

## **SOUTH ZONE CONFERENCE ON 'SMART CITIES MISSION: IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT OF CITIES'**

Tamil Nadu Regional Chapter of Institute of Town Planners, India organized the South Zone Conference from 16 to 17 November 2019 at Hotel Accord, Puducherry.

While inaugurating the conference, Thiru T. Djeamourthy, MLA and Chairman, Puducherry Planning Authority welcomed the delegates and participants to Puducherry and also gave highlights of the planning and development works undertaken by the Puducherry Planning Authority. With reference to the Smart City Mission, he mentioned that not only this program will rejuvenate our cities but will also upgrade facilities. Puducherry is one of the smart cities selected under the Mission. Earlier Rs. 130 crore were allocated and Rs. 60 crore were released for taking up eight projects against the identified 61 projects. However, to speed up and complete the work in time more funds are required.

Prof. Dr. D. S. Meshram, President, ITPI, in his address mentioned that as per guidelines of the 'Smart Cities Mission', smart is a designation given to city that incorporates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance quality and performance of urban services and utilities in order to reduce resource consumption, waste and overall costs. It is also underlined that urban planners ideally aim at developing the entire eco-system, which represents four pillars of comprehensive development namely institutional, physical, social and economic infrastructure. However, he lamented that in the overall process of planning and development of 'Smart Cities Mission' spatial planners are not involved. Even though the guidelines lay emphasis on comprehensive development of smart cities, the strategic components of area based development i.e. (i) City Improvement (Retrofitting) compressing 500 acres (ii) City Renewal (Redevelopment) comprising 50 acres (iii) City Extension (Green field development) over 250 acres, and (iv) Pan City initiatives, irrespective of the size, population and function of city, is not going to make the city smart. In fact a development plan or master plan is a comprehensive document prepared under an act, but 'Smart Cities Mission' is totally silent on this aspect. A strategy adopted appears to be creating islands of prosperity in the midst of poverty and slums and unauthorized constructions. He also underlined that Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a tool and cannot provide total solution for the comprehensive development of a city. Planning and development of a city needs to be seen in the setting of its region and not in isolation. He further brought into focus the fact that due to challenges and competition in the selection of a city for inclusion in the Mission, some cities get neglected which are in fact starving for funds and development. Therefore, cities requiring urgent development needs to be given priority in the Mission.

In the Inaugural Session welcome address was delivered by Shri Pradeep Kapoor, Secretary General, ITPI and a vote of thanks was extended by Shri S. R. Rajendhiran, Chairman, Tamil Nadu Regional Chapter, ITPI.

In the Technical Session – I, presentations were made by Shri Raj Cherubal, CEO, Chennai Smart City Ltd; Shri Mahesh Moroney, Deputy CEO, Nagpur Smart and Sustainable City Development Corporation Ltd; and Shri Lalit Bhati, Urban Planner, Auroville. This session was chaired by Prof. Dr. D. S. Meshram, President, ITPI.

In the Technical Session – II, the presentations were made by Dr. Manivannan, City Health Officer, Vellore from Vellore Smart City Ltd; and Shri Manick Deepan, Puducherry Smart City Ltd., and Shri K. Ravi Kumar Reddy, Secretary, Telangana Regional Chapter, ITPI.

In the Valedictory Session Smt. Kiran Bedi, Honourable, Lt. Governor, Puducherry was the Chief Guest. In her valedictory address, she noted that the basic aim of planning and development should be to improve the quality of life of all citizens. Narrating her experience as IG (Prisons), she stated that for introducing 'Yoga' in prison, initially there were no class rooms, and other infrastructure, which is required to be provided to improve the quality of life of prisoners. She also emphasized that plans should not be prepared hurriedly and half - heartedly, because if such plans are implemented, these will not serve the purpose for which they were prepared. She also indicated that planners should not follow short cut methods in planning. Every city has its own image and culture. For example, in Chandigarh introvert planning concept has been adopted, but if someone looks from the road one notices the drying of clothes in the balconies of the flats. Similarly, the location of important essential services like hospitals, schools, colleges, fire stations, police stations requires to be provided in the plan. In addition care should be taken to phase out the development keeping in view

availability of financial resources before taking up implementation. For example, water, provision of roads and electricity should be provided first, followed by other infrastructure. Land uses causing pollution should be located away from the residential areas and be provided with green buffers. Safety is another aspect, which should receive deep attention of planners and policy makers. She also highlighted the need to change the mind-sets of the various actors in the development of towns and cities. For example, developers generally throw debris on the road, creating problems for traffic and transportation. So, developers and builders are required to be sensitized along with citizens.

Shri K. Mahesh, IAS, Secretary Town and Country Planning and Housing, Government of Puducherry, who was Guest of Honour, in his address, mentioned that if master plan existed for a smart city, they would facilitate implementation of projects under the Mission rather than the projects and proposals and development of a town will take place in comprehensive manner. He has also underlined that having the Master Plan for a town is important but equally important is administrative and political will to implement and enforce the proposals of development plan.

Shri S. Sridharne, Convenor South Zone Conference, gave the welcome address, while Shri N. Ravikumar, Secretary, Tamil Nadu Regional Chapter read the recommendations. Shri Pradeep Kapoor, Secretary General ITPI extended a vote of thanks.

After detailed discussions and deliberations, the following recommendations emerged:

- A comprehensive plan integrating all the strategic components of smart city should be prepared in advance through participation of all stakeholders.
- A smart city should not be seen in isolation from its region, which calls for preparation of regional plan of each of the smart city identified under the Mission.
- To make the smart city sustainable, it is important to make the city, safe and healthy because nobody would like to live in a smart city, which is not safe and healthy.
- While planning of smart cities, citizen centric approach needs to be followed.
- To manage smart cities 'smart citizens' are important; but cities and towns comprises of both smart and not smart people. It is therefore important to obtain the participation of people who are not smart to ensure inclusive planning and development.
- As majority of cities are facing problems of flooding and water logging. Therefore, the area drainage plans should be prepared for all the smart cities.
- Focus on Information Communication Technology for improving infrastructure services and utilities through application of smart solutions is important. However, it is also important to provide basic infrastructure and facilities to citizens for making cities liveable.
- ICT cannot provide total solutions for planning and development as it is a tool to manage and achieve good governance.
- All the existing water bodies should be rejuvenated and interconnected and wherever possible, new water bodies should be created.
- Duct should be provided for laying service lines and underground infrastructure so that different agencies should not dig roads again and again for laying service lines.
- Environment friendly mode of mobility i.e. pedestrians and cyclists should be given overriding priority to other modes of transport.
- During retrofitting and redevelopment, experience shows that many people get displaced and are put at disadvantaged position. Therefore, proper measures should be taken to avoid such hardship.
- Under the Mission efforts should not be made to create islands of prosperity in the midst of poverty, slums, unauthorized constructions, etc. So we should take up comprehensive and integrated approach to planning.
- Local Area Plans should be prepared for taking up retrofitting and redevelopment projects. But the projects should be taken up under the four verticals of the Smart Cities Mission. But these four verticals should not be standalone but remain integrated.