Poor Air Quality in Cities Due to Lack of Coordination

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A survey on the deteriorating air quality in Smart Cities in Maharashtra has pointed out that **there is poor convergence between civic bodies and Smart City Corporations on air quality plans prepared under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and the Smart Cities Mission.** Parisar, a Punebased NGO, prepared the report after surveying six Smart Cities – Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Thane and Solapur.

Poor Air Quality in Smart Cities

To understand how the Smart Cities Mission has dealt with deteriorating air quality in cities, the **study looked at how the cities determined their base level (on a scale of 1-4), projects they proposed to improve air quality and finally the status of those projects.** The study used data from the smart city SPVs, and stakeholder consultations. As per the findings of the study, all cities have fitted air sensors under the mission, but **there is no clarity on how the data generated by these is and will be used by the city.**

While it is mandatory for each city to report on air quality in the proposal, there is **no logic as to why certain projects have been proposed and to what extent they would help improve air quality.** Poor convergence was found between the city AQ action plans made under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and the Smart Cities Mission. While it was announced that the mission would be used to leverage the NCAP in the 43 nonattainment smart cities, the analysis shows this goal has not been achieved, the report stated.

The report said **the project structurally lacked the capacity to fundamentally conceive and execute smart solutions.** They gave the impression of being **consultant driven and often**

disconnected from the urban local body. They did not appear to have the capabilities to address multisectoral problems like air pollution. The **focus of air quality management in these cities was largely on displaying air quality as a single numerical entity and a colour code, setting up low cost monitors and generating data.**

The reports singled out Pune as a glaring example of non convergence between the local civic body and the Smart City Corporation. When the Pune Smart City Corporation decided to install low cost monitors, **neither the civic body nor the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology was consulted at the time of purchase or setting up of these monitors.** As a result, as many as 50 low cost monitors lie severely underutilised because there is no authority who can ratify their data.

While Smart Cities were supposed to bring data and transparency to urban development projects, there seemed to be no clarity on what data was being collected, where it resided or how citizens could access it to help improve the functionality of the city. In fact, the report found no systems in place. Procuring even basic information boiled down to personal visits and the need to resort to Right to Information applications, which generally drew a blank. During the survey, several people attested to the lack of information available to the public and pointed out the opacity in which Smart City Corporations operated.