

**An Analysis of the Functioning of Ward Committees in Bangalore
From July 2003 to December 2006
(Through the eye of the Right to Information Act)**

CIVIC Bangalore

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1. Introduction

Gram Swaraj – was not just an illusory idea of the Mahatma. It was his firm conviction that villages could become self-reliant and that Gram Panchayats would become genuine institutions of local self-government. This was the spirit of decentralization which paved the way for the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (CA) in December 1992 (otherwise known as the Panchayat Raj and Nagarapalika Acts) which recognized the panchayats and nagarapalikas as legitimate third tiers of government and gave them Constitutional validity and permanence.

In the Nagarapalika Act, ward committees are central to large municipal corporations CIVIC did a study in 2004 of the functioning of the ward committees that existed between July 2000 and November 2001 in Bangalore as part of a comparative study of four States that was done by the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi. The study was released on 15 April 2006. This report is an updation of the functioning of the next batch of wards committees from July 2003 to 2006.

2. Background

Despite the Panchayat & Nagarapalika Acts and even 60 years after Independence and governance reforms, decisions about local affairs are still being taken at higher levels, leading to centralisation and lack of control of communities over decision-making over their own resources, development choices and livelihoods.

In urban areas too, the lack of control of urban communities over their own affairs is becoming even more marked and the dream of 'Nagara Swaraj' even more distant. Urban citizens and communities, including their municipal representatives, are having less and less say in the decisions regarding mega infrastructure projects, loans, conditionalities, privatization of basic services, et al, that are driving cities. At the community level, the distant government's inability to look into and solve every locality's problems has resulted in wards getting converted to stinking spaces, full of over-flowing dust-bins, plastic-choked drains and vacant sites, pot-holed roads, pavements with gaping holes, howling stray dogs, et al.

The city/ward-dwellers are becoming increasingly alienated from their city/wards, as their role in the decision-making, planning and development of their areas is almost non-existent. Decisions about the cities are being taken in a top-down manner by a distant and anonymous administration. The city dweller doesn't know where to go, whom to meet or which number to call to solve his/her problems.

Decentralisation, through the 74th CA, and in large municipal corporations through the formation of ward committees, was expected to give back control to local communities over their own planning and development, local decision-making, also ensure proximity, transparency and accountability of the local government to its citizens. Implementation of the Nagarapalika Act in the right spirit would give the city dweller a sense of community and identity with his area and motivate him, and provide him a platform, to participate actively in local governance and development.

3. CIVIC study of the ward committees (July 2000 and November 2001).

Ward committees were formed as mandated in the 74th CA in Bangalore in 1999. This was a progressive step taken by the government and Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BMP) towards decentralising the functions and bringing administration closer to the masses. However, wards committees have not been formed in any of the municipal corporations other than that of Bangalore, even after 12 years of the legislation in Karnataka, which is a gross violation of Constitutional provisions. In Bangalore, wards committees were functional for a short period between April 1999 and November 2001. CIVIC conducted a study of their functioning in 2003 for the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi.

The findings

3.1 Constitution

The wards committee is not a fully elected body like the grama panchayat. The State government nominates the seven members on the wards committees. This pits the elected councillors against the nominated members. The elected municipal councillors represent about 40,000 to 50,000 population each in their individual wards making proximity and accountability a far dream as compared to the grama panchayats where there is one elected representative for every 500 persons and one grama panchayat for every 5000-7000 persons.

3-4 wards are combined to constitute one wards committee and each wards committee represents a population of 1 – 1.5 lakh which actually increases the distance between the people and their representatives. The delimitation of wards and wards committee areas is most arbitrary with neither the area nor the population being fixed bases for the delimitation. The procedure of nomination is non-transparent and wholly undemocratic. Nomination allows the State government to extend its control over wards committees through the back door which is against the idea of local self-governance.

3.2 Functioning

Internal squabbles were there between elected councillors belonging to different parties and between elected and nominated members. There was non-observance of rules regarding the regular holding of meetings and / or weak rules regarding procedures to be adopted for decentralising functions. No institutionalised forum for interaction with people, such as the 'ward sabha' for citizens' interface with the wards committees, for dissemination of information, for grievance redressal, etc. or a systematic, institutionalised procedure through which the people could participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring and social auditing of works for the ward

and for identifying beneficiaries of schemes. Bills and vouchers were not thrown open for public scrutiny.

4. Status Quo (July 2003 to December 2006)

After the Bangalore municipal corporation elections of November 2001, fresh wards committees were formed only in July 2003, after a delay of more than two and a half years. This update sheds light on the functioning of these wards committees from July 2003 to December 2006.

4.1 Methodology

With the limitation of personnel, travel, time and availability of officials, it was felt best to gather the required information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Applications were filed under RTI with every PIO (in this case the Assistant Revenue Officer) of the 100 Wards grouped into 30 Ranges (30 ward committees).

Each application sought the following information since July 2003:

- Number of wards under the ward committee area
- Number of meetings held since July 2003
- Minutes of the meetings
- Number of Councillors (elected representatives) that attended the last 3 meetings.
- Number of nominated members (nominated by the State Government) that attended the last 3 meetings
- Number of nominated NGOs that attended the last 3 meetings
- Number of works sanctioned
- Amount spent on the works

The data was collected, categorised, compiled and interpreted. Of the 30 ward committees' information received through the RTI, only 18 were found to be adequate and hence the analysis was based on this sample (60% of ward committees and 60 of 100 wards).

4.2 Findings

The table below is compiled from the data that was obtained from the ward offices/zonal offices under RTI. It is reflective of the functioning of the ward committees in a limited way given the fact that not an extensive field survey was done but only limited information was sought. There were no interviews with stakeholders. However the figures do give a fair idea, as they are precise, indicative in nature and culled from authentic documents – the minutes of meetings. The following table reflects the performance of these committees in a nutshell.

Functioning of 18 ward committees from July 2003 to December 2006

Name of Range (One ward committee per range)	Ward Nos	No. of meetings from	Attendance for the last 3 meetings				No of Works taken Up	Amount spent on works
			July 2003					
			Councillors	Nominated Members	Officials	Total		
Yeshwantpur	1,2,3	1	3	7	2	12	0	0
Sanjaynagar	4,100	1	2	5	1	8	0	0
	5,6,7	13	0	2	4	6	0	0
Malleswaram			0	2	2	4	0	0
			0	2	6	8	0	0
Rajajinagar	15,16,19,20	NA	2	6	10	18	0	0
			2	3	11	16	0	0
			1	4	10	15	0	0
Srirammandira	17,18,21,22	Not conducted any meetings						
Gandhinagara	24,25,26,27	NA	2	2	12	16	0	0
			2	2	14	18	0	0
			0	2	20	22	0	0
Chikpet	28,29,30	10	1	7	1	9	0	0
			3	7	1	11	0	0
			3	7	1	11	0	0
Binnypet	31,32,33,34	7	1	7	1	9	0	0
			0	1	1	2	0	0
			2	4	2	8	0	0
Govindarajanagara	35,36,37,38	2	2	7	1	10	0	0
			3	7	1	11	0	0
Chandrabadavaney	39,40,41	Not conducted any Meeting						
Basavanagudi	49,50,51	20	3	7	0	10	0	0
			1	6	8	15	0	0
			2	7	0	9	0	0
Hanumanthnagar	52,53,54	NA	3	6	15	24	Rs1 50000	

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			3	7	7	17	comes for the work but not utilised and refund to BBMP.	
Padmanabhanagar	55,56	1	1	4	1	6	0	0
Hombeygowdanagar	61,62,63	2	5	1	8	0	0	2
			5	1	8	0	0	1
			6	1	8	0	0	
Madivala	64,65	3	1	1	10	12	0	0
			2	1	8	11	0	0
			2	2	8	12	0	0
Koramangala	67,68,69	2	2	6	3	11	0	0
			2	5	5	12	0	0
Shanthinagar	70,71,76	12	0	4	8	12	0	0
			0	6	6	12	0	0
			0	5	13	18	0	0
Jeevanbheemanagara	72,73,74,75	3	0	7	4	11	0	0
			0	6	2	8	0	0
			0	5	4	9	0	0
Bharthinagar	80,81,82	1	0	7	1	8	0	0
Sarvanjananagara	85,86,87,89	Information not available						
Actual Total		78	55	192	207	530	0	0
Mandated Total		450	180	378	-	-	-	54 lacs
Realised (%)		17.33	30.55	50.79	-	-	0	0

4.3 Inference

From the table and minutes the following observations can be made:

- Ward committees rarely held their monthly meetings. They met on an average a mere 17.33% times in the last 30 months. Exceptions were Basavangudi and Malleshwaram ward committees, which met 20 and 13 times respectively out of supposed 30 times each. A point of interest is that in Malleshwaram the Councillors and members never took part in any meetings. In three ranges there were no meetings conducted at all, namely, Chandra Badavane and Sriramamandira.

- Highest attendance at a meeting was recorded in Hanumanthnagar at 24 where all the 3 councillors, 6 nominated members and 15 officials took part. However there were only two meetings conducted here in 30 months.

- The lowest attendance recorded was at 4, from Malleshwaram where of 4 two were officials and two were nominated members.

- Councillors hardly participated. On average, a mere 30.55% Councillors turned up for each meeting.

- There was recognisable participation of nominated members. On average, 50.79% turned up for each meeting. On all occasions in the last three meetings in Chickpet all members were present. Point to note is that all Councillors were there but just one officer each time.

- Equally abysmal is the overall participation of officials. 207 officials took part in 78 meetings that were held with an average of 2.65 per meeting. A range consists on an average of 3 wards and hence less than one official represented one ward.

- There was no work taken up, whatsoever, be it repairs, maintenance or developmental.

- No money was spent.

4.4 Conclusions

From the figures, ultimately the objective of decentralisation is questioned. If the ward committees cannot take up any work, supervise or spend any budget for the development, what is the virtue of their existence? Should they be scrapped? Or should they be put to exercise in right earnest with all the support processes.

It is evident from the data that, ultimately, decentralisation became a mere exercise for the government to please itself and never a process close to and dear to citizens. The committees became dysfunctional and withered away from their responsibilities. The table is reflective of how the ward committees have functioned over the last three years. Clearly the data show all is not well with their functioning and there is a lot that needs to be done to make them more responsive, representative, transparent and accountable.

Moreover, the area had one legitimate people's representative in the Councillor who reigned supreme. He sanctioned all the ward works and the authorities took instructions from him. It became a tussle between the nominated members and the councillors as to who the real representatives of the people were and in the end it was the councillors who won. The councillor had the people behind him, the administration and authorities backing him and the funds to boot.

The number of meetings mirrors the internal conflicts and lack of rapport among the members. The conflict of power sharing between elected representatives and nominated representatives came to the fore. The elected members, especially, simply did not turn up for any of the meetings or tried to subvert functions of the committee itself. Since the non-elected members were chosen through political nominations, citizens were alienated from the committee.

Nor did the committees have enough powers to perform any worthwhile function. By withholding authority, the government built in non-accountability into the committee. Limited functions, functionaries and funds tied down the committees. This made them toothless tigers. No committee took up any development work though they were given powers to sanction works for an amount, though little, of rupees one lakh. Money that was supposed to have been utilised to serve people and which was derived from people went unspent. The performance of the committees has come down when compared with the last study of the ward committees (July 2000 to November 2001). Though the intentions were good the process was flawed with innumerable pitfalls.

Therefore it becomes necessary more than ever that the recommendations of CIVIC be adopted to make the ward committee's representative, responsible, efficient and productive units rather than showpieces. One ward committee per ward, members directly elected from the ward, and sufficient funds for their functioning would bring in a more committed entity.

In a nutshell, the setting up of ward committees was a right step in the right direction, but where it was supposed to accomplish 100 steps, only a couple of steps were put forward. There is a lot more to accomplish and we need to keep the concerned engaged to accomplish the remaining steps and more as the demands keep changing too.

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