

## REPORT ON CIVIL SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS MEETING

A Civil Society Stakeholders Meeting was organized on “Status of Urban and Peri-urban Water Bodies was held in Hyderabad” on 27th June, 2012 from 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM at Dr. Marri Channa Reddy Human Resources Development Institute, Andhra Pradesh. The Meeting began with an introductory session coordinated by Dr. Anjal Prakash of SaciWATERS and Dr. Jasveen Jairath of SOUL.

The first session started with a comprehensive presentation on “Peri-urban Water Security in South-Asia: Adapting to Climate Change and Urbanization” by Ms. Sreoshi Singh, Research Fellow, SaciWATERS. The presentation essentially talked about the problems associated with drying up of the surface water bodies or lakes/tanks and its socio economic implications on the people intimately depending on it in the peri-urban South-Asia, with a specific focus on the project locations in Hyderabad. The presentation clearly siphons out the crucial role that these water bodies play in meeting the water security and the factors responsible for their disappearance and degradation.

**Discussion:** The presentation of Ms. Singh was followed by a detailed discussion with the participants. Prof Rajan of IIIT, Hyderabad showed his concern about lack of community's involvement in decision making process. He pointed out that it is extremely important for the primary stakeholders, like fishermen, washer men or agricultural community to voice their opinion strongly. In this regard he was interested to know whether any of such protest for lake conservation was undertaken by the community present in study area. Taking from him, Dr. Tez Rajdan of Jheel Sanrakshan Samiti, Udaipur, Rajasthan pointed out that it is imperative to have unified government agency to look into the overall conservation and restoration of the lake's ecology. He further showed his concern about lack of scientific knowledge of the community which sometimes acts detrimental to the restoration process, like construction of tube wells onto the lake bed as being done by the washer men community in one of the study areas of SaciWATERS. Thus, it is critical for the organizations working on lake conservation to properly inform and enhanced the capacity of the primary stakeholders to take appropriate actions.

The point that ground water modelling is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the surface water system has been pointed out by Dr. Dinesh Kumar of IRAP, Hyderabad. He mentioned that increase build up area in the catchment of a watershed, leads to increases storm water flow over the period of time. Such untreated storm discharge not only pollutes the surface water bodies but also the ground water aquifer. Thus, understanding the behavioural pattern of surface drainage system and groundwater hydrology is important to develop any kind of preventive measures for the lake restoration. Importance of understanding drainage flow in the catchment is also highlighted By Dr. Jasveen Jairath of SOUL, Hyderabad.

Key note presentation was given by Mr. Sagar Dhara. He essentially talked about the energy flow dynamics between city and rural hinterland. His work highlighted the fact that city is consuming all the surplus energy from the rural hinterland and thereby disrupting the balance in the energy flow. Through energy flow modelling, his presentation surfaced the damaging role played by the city.

**Discussion:** The concept that city is the major consumer of energy was contested by Dr. Kumar of IRAP, Hyderabad. He was of the opinion that rural areas and agricultural sector are the major

consumers of energy, particularly with the revolution of tube well irrigation in there. He suggested to move beyond the number game and to come out with a comprehensive mechanism to tap and regulate the excess energy flow in both urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

Second session was a panel discussion with participation from government and academic institutes. Chaired by Mr. Prasanna from A.P Pollution Control Board the panel constituted of three members namely Mr. Bhopal Reddy of Minor Irrigation and Ground water board, Mr. Dharma Naik of state department of Agriculture and Professor Rajan of International Institute of Information technology , IIIT, Hyderabad. Dr. Anjal Prakash of SaciWATERS was the moderator of the panel discussion. The discussion shot off highlighting the work done by each of these institutes in protecting the urban water bodies. Mr. Bhopal Reddy from minor irrigation department mentioned about the role and responsibilities of the department in conserving the tanks/lakes in and around the city. He pointed out that the department is entrusted in identification of the problems like encroachments, pollution, etc associated with lakes whereas policing is done by the local government bodies like panchayats or municipalities. He mentioned about the project on digitizing all the water bodies of the state of A.P that the department is currently undertaking. He brought out the problem of lack of manpower in tackling the cleaning and restoration process effectively and extensively. While explaining the mandate of the department, he clearly mentioned that irrigation department can only take preventive and precautionary action against complaints lodged by the community.

Mr. Dharma Naik of state department of Agriculture highlighted several watershed works particularly farm ponds undertaken by natural resource management division of the agriculture department. Prof. Rajan put forward his concern about multiplicity of departments in handling the issue of urban water management. He was apprehensive about the huge data gap that exists in collaborating and mapping the urban local bodies. He was vocal to the inclusion of middle management in policy formulations. He talked about his current research on data banking on urban water bodies.

Mr. Prasanna from A.P Pollution control board was excellent in providing the mandate of his department and their contribution in preservation of the urban water bodies. He spoke about his experience in saving Mallampet Lake where Dr. Reddy's labs were polluting the water sources by dumping the expired medicine in the channels connecting the lake. Prompt media involvement and active participation of the fishermen community resulted in compensation of Rs.2 lakhs to the affected stakeholders by Dr. Reddy's lab. He also talked about contamination of Nur Muhammad Kunta and Husainsagar lakes by the hazardous industries in and around. He was extremely worried about the fact that level of contamination has reached to the groundwater aquifer and there is no ownership and coordinated action from the government line departments about this.

After the initial talk of the panellists, the floor was open for discussion. Panellists were prompt in answering some of the interesting and thought provoking suggestions, queries raised during question-answer sessions. Dr. N. Sai Bhaskar Reddy of Geo-ecology Energy Organisation (GEO) a NGO, surfaced the problem of increase in frequency of urban floods due to poor catchment management and increase in storm water discharge. He showed his concern about lack of effective metrological monitoring stations in Hyderabad. Mr. Leo Saldanha of ESG India, Bangalore pointed out the significance of such inter-sectoral dialogue stressing on political representations in the same. He was of the opinion that people and political personalities should

be brought together to have an effective dialogue. Prof. O.M. Reddy from Osmania University shared his success story in conserving Ramanatpur lake through active mobilization of community, students and civil society organizations.

Mr. D. Narashima Reddy of Chetana organization was anxious in putting up the issue of corruption and land mafia and its associated damage to the water bodies. He said that “all lands are up for sale and all nalas, lakes are real estate properties”. One important issue that came up again and again in the discussion was multiplicity of the departments in dealing the water management. Such duplicity not only complicates the functions and ownerships of the water bodies but makes the common people clueless about whom and where to approach. Researchers, civil society organizations and academicians were of opinion that creating a new body will not solve the problem, it is therefore imperative to develop the capacity of the existing institutions particularly at the district level to deal with the issue of urban water management effectively.

Session was concluded with Dr. Anjal’s comments on urban water management and the role of research organizations, civil societies and government in dealing the issue effectively.

The pre-lunch session had the presentation of Mr. Ramakrishna and Mr. Rajkumar Singh of SOUL. Mr. Krishna highlighted their success in restoring Neerala Lake and Bachu Kunta. He informed the audience of the future restoration projects of Rangaiah Kunta, Chakali Cheruvu, Baram Kunta and Bheeramguda Cheruvu. He highlighted various challenges that are to be faced before and after restoration of lakes. Mr. Krishna pointed out the merits in conservation and protection of the lakes. Mr. Rajkumar Singh delved into the legal aspects involved in protecting the water bodies. He advised people to use the RTI Act, as information can be collected in a much faster and earlier way compared to the otherwise.

Post-lunch session saw three presentations of Dr. Tez Rajdan of Jheel Sanrakshan Samiti, Udaipur, Rajasthan; Mr. Leo Saldanha of ESG, Bangalore and Dr. Sumeet Saxseena of East-West Center, Honolulu. First two presentations interestingly brought out the effective role played by government and responsible citizenship in restoring the urban lakes while the presentation of Dr. Saxsena highlighted the health issues associated with peri-urban Vietnam.

Mr. Rajdan, who is working the field of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) & Integrated Lake Basin Management (ILBM) took on the session by stating that lakes were clean till 1947. He highlighted how dumping of sewage, effluents, MSW has led to the killing of the lakes. He explained why they had to chose the path of judicial intervention totally in desperation, when they failed to get the support of politicians, bureaucrats and technocrats in protecting their lakes from encroachers and polluters. The reasons mainly being - the multiplicity of government agencies (responsible for the lakes), resulted in a complete lack of accountability by any of them; each agency passed the buck to some other agency (possibly due to their connivance with destroyers of the lakes and because the situation promoted the dubious nexus between politicians, bureaucrats, technocrats, land-mafia, and other vested interests that threatened our lakes. He suggested that formation of a statutory body like Lake Development Authority at the local or the state level for conservation of lakes based on ILBM approach, and also for implementing the directions/verdicts of the courts would be a better idea. He advised that though judicial intervention is very necessary, but it should be the last resort. Finally, he concluded by saying that sustainable solutions lies in collective and synergic

actions of citizens, NGOs, Government, Industries & PRIs. Mr. Rajdan also showed an interesting documentary on how Ahar River is restored.

Mr. Leo Saldanha shared his experiences in protecting the lakes of Bangalore city and filing of PIL against privatization of lakes in the High Court of Karnataka which also paved for a direction to Government to prepare a comprehensive scheme for lakes protection.

Dr. Sumeet Saxseena presented a case from Vietnam. He highlighted the point how peri - urbanization brings wild animals, domestic animals and humans in closer contact leading to more opportunities for virus mutation and cross-species transmission. His presentation conveyed the benefits of integrated agriculture-aquaculture.

Major Kiran concluded the session by focussing on the role of technology, policy and active community participation in saving the urban and peri-urban water bodies.