“BATF: A PARTNERSHIP WITH PROMISE?”

*The Fourth Annual Public Affairs Lecture*

NANDAN M. NILEKANI

The Fourth Annual Public Affairs Lecture was delivered on August 9, 2003 by Mr. Nandan M. Nilekani, CEO, President and Managing Director, Infosys Technologies Ltd & Chairperson, Bangalore Agenda Task Force in Bangalore.
ABOUT THE SPEAKER

MR. NANDAN NILEKANI

As Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer of Infosys, one of India’s most admired companies, Nandan Nilekani is perhaps corporate India’s best-known figures. A key player in several Indian IT initiatives, he co-founded the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM). He is on the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEB), and the London Business School’s Asia-Pacific Regional Advisory Board.

Mr. Nilekani has been involved in various initiatives of the central and state governments. He is the Chairman of the Government of India’s IT Task Force for the power sector and the Chairman of the Bangalore Agenda Task Force set up by the Government of Karnataka. He is also a member of the steering committee, on communications and information for the formulation of the tenth Five Year Plan, of the Government of India’s Planning Commission. In addition, Mr. Nilekani has served as a member of the subcommittee of the Securities and Exchange Board of India that dealt with issues related to insider trading, and as a member of the Reserve Bank of India’s Advisory Group on corporate governance.

Mr. Nilekani is the recipient of several awards including the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay’s distinguished Alumnus’ award in 1999. In addition, Mr. Nilekani, along with Infosys Chairman Mr. N. R. Narayana Murthy, received the Fortune magazine’s ‘Asia’s Businessmen of the Year 2003’ award. He was named among the ‘World’s most respected business leaders’ in 2002, according to a global survey by Financial Times and PricewaterhouseCoopers.
BATF: A PARTNERSHIP WITH PROMISE?

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It is a great pleasure to be here at the Fourth Annual Public Affairs Lecture. What I propose to do this evening is the following: In the next 30 minutes, I will talk about the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF), emphasizing its genesis, record of activities and some of the challenges that we face. I would then leave the floor open for comments and discussions.

The BATF initiative evolved soon after the new government took over in Karnataka under the strong and able leadership of Mr. S. M. Krishna. The guiding idea behind the BATF was to engage civil society and people outside the government in different activities of the government. At the conceptual stage itself, we realized that when citizens deal with the government to pay taxes or to collect birth certificates, etc., they are mostly dealing with the storefront or the front office. He/she is not aware of the host of back office operations that happen and in many ways are critical to the way the ‘front office’ works. Thus, what was needed was to integrate and harmonize the front and back office operations to present a better, more efficient storefront. The other important realization was that the institutional arrangement has to be on the lines of a public-private partnership. Historically, when people talk about private-public partnership, it has really been about some kind of commercialization or privatization of public services. Here, I must emphasize that there was no commercial dimension; the idea was simpler: if there is a set of people outside the classical government system who can bring in some value to the whole process, then we need to create that kind of partnership so that it is entirely pro bono, and not commercial. The idea was to see how civil society and external inputs could be used to improve things in the city.

As a precursor, a number of task forces were set up to explore various options and institutional modalities to implement the idea. One must at this juncture, mention the pioneering work of Mr. Jairaj, the then first Commissioner of the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike, who identified a group of extremely committed to contribute to this city’s progress. As a clear token of support from the highest level, the state government led
by the Chief Minister issued a government order creating the BATF and the partnership was finally set up in 1999 with Mr. Jairaj as the first Member Secretary.

A key challenge after the set up was to identify the key drivers for BATF. Here we were able to capitalize, as Dr. Samuel Paul pointed out recently, one of the biggest advantages we have in Bangalore- the large number of professionals residing here. These professionals are of two kinds — (1) eminent professionals from different walks of life and different parts of the world who have settled down in Bangalore and are willing to offer support and (2) young professionals who are very successful in their respective fields and feel a need to contribute to civil society. The composition of the committee reflected these two sets of professionals. We had distinguished people like Dr. Raja Ramanna, Dr. Narasimhaiah and Dr. Samuel Paul as members, as well as a bunch of energetic young professionals like Kalpana Kar, Naresh Venkataramanan, Ramesh Ramanathan, and Ravichandar who were willing to dedicate a lot of their time to the BATF activities. Thus, we had a unique composition of very senior leaders to guide us, as well as a set of young people who were willing to take the bottom line, and actually work hands on. This is a critical factor to keep in mind when we discuss ‘replicability’ and sustainability.

The mandate for BATF as given in the government order which was drafted by Mr. Jairaj was: first, design a process to upgrade Bangalore’s infrastructure and systems; second, help raise more resources with the involvement of both the citizens and the corporates in Bangalore; and third, focus on enhancing the quality of life. Whether it is the efficient delivery of civic services, internal capacity building or bringing in best practices, we had to create some kind of an agenda for this city and take it forward. For us, the challenge was clearly laid out: We wanted to differentiate this task force from others in India. We were clear that this should not be another advisory body because there is no shortage of advice in India, but acting upon it is far more difficult. There are many reports on how Bangalore could be improved – there are 70 odd reports on this. The real challenge was how to deliver.

As a next step, we identified the basic stakeholders and listed out the key civic stakeholders who can play an important part in the reform
process. The credit for this again goes to Mr. Jairaj. We chose these seven key stakeholders because we felt that this was the good set to work with. We have stayed with these stakeholders for the last four years and in hindsight, our assumptions held true. The next step was to create an accountability platform, where stakeholders set targets and report on their progress regularly. This would be done periodically at day long Summits. The Summit is a very important concept and is of strategic importance in the public-private model of partnership.

As I said earlier, when the civil society engages with the government, it is usually from the outside and is usually critical of the government. We know though, that simply being critical about the present system is not going to change anything. Neither does creating a parallel system help. Therefore, we felt that the idea is not to be confrontational; rather it is to see how we can work together, through a more collaborative partnership model. This is an important exercise because it is a different style of engaging with the system – one which forces you to travel with the system, and to accept the bouquets and the brickbats that come with it.

This partnership model was completely different from what has been done before. Fortunately, we were able to attract financial commitment within Bangalore to make sure that there was money on the ground to implement our plans. So, the unique attributes of the BATF are: the partnership model with the particular set of seven stakeholders; the accountability platform; and the financial capability to make this work. The question we need to continuously ask ourselves is, whether all these things are replicable in another situation.

The other important factor, which we said we would implement, is the Report Card concept. I want to give credit to the Public Affairs Centre and Dr. Samuel Paul for pioneering the concept of Report Cards. We built on this concept by coming out with opinion polls to tap the pulse of the city and to find out what citizens need. Every six months we conduct a market research on what the citizens of the city feel are the top most priorities. The priorities keep changing. In the first poll, potholes were an important issue. By the second survey, it was evident that action had been taken by filling up potholes, as they were no longer on the list. Consequently, it’s a dynamic list of things. This is important because it
provides a feedback loop to the civic providers about the key concerns of the citizens as well as about progress made along various dimensions. We did these surveys starting from July 2000, and then in February 2001, September 2001 and February 2003. These surveys are scientifically robust and representative. What is very encouraging is that in July 2000, only 6% of people believed things had improved a lot, this went up to 28% by February 2003. By July 2000, 65% people believed that things had improved and by February 2003 66% of people felt the same. (See figure 1) If you add up the two columns of improved and improved a lot, by February 2003, 94% of people in Bangalore city believed things had improved and I think this is a very strong commendation of the excellent work done by all the civic providers in Bangalore.

Figure 1: Citizen feedback on improvements in Bangalore

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<th>Worsened</th>
<th>Remained the same</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Improved a lot</th>
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<td>Feb 2003</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>Sep 2001</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>Feb 2001</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
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Tracking this data every few months proved to be quite critical as it enabled us to measure people’s perception of improvements and served as an endorsement of progress.

Coming back to the accountability platform or what we call the Bangalore Summit, so far we have had five of these day long Summits – a public gathering which attracts about 700 to 800 people. The Chief Minister, S M Krishna has attended every Summit. This is a very important signal to the public that the Chief Minister is personally interested in the progress of the city’s affairs. The focus of this is really on setting short term and long term targets. In these summits, both the BATF members as well as all the stakeholders list out the achievements of the last six
months, and the targets for next six months. Six months later we come back and see whether we have actually accomplished our goals, and then set new targets. Therefore, the Summits are outcome-based and focus on results. I still remember in July 2000, when we had the first Summit, Mr. Jerome had made a commitment in January that he would finish the Outer Ring Road by the next Summit and he moved heaven and earth to make sure the job was done on time. He kept his commitment and I remember how hard he worked to make it happen. He set a very good example of an outcome-based approach to management in meeting targets.

Another important attribute of the summit was that it created transparency of goals. Transparency is very important because this gives citizens some insight into the plans of the various civic stakeholders. Every BATF stakeholder has to outline the commitments – what he/she intends to do in a given period of time, for instance, repair a road or fix a transformer. The presentations made by them are then put up on a website for anybody to download. I don’t think civic stakeholders anywhere in the world are making their plans and intentions public and accessible in such a manner. People have to take bottom line for getting these things done and this ensures accountability and provides continuity. I think we tend to underestimate the value of continuity. What happens, I find, in the system, is that when officers change or bureaucrats change, the institutional memory is not as high as it could be, and therefore each new officer defines his own goals. When an organization has to deliver on public commitments, there has to be continuity in the goals of the organization, even when there is a change in leadership. For us, transparency of information allowed for continuity and also allowed for recognition of work done by high performing officers. From my own experience in working with many of the top officers in Karnataka - Mr. Jairaj, Mr. Jerome, Mr. Sreenivasa Murthy and many other colleagues – I saw that there was no real vehicle for recognizing their work. The BATF Summit gives such people an opportunity to show their talent and their efficiency. Recognition, therefore, is another important outcome of the BATF Summit. We also have a quarterly review with all the stakeholders, BATF members and the Chief Minister.

Another pioneering initiative along this line was the Property Tax scheme implemented by Mr. Jairaj when he was the commissioner. This was a
very successful effort because it not only increased the revenues of the city, but also made the process much less discretionary since the citizens were doing a self-assessment. (See figure 2) Interestingly, citizens still liked the concept though they were actually paying higher taxes. Ravi and many others assisted in the implementation of the concept of the self-assessment scheme, and Kalpana and others worked on the public awareness campaign to make it a successful programme. Under the leadership of subsequent Commissioners Mr. Shanthanu Consul, Mr. Ashok Dalwai, and Mr. Sreenivasa Murthy, this programme has gone from strength to strength, and every year the collections are going up. With effective use of technology, it can go up even further. This was a great example of reform in a process through technology and partnership that not only increased the revenues of the city but also made the process much more citizen friendly.

Figure 2: Property tax collected in Bangalore City

Another very visible example of BATF's work was building high quality bus shelters. Kalpana led this initiative. We standardized designs and worked on a build, transfer and operate (BOT) basis. As a result, not only do we now have excellent bus shelters, but we also generate revenue for the BMP. The BMP gets approximately Rs.50 lakhs to Rs. 1 crore of revenue from these bus shelters by selling advertisement space. This is a good example of how the partnership model can work. Another programme, where again
the BMP worked very closely with BATF, was on the Swachha Bangalore Programme – a garbage collection programme with door-to-door garbage collection and segregation. Biocon and Aditi Technologies donated pushcarts. We made solid waste management an issue for people to think about and worked towards a total solution. The programme still continues and recently the BMP launched a fresh set of garbage collection tenders. People are really focused on how to make this work and this, I think, is again a good example of public-private partnership enabled by the BATF.

We also have a public sanitation initiative. Here, Sudha Murthy donated Rs. 8 crores. The idea was to build 100 public toilets. So far 23 have been built and we plan to complete the balance soon. These toilets, which were developed by the BATF, are high quality toilets, which are maintained very well.

Another focus area was traffic improvements. In fact, I don’t know whether people realize, Bangalore is the only city in India where the traffic fines go back to the police. Normally when the fines are collected they go to some kind of consolidated fund, but one of the things that we facilitated early was to get the government to have the fines go back to the police. This empowers the police who use this money to improve the traffic infrastructure. Last year the fine collection was about Rs. 8 crores. We also worked with the Police, the BMP, the BMTC and others on developing a scientific traffic model, drafting a Central Management Plan, designing of one ways and so on and so forth. Hudson Circle is an example of an area where traffic was better managed through the introduction of one ways. Here, this helped avoid the need to build a flyover. We also received a lot of support from a private entrepreneur, Mr. Irfan Razak of Prestige, who spent about rupees 1.5 crores in improving the road from Dairy circle to Hosur road. Once again, the task helped prove the efficacy of a good private-public partnership.

The BDA partnered with the BATF for significant development of infrastructure. The BATF worked with the BDA to get the government order which authorized the BDA to build this entire infrastructure. Unlike in other states, where very often funds come from the state government budget or there is a state guarantee or they issue bonds, the entire infrastructure investment by Mr. Jerome and the BDA has come from
their own resources. Mr. Jerome has done an extraordinary job in raising money by recovering land that belongs to the BDA. They have raised Rs. 100 crore debentures at 8.5% interest, which are listed on the National Stock Exchange and have an LAA+ rating. This is an excellent example of how a dynamic agency, leveraging the growth of the city, has raised resources on its own and then invested it back into public good by creating social infrastructure. I think Mr. Jerome has many more plans for new infrastructure in the city, which I am sure he will take up.

Along with changes in the front office, the back office is also being brought up to speed. The BMP has shown great leadership in implementing a modern international accounting system – the Fund-Based Accounting System (FBAS). Dr. Samuel Paul and the Public Affairs Centre pioneered this effort in Tumkur, where they began to implement the FBAS as part of the ADB project. Building upon that, a major project was done under the leadership of Mr. Sreehari in the BMP and Mr. Ramesh Ramanathan, to implement FBAS completely, a modern, sophisticated accounting system with accurate user cost, asset and liability tracking, full budgetary control and complete mapping of all the assets of the city. This is a project on which we have spent Rs. 2.25 crores and more than 350,000 man-days. Since these changes are taking place in the back office, we may not realize the difference it makes. However, this system has now become totally embedded in the BMP and has become an important, functional tool for them. Last year, the BMP actually published their financial statements in the Economic Times. Normally corporations do that - this is the first city in the country where the City Municipality has published their financial results – much before private corporations published their results.

Thanks to this, there was also another unique development. An MOU was signed between the state government and the Bangalore city. This is something just like the MOU the World Bank has with the Karnataka state government, where the World Bank provides funds based on certain reform processes. Under the new MOU, the city government has made commitments to make some reforms and the funds released from the state government will be linked to these reform points. This again is a unique concept, which was developed by the BATF and the BMP together. This essentially provided the platform for both the Janaagraha Citizen Movement
and the PROOF campaign, of which the Public Affairs Centre is a member. People outside government agencies demand information from government agencies using the Right to Information Act. Unless these agencies have the infrastructure to collect information, such questions cannot be answered. Hence, it is important that we create the information infrastructure. I will come to this point later. Bangalore, I think, is the only city in India where you have a proper fund-based accounting system. Almost every observer who has come to Bangalore, be it the CAG or the ADB or the World Bank, has commended the BMP’s extraordinary achievement in implementing this particular application.

One of the lessons that we have learnt from this is how to go about planning a city. The problem is complicated because of three things – one, we have multiple service providers - city bodies like BWSSB, BESCOM, BMTC and BSNL, a national body in charge of communication. Then you have the Slum Clearance Board, Pollution Control Board, Railways and Metro Railways coming into city, that are also involved. Secondly, you have a multiplicity of development authorities. You have BMRDA, the BDA, Town Planning Department, etc. Thirdly, there are also multiple governments: the BMP, which is in the city, seven CMCs and the gram panchayats. So this multiplicity of service providers, development authorities, and local governments makes it a little complicated to work together. The key challenge to go forward, which I won’t dwell on today, is really to figure out how, on a long term basis, you can have a strategic plan for doing this. I think right now the important thing is to figure out a way to harmonize the working of these entities so that on the planning side there is some integrity of thinking. I must pause for a moment here to applaud what Mr. Vidyashankar has done at the BWSSB. It is extraordinary, in terms of the steps taken to improve the distribution of water supply in terms of the Cauvery phase IV, of reviewing leakages and of all the new initiatives.

Coming back to working with multiple service providers, we started a couple of initiatives: one of them is to create a common base map for the entire city. The initiative is being anchored by the BDA, which houses the Bangalore Spatial Information Centre. A French company has partnered with the BDA on this activity. The data of 1998 from National Remote Sensing Authority has been the basis for the plan. The initiative has seen a
transformation from analog planning to digital planning. The application is complex, with multiple layers for multiple stakeholders. The idea is to plan using digital technology. A lot of work has gone into this project like taking old analog maps and stitching them all together to create a base line for a digital approach.

Another project that the BDA will gain recognition for is the Comprehensive Development Plan revision for the next decade. Again, Bangalore will be the first city in India with the completely digital CDP. The BATF is partnering with Janaagraha, SCE and the BDA for this. The process of consultation is under way with all the stakeholders. I understand from Mr. Jerome that he is planning a public consultation process some time in the fourth quarter and there will be a scenario analysis in September. The idea is that the draft CDP will be ready for public review by June 2004. Many individuals like Swathi Ramanathan, Asha Rao and others are contributing to this. Digitalizing the CDP will make it absolutely up-to-date. This will prove to be something of a legacy. It will be a public consultative process, so people can give their feedback and this I think will be the basis for the future planning. This will be one of our key achievements this year for all stakeholders.

Yet another important initiative that we are working on is providing E-governance. A group called E-governments Foundation was set up by a gentleman called Srikanth Nadhamuni, which focuses on developing software which is available as an open source, on property tax, grievances, ward works, water bills, create licenses, birth and death certificates and GIS. The BMP is implementing a web based property tax system which is currently working in Shivajinagar and which will shortly be rolled out in all the wards. People will be able to come to any ward and pay their taxes online. The software for this is being provided by the E-governments Foundation. Apart from property tax, this Foundation will develop several other modules. The combination of FABS, which is a technology software, along with the E-governance modules, will really make it state-of-the-art in terms of using technology effectively. Again, all this work is being done by volunteers sitting in the US, writing codes using global, open source model, free, so that we can get the benefit here in Bangalore. Globalization is helping in local processes!
What we see here are a number of things: One is we have a set of activities, which we have done as part of this overall programme, which are reform-oriented. Self-assessment scheme, fund based accounting, E-governance, etc. are really sustainable, value adding reforms which will get embedded in the system. Then we have a set of specific initiatives pertaining to road safety, and traffic as well as health and sanitation, primarily the solid waste management activities and clean public toilets. There is also a set of things to do with urban planning, longer term activities like CDP revision, spatial outlook, street furniture etc. The idea is that there is a combination of things, which are directly beneficial to the citizen, and there are a set of ‘back office’ things, which may not be visible to the citizen, but which will essentially create sustainable capacity building and systems within the civic organization. I think we have been able to improve both these things.

Now, I will talk about the critical success factors. First of all, I believe that this could not have been made possible without the complete support of Mr. S.M. Krishna, the Chief Minister of Karnataka. He has shown extraordinary leadership in (a) creating a body like this and (b) giving a free hand to all the members and other stakeholders to make this happen. The political leadership and sagacity that Mr. Krishna has shown has been a key success factor. As to the question of whether this is replicable – first of all, there should be a political leadership of this kind to make it replicable. This is really the most important success factor.

The second important factor is the willingness of all the stakeholders to partner in this activity. I am glad that we witnessed excellent support from all the stakeholders. All of us have worked closely with Mr. Jairaj, Mr. Sreenivasa Murthy, Mr. Jerome, Mr. Vidyashankar and many others. Everyone was absolutely open-minded in accepting this partnership, in accepting the format of the Summit and in accepting the fact that commitments are being made. I think we are very lucky in Karnataka and especially in Bangalore to have officers of this caliber.

The third factor is of course funding. I have provided some of the funding for this. Hopefully, there will be other people elsewhere who will support such activities. Beyond what we have done – my wife and I – a lot of other people have come forward. As I explained to you, Biocon and Aditi funded the carts, Irfan funded the roads, and many other people have come forward
to develop the city. Infosys has done something for the traffic and Ms. Sudha Murthy has contributed eight crores for building clean toilets. Thus, everybody has tried to contribute. This shows the kind of community spirit, which we have in the city.

Last, but not the least, we have a set of extraordinary people. Apart from the senior people who provided the leadership, there were people like Naresh, Kalpana, Ramesh and Ravi who did the real hard work. This team had a set of multi-faceted and complementary skills: it included architects, market researchers, financial experts and technology experts like Srikanth. They worked day and night without any remuneration and without much of recognition. They were motivated by the desire to make their city a better place.

Thus, according to me, these are the critical success factors – political support with leadership, committed stakeholders, funding by way of corporations and individuals coming forward to provide donations, and a team of people who are willing to work and contribute. And, therefore, if you were to ask me: is this replicable? I really have to ask, can you get all these things together in one city, at one time?

We were very optimistic when we started this process. Admittedly, the optimism has got tempered because it takes tremendous effort to complete the task. There was a lot of criticism. In this context, it is important to focus on three things:

1) The direction of change – In our case, there is a perceptible and tangible change in direction. Everybody acknowledges that. Market research clearly shows that a wide variety of people believe that things are getting better.

2) The content of change – Are the right things being done? One of the interesting findings was that the lower income groups in Bangalore felt there was more progress than the upper income groups. It was the poor people who felt that there was improvement. They feel the effect of improved bus service by the BMTC in Bangalore and also the benefit of the work that BMP and BWSSB have done in providing water and sanitation across the city. Thus, generally, there is a sense that the content of change, by and large, is right.
3) Pace of change – The biggest contention would be the pace of change; all of us would like things to happen at the speed of light. However, this is very difficult. With the kind of conditions that we have, and the kind of gridlock that we have created on many issues, the pace of change is something that we have to contend with.

All of us have realized that it is important to drive consensus, because there are so many stakeholders, all with different points of view. This is a challenge. However, it is clear that no other urban city in India has anything close to this model. In fact, Ravi has made presentations in Bombay, Pune, Nasik, Cochin, Trivandrum, Trichy and Chennai, and people in these cities have expressed wonder at our model. Questions such as how are you guys doing it? What is it that makes it work? are frequent. To an extent, we have been very lucky in being able to put all this together. As I explained, those critical success factors are something, which we may not be able to reproduce all the time.

Over time, BATF has played multiple roles. We began by doing a number of projects because these actually show results on the ground. However, increasingly, the focus is on conceptual inputs. For example, in the areas of software, process improvement, financial management, urban design or architecture, there are many people in Bangalore who have come forward to offer their expertise for free. Very important are: the conceptual inputs that are coming in; implementation support in some of the major programmes; and advocacy of new changes. In addition, we are creating a body of knowledge, which other cities can use. For example, there is a complete package for implementing FBAS in any other city and for building toilets that anybody can take. There is also a complete package of software that can be used. The idea is to create a body of knowledge which other people can use. This is an important part of scalability. While the BATF model may not be replicable – the intellectual output of this can be used.

This is being driven by the urban development department with inputs from the BATF so that all 30 cities will have fund-based accounting. All of them will have toilets, solid waste management, e-governance software, property tax, GIS, etc. The idea is to scale this activity to other cities across the state. We hope that they can replicate some components of this, if not the overall governance model that we created.
Thus, conceptually, we have a different way of looking at public governance. Clearly, you need some kind of a public-private partnership. This is because all the required expertise is not there in the system, and, therefore, it is important to get know-how from outside. We must first focus on supply side reform i.e. making the systems much more energetic and much more capable. We have tried to do this by accelerating the pace of change. This is possible only through strong political leadership. Only after introducing supply side reforms like fund-based accounting, etc, can you create meaningful demand side participation. This includes all the programmes which have citizen’s involvement – Janaagraha, the Public Affairs Centre, PROOF, just to name a few. Then you are able to combine these two. Most people who are looking at improvements in governance are ultimately coming to the view that it is not about proximate determinants, it is not about putting in more capital, it is about creating accountability, creating transparency and creating a way to have citizens engage with the improvement efforts. We should leverage information to create accountability. For example, today, in the BMP, the fact that they have an accounting system, the fact that you know what ward works are going on or the fact that you know what budgets are allocated, creates transparency and accountability which citizens can leverage to drive better governance. Thus, you need a combination of supply side reforms done with public-private partnership as well as demand side participation from citizens. This is the only real way that you can achieve improvement in the quality of governance in our cities.

Thank you very much.

The discussion that followed Mr. Nandan Nilekani’s lecture was led by Mr. K. Jairaj, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister of Karnataka. His comments are given below:

I would like to begin by saying that the BATF has really surpassed whatever expectations were set in late 1999. And I have listened with very keen interest, the determinants, or the factors behind the success of BATF, which Nandan listed. Two were missed out and I thought I would add them to your list. The first is the leadership within the BATF, may be Nandan was modest, but I think all of us will acknowledge that without the driving force within the BATF and there is no gainsaying the fact that without the kind of leadership (provided by Nandan), BATF would have petered out as many well
meaning civic initiatives often do. Secondly, and this is very important, that through a process of trial and error or learning by doing there was a clear understanding of the role of BATF. I am saying this because initially when BATF was constituted and the first summit was held, there was only one surviving stakeholder of the first Summit which is our dear friend Jayaker Jerome. All the others have perished on the way. When that summit was held, there was a lot of nervousness among the local leadership about what is this new animal called BATF? And what is it going to do to our powers and autonomy and so on. And I think people would recollect those days but now that the local leadership is also in sync with BATF, they have been well managed by the political commitment that BATF has received. The clear definition of the role that BATF has assigned for itself is the factor that is very important in its longevity. I am mentioning this because when you speak about replicability and sustainability, these two factors, the leadership within BATF and the limitations in its role, are factors that bear mention.

In terms of the agenda that was set out in the Summit January 2000, I must be candid in saying that there are a few that are still unfulfilled – what are they? The first is, we wanted a comprehensive GIS of the city. Though there has been some pilot initiatives, unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, we do not have a full blown GIS which covers all the 100 wards of the city. I am sure they are working towards it, but we do not have it. I would rate that as one of the unfulfilled points about the Bangalore Agenda of January 2000.

The second, and I would like to mention this clearly, is that except for the selflessness of a few individuals and corporates, Nandan mentioned – Rohini, himself, Sudha Narayanamurthy, Biocon, Aditi and Prestige - except for them nobody else came forward. The first set of commitments which were made in January 2000 totaled to nearly Rs. 40 crores or Rs.35 crores, I don’t know the exact figure. The realization, over time, is less than that. Because I think many of the corporates and many of the so called “donors” expected some kind of a quid pro quo in return for funding Bangalore’s activities. I am mentioning this because it is important to put all these things on the table to show the complete selflessness of those who have funded BATF and kept it going. The third area which is unfulfilled in my opinion is that the building of capacity in the stakeholders is still a question
mark. Although the Fund Based Accounting System has come in Bangalore City Corporation, the BMP has implemented the Self Assessment Scheme, there is an outstanding progress by the BDA and by the BWSSB, the issue is whether all this will survive those who are now leading the civic organisations. In fact, I am very concerned about whether the kind of progress you see in the civic bodies will survive the present leadership in the civic bodies than in the BATF. I say that quite candidly because we do not have any objective indicators to measure the capacity that has really been built in the civic stakeholders involved in Bangalore. I am putting it for discussion and I'll be happy if these points are rebutted.

Then the third set of issues that I would like to quickly mention is what are the factors that may rock this entire exercise. I am convinced that BATF will survive, it will go forward, it will have a new role because of the kind of model that has been built. But three factors that I would like to mention which may make things difficult for all of us in Bangalore: the first is the issue of enforcement, especially in the peripheral areas, in terms of zoning, in terms of land use, in terms of conversion. I know that the BMP is doing very heroic job, I also know that my dear and esteemed friend Jayakar is really heroic about whatever he is doing. But overall, it is a fact that today credibility of the people in enforcement is quite low. And I think all of us should put our heads together because unless and until there is compliance with the law totally, this kind of excellent effort that we have may come a cropper. The second is that in January 2000 and even today there is muted criticism that whatever is being done, the kind of amalgamation of efforts that is being undertaken by BATF, by the civic stakeholders do not have a pro-poor approach except for the sites distributed by the BDA which have a definite weaker section orientation, and which is just an outstanding record. Otherwise, I think it is time that we look at what is the actual delivery of public services that have been brought about by the civic stakeholders, by the BATF, which really enlarge the concerns of the poor and make a difference to them. I am not striking a populist note here, I am just trying to put this pragmatic issue on the table because I have been told that one of the things we have not been able to do is to bring about a massive housing programme for the urban poor in the city areas for instance, so I mentioned that. And finally I would like to say that the third issue that can rock the boat is the continued infrastructure
bottlenecks. Notwithstanding the excellent work that is being done to improve the city infrastructure. We heard recently a captain of industry say that Bangalore’s infrastructure is just appalling bad and that because of this poor infrastructure he is not going to put any more investments into the city and there are also other comments that are made. So I would like to think that we should use the forum of BATF, PAC, and the seven stakeholders in saying what kind of a total infrastructure approach we can bring about in order to see that the BATF stakeholders, example remain unqualified successes.

**Mr. Nilekani’s response**

Mr. Jairaj mentions the role that is appropriate to the BATF. Obviously it is not a super ordinate body which is trying to run everything, nor is it a vehicle for solving citizen grievances. The idea was to create an accountability platform, which allows the citizens on a periodic basis to understand the short term and long term goals of the civic stakeholders. As I said earlier, it creates accountability, transparency, outcome-based approach, recognition of achievements and so forth. And it engages in specific projects, which would lead to reform sustainable improvements and specific outcomes. I think it is really difficult to take on everything else because at the end of the day, it is a pro-bono volunteer group that is doing this. So I think its really difficult to take up individual transactions or individual challenges. But to the extent possible we have tried to create a public platform for accountability and try to work on specific themes like accounting, e-governance, public toilets and so forth, so that we can create some value additions. It is difficult to take up many more specific issues. The only sustainable model is one that improves the quality of governance. And the governance will improve by the following things:

We need to create ways and means for civic bodies to augment the resources and I think one of the remarkable things that have happened in Bangalore is that everyone of the civic bodies has become financially
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