be the ones who succeed. The act of promoting involvement reflects the needs of the stakeholder, whereas the success of their action reflects the salience of their position.

We adopt Mitchell, Agle, and Wood's stakeholder model and consider stakeholder salience based on the power and legitimacy of stakeholders. Legitimacy means the extent to which stakeholder claims are appropriate given the constitutional framework and political norms. At this stage we must be aware that the bureaucrats can resist illegitimate claims, even when powerful groups make them. For example, elected official who attempt to micromanage administrators violate the norm of professional expertise and are often resisted by career bureaucrats. Here their power refers to the extent to which stakeholders have or can gain access to coercive, utilitarian, or normative means to impose their will in the relationship with government. A consistent two-way relationship fosters communication and information sharing and likely builds trust and enhances mutual responsiveness. Hubli - Dharwad experiment made a good beginning in this with a separate cell viz. city development strategy cell (CDS cell).

#### *Role of Elected Representatives*

Elected representatives, in an attempt to maintain constituent support, might denounce big government, emphasise self-governance and support constituent efforts to be involved in administrative process. Elected leaders who want to appear responsive to constitution will call for greater transparency and accountability in government. Moreover, elected leaders are likely to succeed when they push for citizen involvement because their pressures are viewed as legitimate due to their significant power over administrators in broad policy matters. However, the local level officials who also understand that they serve at the mercy of the governing body and that their actions can be supported, modified, or vetoed by elected leaders, therefore seek co-operation. However this is not the scenario in the Third World where elected representatives invariably clash with the bureaucrats have won through the courts the claims of their superiority and hence discourage all those efforts which undermine their power and positions. The case of the formation of the citizens committee in Hubli-Dharwad Corporation is no different from this reality. The experiences of the same are discussed in the paragraphs that follow. Here, too there were politicians who felt affected in respect their positions vis-a-vis the citizens

122 / INDIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
VOL. LVI, NO. 1, JANUARY-MARCH 2010

committee.

#### *Non-governmental Organisations*

Non-governmental organisations (NGO) play an important role in local service delivery. As members of service networks, they require access to information and participation in administrative access to information, participation and administrative decision-making. They have a networked relationship with government whereby they serve on boards, attend meetings, and develop working relationships with both elected officials and professional administrators. In addition to these they also involve in designing citizen participation models based on the local social context and help the bureaucrats in charge of the local governments in organising training activities for the citizens taking the help of the intellectual citizen groups who are a part of four tier models of citizens participation. The activities of many NGOs not only facilitate civic engagement but also stimulate government action to seek citizen input. Many NGO leaders are important figures in local politics, serving on advisory boards, representing significant constituents, or contributing to political campaigns. More than 50 per cent of NGO managers serve on boards, commissions, and committees addressing community problems. Therefore, NGO have both the need and the capacity to push for citizen involvement.

#### *Case of Hubli -Dharwad Corporation*

It is a fact accepted across the world that good governance is possible only with people's participation. Hubli-Dharwad Municipal Corporation (HDMC) has over the last few years taken certain important steps to ensure better services to its citizens. This has transformed the image of the Corporation from a non responsive municipality to responsive and functioning one in the state.

In order to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives HDMC has taken a unique task of providing platforms called 'Citizen Committee (CC)' through which every citizen of the twin cities can contribute in developing Hubli-Dharwad into a world class city. Although, this is a far off dream the city made an attempt. The diagrammatic presentation shown here (Diagram -1) indicates the structure of this. CC being the lowest in the rank is also closest to the population covered under corporation jurisdiction. This committee was expected to interact with the citizens / people at the local level in the given jurisdiction.

#### *What is a Citizen Committee in Indian Context?*

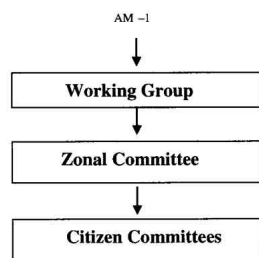
A citizen representation forum established at every polling booth across the city is called a citizens committee. It consists of nine members who are registered voters, elected by the fellow voters, having a strong desire to

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:35 - Last Updated Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:51

PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT 123  
KAMALAKSHI G. TADASAD

serve the community and work hand in hand with the corporation and having no criminal records. If this is what the 'CC' planned ideally the HDMC as far as possible succeeded in finding such members. However, what did not happen as expected was the quality of debates and discussions. Neither were they focused nor were they practical. It infact turned out to be yet another classroom. Two visible reasons were the citizens chosen did not understand their 'role'- but were interested in 'power' sharing while the corporation officials did their job of organisers without clear vision. The NGO's which acted as facilitators only bridged the two without bargain.



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION MODEL IN HUBLI - DHARWAD

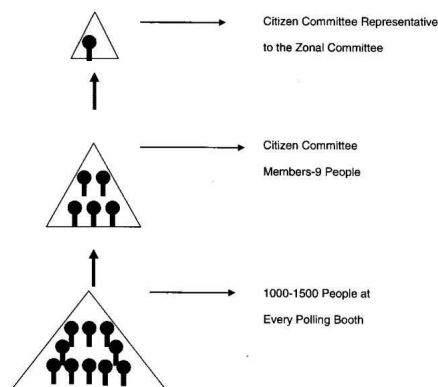
## Composition of Citizen Committee

It consists of nine members who shall be registered voters.

- The nine members shall be in the following age group
  - 18-22 years: 1 member
  - 22-28 years: 1 member
  - 28-35 Years: 1 member
  - 35-45 Years: 1 member
  - 45-60 Years: 1 member
  - 61 Years and above: 4 members
- 1/3<sup>rd</sup> representation shall be from women
- 1/3<sup>rd</sup> representation shall at least be PUC qualified

124 / INDIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
VOL. LVI, NO. 1, JANUARY-MARCH 2010

DIAGRAM - 2



- There shall not be more than one member from the same family

## Term of Office

Three years shall be the term of office for every Citizen Committee

As far as Citizen Committee's activities are concerned, currently, the CCs are being constituted to discuss and contribute to the city development strategy (CDS). It is a blue print for the city's growth, over a period of 20 years, which aims at providing better infrastructure and governance to its citizens.

Regarding the role of CCs in CDS the CCs will have to help in ranking the issues identified in the CDS report based on the local requirements and help HDMC plan for a phased development of the city, which is acceptable to one and all.

## Zonal Committee

It is a committee formed at every zone with in the twin cities consisting;

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:35 - Last Updated Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:51

PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT 125  
KAMALAKSHI G. TADASAD

of representatives of the various citizen committees in the respective zones. The chief zonal officer from HDMC, of the respective zones, heads it. There shall be 12 such committees formed in the 12 zones of the twin cities.

They assist the zonal offices of HDMC in planning, implementation and monitoring of developmental activities in their respective zones.

## CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

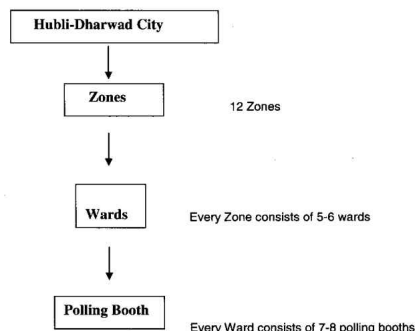
### Composition of the Citizen Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee will comprise members drawn from different backgrounds like academic, laureates, professionals, social workers, government officials and NGOs.

#### Roles and Responsibilities of Citizen Advisory Committee

- To supervise the formation and functioning of CCs and zonal committee.
- To identify the activities of HDMC where citizen participation is essential and also define the outline of participation.

DIAGRAM - 3



#### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ZONAL COMMITTEE

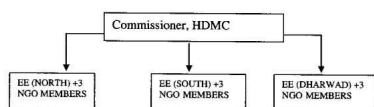
126 / INDIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
VOL. LVI, NO. 1, JANUARY-MARCH 2010

- To provide the necessary guidance to the working group and the CCs in implementing the action plan.
- To devise a mechanism to monitor the performance of the working group and CCs based on the project regularly.
- The Advisory committee shall think of alternatives on being found that the CC is not functioning effectively.

## WORKING GROUP

### Composition of the Working Group

The Working group shall comprise 12 members headed by the Commissioner, HDMC. It shall have three sub groups; one for each division of the twin city. Each sub group shall be headed by the concerned executive engineer and have three NGO members.



#### Role and responsibilities of Working Group

- To assist the citizen advisory committee and the capacity building agency in formation and running of CC.
- To assist the citizen advisory committee in identification of activities of HDMC where citizen participation is essential.
- To prepare an action plan defining the roles and responsibilities of the CCs for the identified activities.
- To provide the necessary technical assistance to the CCs in implementing the action plan.
- To assist the advisory committee in monitoring the performance of the CCs.
- To rank the zonal offices for their performance based on the inputs from the zonal committees.

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:35 - Last Updated Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:51

PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT 127  
KAMALAKSHI G. TADASAD

## WARD ANCHORS

1. Ward anchors shall be a member of one of the CCs in the respective ward.
2. Every ward shall have three ward anchors.
3. The role of a ward anchor shall cease to exist once, the CCs are formed and the capacity building activity is completed.

*Roles and Responsibilities of Ward Anchors*

1. To assist the working group and the agency in formation of CCs in their respective wards.
2. To assist the working group and agency in mobilising people to be a part of the CCs.
3. To assist the working group and agency in capacity building of the CC members.

*Discussion*

Having explained the various facets of the maiden attempt of HDMC in the direction of participative governance, it must be confessed that it was not without limitations.

Initially, the orientation given to 'CC' to ensure that they would be in tune with the officials of the corporation did not materialise. There were apprehensions and confusions with regard to the selection process itself there was a feeling that it was a power sharing arrangement rather than a participative activity.

Secondly, the whole exercise seemed to be elitist and far away from the ordinary citizens. This resulted in widening the gap between the expectations of the CC and the corporation officials.

Thirdly, the 'CC' instead of working as a voluntary body in charge or engaging in the framing plans for the city in entirety, it seemed to address localised and ward wise issues, thus culminating in a broken house of divided interests.

Fourthly, the officials including the commissioner virtually failed to reach out to the ground level to understand the realities. This was true of the apex body "Citizen Advisory Committee." Mere discussions did not thus lead the innovations to reach the goal thereby experimentation and propaganda dominated the HDMC experiment.

The above explanation clearly indicates the much needed integration between the rulers and the ruled. It is in fact noted as the member of the working committee that the citizens of Hubli-Dharwad have much to desire. They were in fact are more involved than the officials. They perhaps were looking for means to mediate with the government. They looked towards groups such as NGOs, elected officials, and business leaders,

128 / INDIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
VOL. LVI, NO. 1, JANUARY-MARCH 2010

especially in a pluralistic society that is based on group politics.

Individual citizens pushed for greater involvement when their direct interests were at stake. However, individual citizens often lack expertise and feel powerless when facing bureaucratic regulations and government hierarchies. They need to be involved because they lack power, but for the same reason, they are less effective at promoting participation and influencing decision outcomes. Many administrators fear that responding to individual citizens may decrease agency effectiveness.

In general, the three propositions that this article intended to present are in fact supported by the results. Citizen involvement efforts by local governments do reflect bureaucratic responsiveness to participatory values, stakeholder pressures, and administrative practicality. In addition, when we compare the adjusted values, it seems that the responsiveness framework better explains the use of involvement mechanisms than the use of participation in strategic decisions. It is likely that other variables, such as leadership, political culture, social capital, and other institutional arrangements, may affect the concept of some governments decision to use citizen input in strategic decisions more frequently.

Finally, it is worth noting that because the pushing and dragging factors were measured in a relative rather than absolute terms, the regression results for external stakeholders and administrative practicality should be interpreted in relative terms as well. Although administrators' lack of time was not viewed as a major barrier to citizen involvement but the regression results show that it had a negative impact on the use of citizen input in strategic decision-making. Communities in which administrators' lack of time is ranked high with respect to hindering citizen participation are likely to have weaker government efforts to involve citizens in strategic decision-making. Including citizens in strategic decisions adds to the numerous responsibilities and demands that managers already confront. If bureaucrats feel overloaded, they are less likely to involve citizens in decisions that relate directly to administrative power and require more administrative support. In total it was found that the citizens participation was not significantly rated in the used in explaining the use.

Lack of administrative resources was not significant in explaining the use of citizen input in strategic decisions. Administrative resources are not a major concern when government feels the need to involve citizens in dealing with urgent strategic problems that require broad participation. In comparison, the results show that resource shortages had a positive impact on the use of involvement mechanisms. Popular participation mechanisms, such as public hearings, normally do not require significant financial investments; they are designed to gain political legitimacy without costing

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:35 - Last Updated Thursday, 09 September 2010 04:51

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PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT 129  
KAMALAKSHI G. TADASAD

government too much. It is also likely that resource scarcity forces government to rely more on citizen participation through volunteering advisement, and co production.

Our respondents perceived lack of time for citizens as the biggest barrier to involvement, but the regression results demonstrate that lack of time had a positive impact in both models. Lack of time constrains the willingness and ability of citizens to participate, which, in turn, places pressure on administrators to provide more accessible participation opportunities. For similar reason citizens promoting a narrow agenda was found to have a positive impact on the use of involvement mechanisms. The results suggest that administrators may proactively respond to some constraints on the citizen's side, treating them as challenges and opportunities. The results also showed that citizens' lack of expertise had a negative impact on the use of citizen input in strategic decisions. This finding reflects the importance of education and training for citizens to enable them to become experts in government operations.

#### A SELECT READING

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