

**Mysore Water Workshop – 17/11/2007****Participants**

Gururaj Budya	Ravikumar	Pushpavalli & other corporators	Janardhan
Sudhir Vombatkere	Lakshman	Nagaraja	CASUMM members

The Mysore public meeting on water sector and reforms began with a quick round of introduction of all participants and present and former corporators, members of institution of engg lecturers, researchers and activists attended the meeting. Following this there was an introduction to CASUMM by Vinay Baidur and P Rajan. Vinay then explained the concept of the meeting and its agenda and the need for an ongoing interaction between citizens and groups in Bangalore and Mysore because both cities were having projects from JNNURM, and that this meeting was a beginning in this direction. He stated that this was an informal meeting and no officials were invited. He commented on the pace of reforms in urban infrastructure development, especially in water sector. He mentioned that the 24 X 7 water supply project was introduced as a stealthy reform under JNNURM. He said that there was some information about the three projects that Mysore had applied for under JNNURM. Out of these only one was approved by the Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee, MoUD, Govt of India while two regarding bulk water augmentation and bus rapid transit were sent back for modification. He stressed that there was a

need for transparency by Government in the disclosure of information on costs and other aspects involved in the investment in the public water utilities. He explained about how water reforms are happening at the state and central government level and also changes in the policy. Karnataka has three corporations which are already implementing water privatisation pilots in some wards as part of the KUWASIP. These pilots were claimed to be successes based on which scaling up the same approach to other cities was being tried out, with Mysore being one of them and Mangalore being the other.

He gave the example of lack of transparency contained in the executive summary of the Mysore 24/7 water project which was circulated in advance to many of the participants by e-mail. It did not contain enough information on the costs and estimated the entire project to be around 88 crores which in reality would cost double as much, since the new estimate of 194 crs was on the website - [www.jnnurm.nic.in](http://www.jnnurm.nic.in). Addressing this issue of transparency in disclosure of costs, Mr Lakshman, – ACICM Mysore and Chairman Institution of Engineers, felt the need to include officials from the Government in addressing the problem. He felt that informal discussion with Citizens was not a way forward and was skeptical that this information sharing would have any effect on reversing Privatization of water. He felt that without officials from Mysore City Corporation etc it is not much use to discuss.

Lakshman also raised another question. We are discussing water privatisation but Mysore city is getting 80 % grant money from centre through JNNURM but Bangalore is 50% grant and 50% other sources. We will first take the money and we will see the other issues later on.

Gururaj Budhya of URC responded to this issue saying how P. Manivannan I.A.S present MCC Commissioner encouraged water privatisation in Hubli-Dharwad City Corporation. And also he promoted informal committees like the “area sabha- known as citizens advisory committees”. He wants to implement the same idea in Mysore. For this Lakshman responded that already Manivanan called a closed door meeting where JUSCO- Jamshedpur urban services company gave a presentation for taking over water supply through O & M privatisation. The people of Mysore totally protested against the company and consultants and also we cannot compare Mysore to other cities like Hubli, Dharwad, Belgaum and Gulbarga. Already MCC

privatised many of the water works like bill collection, metering, water man, maintenance department and some parts for distribution is also privatised almost 60%.

In responding to this Mr. S.G. Vombatkere, Mysore Grahakara Parishat (MGP), ex-member Mysore Agenda Task Force and member JNNURM advisory committee MCC, gave the example of Cochabamba, in Bolivia a city which is in a semi – arid region. In 1999, the World Bank recommended privatisation of Cochabamba's municipal water supply company, SEMAPA, through a concession contract to a private consortium, Aguas del Tunari, which involved International Water, a subsidiary of Bechtel. A law was passed called the Drinking Water and Sanitation Law in October 1999 that withdrew subsidies from basic services and allowed privatisation. Mr. Vombatkere also recounted that it was illegal to store even rain water in this area after the law was passed!

The private water company doubled water rates to \$20 a month in a city where minimum wage is less than \$100 a month. A citizen's alliance formed in protest to demand the repeal of the Drinking Water and Sanitation Law, & annulment of ordinances that allowed the privatisation. The fundamental critique of privatisation was based on the negation of the community's property rights to water resources, traditional rights and the rights and obligations of water corporations, committees, and associations. By reclaiming water from corporations and the market, the citizens of Bolivia have shown that privatisation is not inevitable and that people and their democratic will can prevent corporate takeover of our vital water resources.

Smt. Pushpavalli Anand, former Deputy Mayor of Mysore City Corporation expressed her opinion that water and air is a public resource, so we should not privatise. If water privatisation happens how will it ensure whether slum and poor people will get water. Already MCC officials are doing a public tap survey so we are mobilising the people to protest the survey of public standposts. Yesterday the commissioner called a meeting with the councilor of NCC in three batches he convincing the councilor to accept JNURM and water privatisation issues. This project is against the 74<sup>th</sup> amendment, if this project is implemented what will happen to BPL and APL ration card holders. If the water supply is privatised those companies will not be accountable or transparent to the citizens. We should give information to the citizens and they

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should ask questions to the corporators and also we should have street level meetings in the slums and lower income group areas.

Mr.Ravi Kumar from CART and NIE, Mysore - said we are opposing water privatisation and ADB project. If operation and maintenance of water is given to private company there is no ownership of water to the public or government department. Last couple of year's government is not recruiting any employees in the water utility. Many government policies are pushing the public private partnership models.

Mr Vombatkere was then asked to give his opinion on the 24/7 water supply project planned for Mysore. He began with explaining the idea behind the concept of 24/7, which started out first in the power sector in countries overseas where uninterrupted supply of power and later on water supply was developed. The concept derived from the convenience of switching on and off such a supply of water instead of the concept of storage. Privatisation in water goes against storage of water in over head tanks or even in the mains as it is believed that the sewers will run back into the latter making the water unsafe to drink.

This is where he made the link with sustainable water practices with regard to contextual remedy for the situation. Country specific problems such as shortage of water and general concerns of non renewable water are aggravated by privatisation. For example rain water harvesting is a sustainable way of getting renewable water and hence the idea of storage helps in not depleting the existing surface water resources. Here the usage determines the supply of water. Mr. Vombatkere gave the example of running tap water being collected in a bucket with a hole and he believes that privatisation will handle the water crisis in a similar way.

24/7 water comes at a price with the cost of huge investment into the utility that is ultimately passed onto the citizens in the form of high Tariffs. In paying for water – citizens are turned into consumers and fundamental rights become services. Privatisation in water is about the “conversion of an ecological crisis into a market of scarce resources”. Privatisation only aggravates the water crisis, and will lead to overexploitation of water, because when access to

water is determined by the market and not by limits of renewability, the water cycle will be systematically violated and the water crisis will deepen.

Mr. Jagannath environmental engr from ISRO Bangalore and a Mysore resident was the last speaker who mentioned that there were 85 RWA's registered in Mysore but only about 10 are active and these are mainly concentrating on solid waste management. There is no transparency in any bureaucrats and politician. We should give demonstration to public in these issues. There should be forums where we can provide space to citizen's to discuss and raise the questions to politicians and bureaucrats. There are 800 SHGs in Mysore but political groups are splitting them up and undercutting chances of any mobilisation. We have to give information regarding ICICI and Reliance MFIs since they have a marketing strategy to SHGs. But we are not concentrating like them for SHGs. We should think how much public voice are heard and we have to discuss widely and give information to maximum people. We have to create many of these kinds of meetings to help the public to participate.

Vombatkere recommended that we can prepare a two page water privatisation note and distribute widely so that we can give crucial information to the public. Second recommendation RTI application regarding the project could be filed and the same could be distributed to youth association and SHG members, RWA's and councilors. Government is saying no privatization and yet they are taking the opinions from experts. Through this door many privatisation things are happening.

Concluding the meeting Vinay Baindur thanked all the participants and speakers and said that he looked forward to more such interaction meetings when we could have the next one in Bangalore. Along with Campaign against Water Privatisation –Karnataka (CAWPKA) which is active in Bangalore and other cities he would help prepare the note on water privatisation and circulate it soon. He also mentioned that the Water and Sanitation Programme-South Asia along with Samaja Vikas, Hyderabad, a “development support organisation” and consultant of the World Bank was preparing the ground for building consensus on the issues of privatisation and 24 X 7 water supply and planning to organize workshops in Mysore and Mangalore. The participants said they would watch out for that. With a request from one of the participants a note

was also prepared on the proposed area sabha – polling booth committee under the community participation law a reform under JNNURM, which was meant for information to the press.

**CASUMM**

Dec 2007

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**We welcome your comments and questions on this Working Paper**

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