



COVA - PUCAAR

A Study on Functioning of Ward Committees and Area Sabhas of GHMC: Issues and Recommendations

Prepared by:

Dr. Mazher Hussain

(Director COVA)

&

Mr. Sarat Asthana

With inputs from

**Dr. Amit Gilani, Mr. B.Murli Krishna, Mr. Habeebuddin,
Mr. Mohammed Turab, Mr. Naseer Siddiqui and Ms. Renuka,**

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A Study On

Functioning Of Ward Committees and Area Sabhas:

Issues and Recommendations

In accordance with the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India aimed at enabling the participation of citizens in governance through local bodies like the Panchayats and Municipalities / Municipal Corporations, The Government of Andhra Pradesh issued a G.O. on 20th February 2010 (G.O. Ms. 57). As per this GO, The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation was directed to immediately undertake steps to constitute Ward Committees and Area Sabhas in all the Wards under the GHMC.

Consequently, GHMC constituted Ward Committees for all the 150 Wards on 18 June 2010 and for all the Area Sabhas for the Wards on 14 October 2010.

Part I

Key Features of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees

- The most significant feature of this program is that there is no election, selection or nomination to enable a citizen to participate in an Area Sabha meeting. Any registered voter of an area is entitled to participate in the Area Sabha meeting.
- The Ward Committees are to be constituted by inducting representatives of RWA, NGOs, SHGs and prominent citizens of the Wards, thus in principle enabling socially active and concerned citizens to take part in the decision making processes for the development of the Wards concerned.
- At least 50 members of the area must be present to conduct the Area Sabha meeting.
- Meeting of all Area Sabhas must be held at least once in three months on dates already specified as follows:

Schedules for Area Sabha Meetings Suggested by GHMC:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| All Wards in South Zone | 01-06 th of the month once in three months. |
| All the Wards in North Zone | 07-12 th of the month once in three months. |
| All the Wards in West Zone | 13-18 th of the month once in three months. |
| All the Wards in East Zone | 19-24 th of the month once in three months. |
| All the Wards in Central Zone | 25-30 th of the month once in three months. |

- Minutes of the Decisions taken at the Area Sabha Meetings should be sent to Ward Committees for preparation of the Ward Development Plans.
- Officials concerned should submit Action Taken Reports on the decisions / recommendations of the Area Sabhas within 7 days of the meeting
- The Ward Committees should meet at least once in two months at a fixed place and at dates already specified as follows:

Schedules for Ward Committee Meetings Suggested by GHMC:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| All Wards in South Zone | 01-06 th day of every alternate month. |
| All Wards in North Zone | 07-12 th day of every alternate month. |
| All Wards in West Zone | 13-18 th day of every alternate month. |
| All Wards in East Zone | 19-24 th day of every alternate month. |
| All Wards in Central Zone | 25-30 th day of every alternate month. |

- Any registered voter of the Area can attend the Ward Committee meetings as an Observer.
- Thus the Ward Committees and Area Sabhas enable common citizens to participate in making plans and initiate development programs for their areas.
- The Ward Committees and Areas Sabhas are also empowered to monitor the execution of all works in their areas to ensure quality and transparency.

- Hence, as per this new system, The Corporator of the Ward has to work in consultation and collaboration with the voters of the area through the Area Sabhas and Ward Committee for planning and execution of works for the development of the Ward.

For an over view of the functions and responsibilities of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees please see Annexure I

(For more details of the composition, roles and powers of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees please see G.O.Ms No.57 MA & UD (UBS) or visit www.ghmc.gov.in/tender%20pdfs/DivisionOfWardsToAreas.pdf

Failure to Conduct Meetings of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees

However, it is observed that even though the Ward Committees were constituted nearly one and a half years back and the Area Sabhas one year back, in all 150 Wards of GHMC, their meetings are not being conducted as per stipulations. In some cases no meetings have been conducted at all in contravention of the rules and depriving the common citizens their rights and opportunity to take part in planning for the development of their areas.

In order to ensure that the Area Sabha and Ward Committee Meetings are conducted as per stipulations and that the common people are informed about the dates, timings and venues of the meetings, COVA and other civil society organisations made representations to The Mayor, Commissioner and other officials of GHMC urging them to ensure that the meetings are conducted regularly and the public is informed through newspaper advertisements and mobile publicity etc. In response the Commissioner issued one Memo and a Circular on 17.09.2011 directing the officials to ensure that the meetings are conducted as per schedule, all concerned officials attend the meetings, and public should be informed through newspaper advertisements and mobile Audio publicity.

In spite of these clear instructions by the Commissioner of GHMC, meetings of Areas Sabhas and Ward Committees are still not being conducted in most of the Wards and no publicity is being given in any Wards.

Part II

In order to explicate the reasons behind the non conduct of the meetings COVA undertook a Study with the following objectives:

1. To Ascertain the opinion of a cross section of Stake Holders regarding the relevance and utility of Ward Committees and Area Sabhas
2. To find out difficulties for conducting Areas Sabha and Ward Committee Meetings, if any, and to ascertain whether proper procedures are being followed where ever the meetings are being conducted.
3. To give suggestions and recommendations to ensure that Area Sabha and Ward Committee Meetings are organised regularly and effectively

Methodology:

Selection of Wards-

The following 5 Wards being represented by different political parties were selected:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Mehdipatnam- BJP | 2. Ghansi Bazaar- Congress |
| 3. Purnanapul- MIM | 4. Azampura- MBT |
| 5. Saleem Nagar- TDP | |

Stakeholders Interviewed:

The Following 12 stakeholders were identified for Interviews in each of the 5 Wards Selected:

1. Corporator
2. Ward Committee Members - Two
3. Area Sabha representatives- Two
4. Representatives of Civil Society (NGOs/RWA/ SHGs / Active Social Workers)- any two

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 5. Leaders of Opposition parties- Two | 6. Ward Secretaries- one |
| 7. Deputy Commissioners | 8. Zonal Commissioners |

Total number of stake Holders to be interviewed: 51

Total number of Stake Holders Interviewed: 45

Persons Interviewed

The persons interviewed are 5 corporators, 9 Ward Committee members, 8 Area Sabha representatives, 11 representatives of local NGO/CBO/RWA / social workers, 2 Ward Secretaries, 2 Deputy Commissioners, GHMC, one Zonal Commissioner were interviewed.

Interview Team

All interviews were conducted by 5 Teams of researchers comprising of 9 members drawn from Change Activists and COVA Staff.

Team Members from COVA: Dr. Amit Gilani, Mr. B.Murli Krishna, Mr. Habeebuddin, Dr.Mazher Hussain, Mr. Mohammed Turab, Mr. Naseer Siddiqui, , Ms. Renuka, Mr. Sarat Asthana

Preparation of Questionnaire:

Different questionnaires relevant to each of the Stakeholders were prepared. Questionnaire for Ward Committee Members is given as a Sample as Annexure II

Part III Findings of the Study

Desirability and Utility of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees

- All Area Sabha representatives, Ward Committee Members, members of Civil Society, leaders of opposition parties in the concerned Ward, Ward Secretaries, Dy. Commissioners and Zonal Commissioner expressed that Area Sabhas and Ward Committees are required to help grass root participation in planning for proper development of the Ward and ensuring proper implementation and transparency
- Many Area Sabha and Ward Committee members said that as the extent of the Area Sabhas and Wards are small, issues become easily reachable and as they know the local areas better solutions also become easier.
- One of the Ward Committee members stated that Ward Committees and Area Sabhas can enable easy and quick solutions as MLAs and even the Corporators cannot visit all the areas and locality to address the small issues and problems that occur routinely.
- But there were differing responses from Corporators. While the 3 of the Corporators interviewed favoured the system of Ward Committees and Area Sabhas, 2 Corporators expressed that these are not necessary and that the elected representatives themselves can do all that is required.

Vacancies in and Record of Meetings of Aare Sabhas and Ward Committees

- In Circle 4 there are 25 Wards and all the positions of Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives have not been filled and there are still 14 vacancies remaining as on 17th November 2011.
- The Posts of 3 Secretaries out of 14 Wards (that is 21%) are vacant. It is reported that one of the Ward Secretary is suspended and there have been no replacement for him.
- Out of 5 Wards studied, only 2 Ward Secretaries were available..
- In Circle 5 there are 14 Wards and as many as 29 positions of Area Sabha and Ward Committee members are still vacant. In Shahali Banda- all the 8 positions of Area Sabha are vacant and in Dhoolpet all 6 Area Sabha positions are vacant. In Ghansi Bazar, 5 positions out of 8 in the Area Sabha are still vacant. Many other Wards and Area Sabhas have similar stories.
- In Ghansi bazaar 2 out of 3 Area Sabha representatives nominated were not even aware that they are nominated as Area Sabha representatives. When shown his name and address in the list of Area Sabha representatives, one of them, Mr. Jai Prakash agreed that it is his name and address but he had neither applied nor is he aware that he is a member of the Area Sabha. Another member

Ram Swaroop Agarwal had applied but was also not aware that he has been selected.

- In 5 Wards studied the details of the Ward Committee meetings conducted (after the oath taking ceremony) as per the feedback from Ward Committee Members are as under:
 - o Azampura Ward No. of meetings held Nil
 - o Ghansi Bazar Ward No. of meetings held Nil
 - o Saleem Nagar ward No. of meetings held 1
 - o Purana Pul Ward No. of meetings held 2
 - o Mehdi patnam ward No. of meetings held 5-6

It is observed that wards where people are educated, holding high positions and the Civil society is active, relatively more Ward Committee and Area Sabha meetings are taking place.

Responses and suggestions of Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives regarding Ward Committees and Area Sabhas:

- Information about the Meetings is not being provided properly to all Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives. Some of them are being informed on phone about the meetings.
- Some are of the opinion that Ward Committee Meetings and Area Sabha meetings should be conducted on fixed date, time and venue.
- Every Ward Committee member is enthusiastic about the meetings. Most feel that regular meetings would empower them more.
- The agenda of the Ward Committee and Area Sabha Meetings is not being circulated in advance.
- In some instances where the Ward Committee meetings are convened, the Ward level officers are not attending the meetings as directed and hence no action is taken on the grievances expressed.
- Most said that only the oath taking meeting was held and no other meetings thereafter. However, some Corporators are claiming that some meetings have taken place. This needs to be varied from office records. It could also expose if any meetings were held without proper intimation to and involvement of people.
- Even Oath forms of the of all the Area Sabha and Ward Committee Members are not available with the Dy. Commissioners .
- Members of Ward Committees and Area Sabhas hold Corporators and Ward Secretaries responsible for not conducting the meetings.
- In one of the Wards (Mehdipatnam), people felt that constitution of Ward Committees is becoming an obstruction as they lost direct access to the government officials to redress their problems, which they were doing earlier.
- Due to lack of orientation and training, most Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives seem to take Area Sabha and /Ward Committee membership as a position of some power but are not aware of their functions and responsibilities

Demands:

- Most Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives are demanding that Appointment Letters and ID Cards should be given to them to enable them to call people to meetings and even officials ask for such identification.
- Information and forms of all government schemes should be given to Area Sabha and Ward Committee Members to enable them to share with the people.
- Some also stated that they should be given travel and phone reimbursement upto Rs. 1500 to 2000. Few even demanded that they should also be paid some salaries.
- Some demanded that they should also have powers to sign authorization of the work done by contractors
- The Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives should know the budget allocated to each Ward for carrying out works efficiently.
- There was also a demand for regular trainings to all Corporators, Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives to enable them to function effectively. However, they said that absolutely no training has been conducted so far.

Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives allege that they are being neglected by Corporators. They feel that the Corporators are afraid of them and take them as threats to their power and interests.

Responses and suggestions of Civil Society members regarding Ward Committees and Area Sabhas:

- Some of the NGOs had never heard of Area Sabha or Ward Committees and some of those who had heard had no idea about their constitution, composition, functions or powers. Some are not even aware that they are eligible to become members of the Area Sabhas or Ward committees by virtue of being members of civil society organizations.
- Those members of civil society who were aware of Ward Committees and Area Sabhas said that the Corporators selected their own friends and followers for the posts and ignored the active social workers.
- Members of Civil Society organisations demanded that orientation about the concept, constitution and functioning of Ward Committees and Area Sabhas should be given to all civil society organisations in twin cities and also to members of the public.
- There was a suggestion that Dy commissioners and Zonal commissioners should make surprise visit to the Meetings to ensure that they are conducted regularly and properly.

Varied responses and suggestions of members of opposition parties regarding Ward Committees and Area Sabhas:

- No work is being done in the Wards
- Waste of time, only discussion
- Due to widening of Municipal Limits, Area Sabhas and Ward Committees are very useful for development. Problem can be fixed.
- Public meeting for awareness should be conducted regularly

Responses and suggestions of officials regarding Ward Committees and Area Sabhas:

- The Secretaries incharge appointed by the GHMC for conducting the meetings have been changing very frequently in all the wards. Frequent transfers of officials and sudden priority assignment also contribute for improper planning to conduct meetings.
In case of transfer of any ward Secretaries, immediate replacement should be posted.
- Some Ward Secretaries are given charge of a number of wards and also have other regular duties. They are also called for a number of other meetings. Such multiple duties and assignments for officials is hindering concentration on Ward Committee and Area Sabha meetings
- Permanent meeting place with appropriate infrastructure and adequate budget should be provided for conducting Area Sabha Meetings
- Officials may take initiative but Corporators do not show interest or cooperation in calling for the meetings.
- Frequent meetings and participation of all departments should be ensured.
- An exclusive officer should be appointed as Ward Secretary dedicated for the Ward and entrusted with the responsibility for conducting all Areas Sabha and Ward Committee meetings and ensure follow up action.

Some officials are claiming that there is difficulty in organising meetings as the Time and date availabilities of the Corporators, officials and members are not matching. The problems increase when the Corporators and the members belong to different political parties.

Officials claim that no complaints are being received from public about non conduct of meetings. This shows that the members of the public are either not aware about Area Sabhas and Ward Committees or have to information about where to lodge complaints when meetings are not held.

New officials posted do not seem to have much idea about Area Sabhas and Ward Committees. All new officials should be given appropriate orientation and all officials should be given regular trainings.

Responses and suggestions of Corporators regarding Ward Committees and Area Sabhas:

- Some representatives are of the opinion that Ward Committees are not required and even without Ward Committees works are being done.
- Some Corporators stated that Ward Committees and Area Sabhas make no sense and there is no need for them.

- In one case, the Corporator did not respond but asked the Interviewer to meet the Floor Leader of his Party. The Floor Leader said that there is no need for Ward Committees or Area Sabhas and that that Corporators can do everything.
- There is also resentment that while Corporators have to work hard to get elected, the Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives are not elected but want to enjoy all perks and power.
- One corporator felt that some Area Sabha representatives and Ward Committee members are taking wrong advantage of their titles, hence did not favour this programme.
- Corporators also feel that the Ward Committee members are bypassing them and making illegal use of their position by printing letter pads and visiting cards.
- There are also allegations that some Ward Committee and Area Sabha representatives are taking bribes.
- Corporators are also unhappy with the stipulation for 50% signatures from Ward Committee members for development works
- Some Corporators feel that in the Ward Committee, their vote is equal to the vote of any other member. Hence they are reduced to becoming only one of the members of the Ward Committee.
- At least 50% of the revenue collected from the Wards to be spent in the Ward itself for improvement. This will also lead to decentralization and better mobilizing of taxes.

Difficulties in Conducting Meetings:

- Budget for conducting Area Sabha is not provided.
- There is no permanent place for Ward Committees and Area Sabhas
- Some feel that political rivalry between Ward Committee members and Corporators hinders conduct of meetings, hampers functioning and development of the Wards.
- Some Corporators said that there should be minimal transfers of officials, immediate postings should be made to ensure that there are no vacancies and to make sure proper conduct of meetings and achieve desired development
- Training to the Corporators, members of Ward Committees, Area Sabhas and officials is not provided. Only one training was given to the Corporators at head office after their election.

Findings of the Study

- A majority of people including the highly educated and socially active seem to be totally unaware of the Concept, constitution, functioning and powers of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees.
- Despite clear directions from the GHMC, no efforts are being made to provide proper communication to the ward and Area Sabha representatives
- There is good response by higher level officials at GHMC to any representations for proper conduct of Ward Committee and Area Sabha Meetings. In most cases, the officials have issued appropriate directives and circulars within a fortnight of the receipt of representations. However, there seem to be no implementation on the ground.
- There seems to be a clear lack of interest in the concept and functioning of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees on the part of Corporators and field level officials.
- The directives for publicity are not being followed in any ward.
- Some Circles report that no one claimed any reimbursement either for refreshments or newspaper ads. This means that contrary to any claims there may not have been any meetings of the Area Sabhas and Ward Committees in such Circles..

Lack of Follow up

- It is found that in very few wards meetings are convened but Minutes of meetings are not properly recorded.
- The minutes of meetings are not displayed on the notice board of the ward office and also on the GHMC website as stipulated.
- Action Taken reports are being filed in most cases as required.

Suggestions for publicity for awareness

All the stakeholders interviewed gave many suggestions for publicity for spreading awareness about the AS and WCs. Some of the suggestions received from different stakeholders are as follows:

- Mobile audio publicity using autos
- Posters, slides, booklets and handbills in different languages
- Newspaper advertisements and notifications.
- Door to door Campaigns
- Public meetings & Awareness sessions.
- Announcements in Masjids, temples and other places of worship
- Wall paintings
- Local tv channels
- Weekly updation of GHMC Website
- Monthly Newsletter of GHMC giving updates of all meetings conducted, development work initiated and meetings and plans for the coming months.

Recommendations of COVA

- Officials like Ward Secretaries, Dy. Commissioners and elected representatives of the Wards (Corporators), responsible to ensure proper functioning of the Ward Committees, Area Sabhas and development of the area as stipulated should be made accountable and action should be taken against them for dereliction of duty. At present no action whatsoever is being taken for not conducting the meetings as stipulated.
- Wide and continuous publicity should be give about the concept of Ward Committees and Areas Sabhas.-
- List of committee members, duties and functions of Area Sabhas and Ward Committees should be displayed in public places.
- The quality of the meetings should be improved.- Regular meetings on fixed times and date and venue should be organised. Agenda should be circulated 3 days in advance. All officials should be present and Minutes should be maintained and circulated. Action taken reports should be filed within 7 days.
- Date of next meet should be announced before concluding any meeting.
- The entire proceedings of the Area Sabhas and Ward Committees should be photographed to show attendance
- Invitation to media should be extended to cover meetings. TV Channels can be approached to give coverage of meetings
- NGO's should be involved in orienting as well as supervision in social audit etc.
- Resolutios should be pasted on notice boards as well as copies given to members who often claim ignorance about minutes and decisions.
- Most people are unaware that there is no need for selection/ election or nomination to participate in the meeting of the Area Sabhas and that any voter of the area can participate.
- It is unfortunate that GHMC seems to have failed to communicate the required information to the common people about the Area Sabhas and Ward Committees for whom these were conceived and constituted.
- If common people are properly oriented about Area Sabhas and Ward committees and their utility, then the main initiation for the meetings could come from the people themselves.
- Selection of Area Sabha and Ward Committees should be conducted in the areas and not in GHMC
- GHMC should recognize one best NGO in each ward and authorize to monitor functioning of the ward. This NGO shall be accountable to give periodical performance reports to the Commissioner GHMC.
- Members of the Ward Committees and Area Sabhas who do not attend three consecutive meetings without prior notice and valid reasons shall be disqualified from the membership. Commissioner GHMC shall fill such vacancies immediately nominating social activists from the respective ward who have clean image and reputation.
- Additional funds for the best 10 performing wards in governance should be awarded - Zone wise every year to encourage good governance.

Annexure-I

Functions of Area Sabha:- Area Sabha is entrusted with the following functions:-

- (i) To generate proposals and determine the priority of developmental programmes to be implemented in the area and forward the same to the Ward Committee;
- (ii) To identify the most eligible persons for beneficiary oriented schemes as per guidelines of the Government and prepare a list of beneficiaries in the order of priority and forward the same to the Ward Committee;
- (iii) To verify the eligibility of persons getting various kinds of welfare assistance from the Government such as pensions and subsidies and submit a report to the Ward Committee;
- (iv) To identify the deficiencies in water supply, sanitation and street lighting and to suggest remedial measures to the Ward Committee; and
- (v) To suggest the location of street lights, public taps, public wells and public toilets to the Ward Committee.

Functions of Ward Committee:-

(1) The Ward Committee shall perform the following functions as specified in sub-section (6) of section 8-A of the Act, namely:-

- (i) Supervision over
 - (a) Sanitation work and drainage maintenance
 - (b) Distribution of water supply
 - (c) Working of street lights
 - (d) Minor repair of roads
 - (e) Maintenance of markets
 - (f) Maintenance of parks and playgrounds
 - (g) Implementation of poverty alleviation programmes
- (ii) Monitoring the functioning of schools, maternity centers, dispensaries and health centers wherever they are under control of the Municipal Corporation.
- (iii) Facilitation in the collection of taxes and non-taxes.
- (iv) Preparation of list of beneficiaries for beneficiary oriented schemes, pensions and subsidies.
- (v) Prepare annual ward development plan.
- (vi) Map the ward infrastructure index.
- (vii) Preparation of inventory of municipal assets.
- (viii) Assistance in the implementation of all government schemes.
- (ix) Motivate and encourage the residents in the ward for construction of individual toilets under Integrated Low Cost Sanitation (ILCS).

Following ward level officers to attend the meetings of the Ward Committees concerned.

- (i) Bill collector of taxation section;
- (ii) Community organizer or project officer of ucd section;
- (iii) Section officer of town planning section;
- (iv) A.E of engineering section;
- (v) A.E of street light section;
- (vi) sanitary jawan / sanitary supervisor of sanitary section;
- (vii) Supervisor of entomology section;
- (viii) Supervisor of horticulture section.; and
- (ix) Ward level officer deputed from HMWW & SB and central DISCOM.

Preparation of Ward Development Plan:- After approval of the budget by the Corporation, the Commissioner or an officer authorized by the Commissioner shall send an intimation to the Ward Committees about the allocation of funds to them for the succeeding financial year. Based on the intimation received from the Commissioner, the Ward Committee shall prepare a Ward Development Plan giving priority for water supply and drainage / sewerage and solid waste management. The Development Plan shall be placed before the Ward Committee for its approval. After approval of the Ward Committee, the Secretary of the Ward Committee shall forward the Development Plan to the Commissioner for incorporation in the Annual Development Plan of the Corporation.

