

Towards Making Governance People Centric in Kochi

For Consideration of the
Newly Elected council of Kochi Corporation

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Centre for Socio-economic & Environmental Studies (CSES)

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The Centre for Socio-economic and Environmental Studies (CSES), Kochi has been actively involved in social research since its establishment in 1996. Based on the experience of the CSES in conducting research for the Government of Kerala, the Central Government and several international organisations and research institutions, following suggestions are submitted for consideration to the newly elected Council of Kochi Municipal Corporation (KMC). Recommendations for making governance in Kochi people centric is organised into three themes: improve service delivery, create an inclusive city and develop and maintain public spaces.

I. Improve Service Delivery

CSES was involved to provide research support to the Modernising Government Programme and the Kerala Local Government Service Delivery Project and recently to the Fourth Administrative Reforms Commission. Insights from our studies have shown that there is immense scope for the local governments to improve service delivery. It is a welcome measure that the newly elected Council envisages implementing e-governance in the Corporation at the earliest through the integration of the Corporation systems with the IKM software, the Integrated Local Government Management System (ILGMS). Although these are steps in the right direction, there exist several avenues to improve the service delivery of KMC. Suggestion for improvement is noted separately under three heads—services provided by the Corporation Office, improving civic amenities and strengthen transferred institutions.

Kochi Corporation may develop a service delivery policy to ensure accountability and transparency in urban governance and service delivery. The policy should cover not only the direct services administered by the corporation office but also those from the transferred institutions managed by the Coporation.

a. Services Provided by the Corporation Office

1. Development of Service Standards

It is important to specify service standards to ensure efficient service delivery. The framing of citizen charter and the implementation of the Right to Services (RTS) Act are major milestones towards improving service delivery and making government services people centric. Though the RTS has prescribed minimum standards, it is possible or expected of the LSGIs to improve on the same and deliver the services within a much lesser timeframe. It is also important to publish the same in the citizen charter, review service delivery and keep improving. However, it is

observed that the time norms followed in KMC are not in line with the RTS. It needs to be streamlined immediately and improved through systemic changes.

Visits to other LSGIs with successful models of service delivery and monitoring could be organised to study and implement the same in KMC, with suitable modifications. To clear the backlog, a one week campaign such cases should be organised initially.

Before setting new service standards, KMC shall make an assessment of the processes and procedures involved in delivering different services. Based on such an assessment, KMC has to revise the system to make it more efficient.

2. Monitoring Performance in Service Delivery

Performance indicators could be developed to review service delivery and ensure efficiency. Indicators could capture dimensions like services provided to citizens within the prescribed time frame, service provided on the day requests were made, etc. It is also important to ensure transparency in the system for service standards. Performance of Corporation on these standards need to be regularly tabulated and displayed in the office and website of the KMC as a measure of competence. Such a dashboard would increase staff productivity and be used as a ready reckoner for performance assessment of KMC office.

Indicators on performance need to be reviewed every month by the Council. When service is not delivered as per standards, the reasons shall be recorded and reported to the higher authorities without ambiguity. An appellate authority could be created within the Corporation to be approached by the citizens/applicants if the service is not delivered on time. A committee of councillors could be constituted to monitor the service delivery of the Corporation

3. Publication of Performance Reports

The annual reports published by the KMC usually has details about the sources of funds and the allocation, utilisation and expenditure of funds across sectors and projects. The inclusion of the performance of the KMC in various domains including service delivery from the offices of the KMC including its transferred institutions, with details such as the number of services delivered, service standards met, etc. would also be a step towards ensuring efficiency, accountability, and transparency. This would also help create better awareness among the citizens about the service standards and empower them to demand service delivery improvements.

4. Online Delivery of Services

Right from implementing new systems, KMC should ensure that online delivery of services is not restricted to a few services, such as registration and issue of civic certificates, as is the case with other LSGIs. Option for online service should be provided to all services such as D&O Licenses, building permits, etc. To issue building permits, KMC could adopt the *Suvega* online building permit system implemented in Kozhikode Municipal Corporation, with necessary improvements and modifications required in the Kochi context. Similarly, e-payment facilities should be available across all payment formats such as debit and credit cards, net banking and e-wallets and provision to pay all services and taxes, including professional tax.

5. Revamping of KMC Website

There should also be a complete revamp of the Corporation Website. New website should have features to facilitate citizens' access to services offered by KMC, contact details of elected representatives, office functionaries, community workers (ASHA and Anganwadi workers) and information on transferred institutions under the management of the KMC such as Krishibhavan, Matsyabhavan, Dairy units, schools, health care facilities, etc. The website could also be GIS enabled and interactive, wherein citizens can access information and contact details of representatives, officials and community workers in a particular division by clicking on the same in the map available in the website.

6. Information Dissemination Systems

The ease with which citizens can access the required information regarding services is the mark of an efficient government. Currently, there is no proper enquiry system in the KMC. Modes of information dissemination at the disposal of the KMC – website, enquiry counters, community level functionaries, elected representatives, residents' associations, etc. – need to be integrated and streamlined. There should also be mechanisms to regularly update the people about the norms related to services provided by the Corporation and institutions under the management of KMC. The KMC should effectively use social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., to broadcast information to targeted groups and citizens in general.

7. Update on Status of Service

Information on the status of application submitted to KMC should be readily made available at the click of a key or by a phone call so that applicants do not have to make repeated visits to the Corporation office. It could be done using automated or chatbot systems to send messages to the applicant's mobile number. This should be a key feature of the smart city mobile application being developed. There have been

such successful interventions elsewhere, such as in *Aymanam Grama Panchayat*. Reducing footfall merely for the enquiry would improve staff productivity and access of citizen to staff/amenities in the Corporation office.

8. Make KMC Office Citizen Friendly

The layout of the KMC's office needs to be made citizen friendly. It is currently a gargantuan building that citizens find overwhelming to navigate across sections. The new Corporation complex expected to be completed soon should have proper marking and signages suitable for different citizens' categories. It should have a waiting lobby with sufficient seating and writing facilities, drinking water, information display, TV, etc. and a token system wherein citizens are directed to the section when their turn comes. It is also known that citizens often depend on middlemen to avoid or circumvent coming to the Corporation office, due to the hassles. A more citizen friendly behaviour from the staff and designated staff at various points with "May I Help You?" signages would help the citizens. The KMC office staff also need to be given regular training in customer service and customer relationship management. Regular feedback on service delivery, including the staff's behaviour, could be collected from citizens in printed forms and emoji tablets placed at strategic exit points. The feedback received should be regularly reviewed by the Council, and corrective measures are taken.

9. Enhance Services Delivered by Zonal Offices

Apart from the main office of KMC, there is a regional office in West Kochi and other zonal offices. However, these offices delivery limited services, such as collecting property tax and professional tax. Further decentralised and localised delivery of services of the KMC would be extremely beneficial to the citizens.

b. Strengthening Civic Amenities

Regarding civic amenities, dissatisfaction among citizens is mainly observed in road maintenance, waste management and waterlogging. As an extensive programme is already underway to resolve waterlogging in the city, suggestions are restricted to improve road infrastructure and waste management.

1. Improve Road Infrastructure

- The Corporation should have a road development policy. A status report should be prepared for road development and maintenance before the new Council undertake any new road works. Priority should be set up in road development to identify development and maintenance of major roads. Yearly targets should be fixed and it should be ensured that all major roads are properly maintained in the first year itself. Instead of going for division-wise allotment of road development works, the work shall be initiated based on priority. If a road is

identified for development, the entire stretch shall be developed rather than doing it in patches as has been done in the past.

- All major road works should be undertaken with a five year maintenance contract. For other roads, the road maintenance fund shall be utilised for filling the potholes as and when it occurs. There should be a provision for citizens to report on potholes and poorly maintained roads.
- All roads developed during the next five years should have display boards in which the Corporation should be able to proudly announce that "This road is maintained by Kochi Corporation". This will also reduce the confusion among the public regarding the roads maintained by the Corporation and those maintained by other agencies such as State PWD, NHAI and KML.
- In the case of roads built and managed by KMC, the Corporation should prepare an annual road construction and maintenance calendar and share it with other departments and agencies viz. PWD, Water Authority, Electricity department, BSNL etc. beforehand. Such planning would help better integrate works among departments so that wastage of public resources does not occur as is often seen when newly constructed/ maintained roads are dug up by other departments for works such as laying of pipes and cables. It should also be ensured that the permission for digging is displayed at the site so that citizens can become aware that digging is done with necessary permission.
- Walkability or pedestrian friendliness of Kochi needs to be improved in a phased and prioritised manner. A walkability audit shall be conducted to identify locations where electric and telephone posts are creating obstructions and where drainage slabs and tiles are not fixed properly, thus making it dangerous for pedestrians.

2. Improve Waste Management

A few suggestions to improve the waste management system in the city are noted below:

- The working condition of sanitation workers needs to be improved. Vehicles used for the collection of wastes including handcarts and lorries, need to be upgraded and covered. The workers also must be regularly provided with safety gloves and personal protection equipment.
- It is observed that there are spots in public areas wherein collected waste is sorted and loaded into the lorry, which then become dumping grounds. Enclosed compounds should be identified and set up as localised waste collection centres. The effective functioning of Haritha Karma Sena under the umbrella of Haritham Mission and Kudumbashree Mission in many GPs, are models that could be adapted and implemented.

- Strengthening ward-level sanitation committees with improved citizens' involvement is also required to ensure efficient waste management, including regular cleaning of drains. Regular inspection of sites where waste is collected and sorted and public markets in the division should be undertaken by members of the sanitation committees and reported to the Council. The Council shall conduct a periodic review of these reports, and take required actions.

c. Strengthen Transferred Institutions

1. There is an urgent need to develop minimum standards in service delivered by the transferred institutions and improving their infrastructure. There are several transferred institutions under the management of the KMC such as schools, anganwadis, health care institutions, offices of other line departments, etc. It is observed that there is a wide difference in the infrastructure and facilities available in different institutions of the same category. The Corporation may ensure that a pre-fixed set of essential infrastructure and facilities are available in all transferred institutions. An assessment of the existing infrastructure and facilities in all transferred institutions shall be undertaken before fixing the standards. Priority shall be given in the first two years in ensuring such facilities. The possibility of mobilising CSR funds may be explored.
2. For instance, more than 100 Anganwadis in the Corporation limit have a different quality in services and infrastructure. One major problem with the Anganwadis is the absence of sufficient space and facilities for indoor and outdoor activities. As has been done by the Delhi government, possibilities of developing clusters of Anganwadis could be considered where 3-4 Anganwadi's are run in the same premise, and the facilities and human resources are shared. The Corporation can provide better infrastructure and facilities in the cluster. The Corporation can also arrange transportation of children.
3. One of the major components of ICDS is to provide nutrition to children and other beneficiaries. While in houses, we have diversity in the menu, in most Anganwadi's same food is served on most days. The Corporation may consider providing different food on different days. There should be a consensus on items to be included in the menu. It is also important to ensure diversity in the menu at the schools as well. In the case of dispensaries, across all streams of medicines, a minimum level of facilities according to the footfall must be made available.

II. Creating an Inclusive City

Kochi Corporation should work with a long term objective of transforming Kochi into an inclusive city – which values all people and their needs, equally. For a city to become inclusive, it is important to offer equal opportunities to different sections of its population. Some suggestions to transform Kochi into an inclusive city are provided, focusing on women, differently-abled, elderly and migrants.

a. Women Friendly City

1. Need assessment of women belonging to different sections of the society is the first step to redesign Kochi into a women-friendly city. The Corporation can initiate consultations with women to understand their views, needs and identify issues. Based on the assessment, the Corporation can develop a gender policy. Academicians and activists working in women and gender should be involved in these efforts.
2. Analyse Gender Budgeting in Kochi, to understand how the budget for women including the women component plan are prepared and utilised.
3. Constitute a Gender Equality Committee to prepare a road map to increase women's participation in local governance, consultations and decision making. Hold meetings at times convenient to women and also make use of online platforms. Improve relationship with organisations working on women's rights.
4. Conduct consultations on gender-sensitive planning and service delivery for the Corporation.
5. Gender sensitisation training should be organised for the corporation staff and elected representatives to foster gender awareness and build a common understanding of gender issues. Such capacity building training may be organised regularly to ensure gender-sensitive planning and service delivery.
6. Make it mandatory to prepare Gender Sensitivity Report, every year by all institutions managed by the Corporation. The Report should document targeted milestones to attain gender friendliness by institutions and progress made every year.
7. Conduct safety audits for women to identify vulnerable spots in the city. Opinion/experience of women from different walks of life- employees, elected representatives, urban planners, journalists, lawyers, homemakers and representatives of women's organisations, police should be included in such social audits.
8. Apart from immense difficulties in finding short term accommodation, single women find it difficult to access long-term accommodation. Mechanisms could be devised to list safe short term and long term accommodation available for women, to make them welcome to the city.

9. Study issues faced by women who are required to transit during late evening or at night.
10. Considering that Kochi offers vast employment opportunities, an effort should be made to start more childcare centres to encourage women employment. It is important also to regulate and monitor the functioning of childcare centres. Starting daycare centres in coordination with Kudumbashree could also be considered.

b. Sensitive to Requirements of Disadvantaged Groups

1. To make Kochi friendly to people with disabilities and elderly, it is important to ensure that government offices, public transport and public spaces in the city are physically accessible to them. This would mean providing easy access to buildings, public spaces in terms of access of wheelchair, provision of handrails, lifts and staff to assist differently-abled and elderly.
2. To make various services of the KMC accessible to differently-abled, information/booklets in sign/ braille/audio format shall be made available. The website of the KMC as well as the mobile application being developed shall be made differently-abled friendly.
3. Set up a toll-free number in the KMC to facilitate easy access of services delivered by the Corporation to differently-abled/elderly. The staff handling these calls shall be trained to be sensitive, polite and empathetic.
4. While the shift to e-governance is essential to improve service delivery speed, it should not be at the expense of delayed delivery, say for disadvantaged population groups like elderly, who are likely to be less technology savvy. Doorstep delivery of services, with community level workers' involvement, could also be considered for elderly and differently abled citizens.
5. With a large influx of migrants into Kochi for work, education, and tourism, it is essential to revisit our city's existing mobility pattern to make it more commuter-friendly. For instance, the destination points in buses are currently written in Malayalam, hindering the easy mobility of non-Malayalis in and around the city. Adopting a numbering system for city buses, displaying the number of details at each bus-stop, and integrating the numbering system into the google map platform can improve bus commuters' mobility.
6. Considering the huge concentration of interstate migrant workers, including single women in the KMC, effort should be made to set up migrant facilitation centres/kiosks to cater to their needs.

III. Development & Maintenance of Public Spaces

Inadequacy of public spaces, appealing for different population groups, is a drawback of Kochi, a city that claims to be multicultural. Some suggestions to identify, develop and enhance the appeal of public spaces is provided here.

1. CSES has conducted a survey of a sample of parks and public spaces in the past. It was found that many of them are in deplorable condition and therefore not accessed by the citizens. Condition of the existing public places should be assessed. Development of a system to maintain the public places (new and existing) can be included in the annual plan of KMC. Strategies for developing public spaces should be made in a participatory manner, after incorporating the local place's specificities. Depending on the location, public spaces could be designed as multi-functional centres with exhibition places, library, performance centres, coffee shops etc.
2. Mapping of places suitable for developing future public places may be done immediately. GIS can be used for this.
3. The Corporation may consider entrusting the management and maintenance of public spaces to the local community. Involving different local stakeholders such as clubs, trade unions, residents' associations, Kudumbashree units, etc. for the regular maintenance and upkeep of the public places may be effective and improve accountability. Elected representative of the division should have a key role in its management.
4. Given the space constraints and the need to have regular footfalls, the neighbourhood public spaces (unlike big spaces like Subhash Bose Park) should have provision for multiple activities as being done in Changampuzha Park in Edappally.
5. While developing public spaces, the focus should be to make them accessible for different population groups. Conscious efforts need to be taken to reduce the gender disparities in utilising public spaces and sports activities engaged by boys and girls. Sports training can be imparted to girls under the leadership of the Corporation.
6. Mapping unsafe public spaces with poor visibility and low levels of public safety can be undertaken with modern technology such as GIS and an action plan formulated to make these spaces safe.
7. Recreation spaces for women and elderly should be a sure focus.
8. The focus should also be on creating cultural spaces, that could showcase Kerala's rich tradition in arts and crafts. Public spaces like *Dilli Haat* in Delhi or *Chokhi Dhani* in Rajasthan that attract tourists and locals could be considered as models. Food stalls could be set up in cooperation with Kudumbashree or local restaurants that could present Kerala's unique food tradition.