When BDA goes public!

By Shirali Rao

It is an unusual initiative that is both welcome and timely. When a powerful government organization like the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) is, traditionally, viewed with suspicion by the public as being both inefficient and corrupt, steps to open a dialogue with citizens' groups and NGOs, is likely to suggest some opportunity to reframe this perception.

A good deal of the credit for this goes to the present BDA Chairman D.A. Ravindra, whose leadership with such an organisation has been made possible. He has, for the first time, brought into focus the possible benefits of a collaborative role between citizens' representatives and public service providers like the BDA.

As part of the 'new' effort in government to decentralise services to reach the people more directly and to improve administration so as to enhance accountability and transparency, a meeting called on June 15 by Dr. Ravindra, sought to make a preliminary foray towards initiating an on-going dialogue between the BDA and citizens' group representatives.

A direct call-out of the meeting was the suggestion to set up a citizens' cell within the BDA. The cell will be given definite shape in subsequent discussions, and would have both BDA and citizens representatives on it to screen and scrutinise specific public governance and problems with a view to the BDA.

Periodic review meetings for both the cell and the core group of NGOs were also proposed as a necessary advice.

While the idea was initiated by NGO representatives present, the unique aspect of the meeting was the willingness of the BDA to place its administration in a participatory manner.

The government, it was heard, would not be able to solve all the problems by itself, particularly with respect to service-related issues. Even in terms of basic information, like policies and procedures, there is need to question and expose the omissions and miscalculations.

The government was also asked to develop an attitude of mutual cooperation, and thus, the government could participate in the efforts of NGOs and citizens' groups.

A formal committee was then formed to discuss and come up with strategies for an effective and efficient BDA.

The first meeting of the committee was conducted by the BDA Commissioner, after which they are scheduled to meet once a month under the chairmanship of the respective Executive Engineer.

The scope of the consultations will specifically include such areas as the maintenance of BDA parks, playgrounds and open spaces; sanitation; fire-fighting; development of infrastructure; water, electricity and sewage systems; and protection of vacant lands in the city and the reservation of C sites for a specific purpose.

It was felt that in the interest of speed of implementation of these works as well as the order of work, a suitable mechanism could be developed to ensure periodic consultation between the two groups. The need for documentation of the BDA was also emphasised.

Hence the Consultative Committee, which came in the wake of various complaints in this regard, made by the office bearers of the various Residents' Associations to the BDA Chairman and Commissioner, over the last few months.

The meeting was held recently in the City between the BDA and citizens' group representatives in an attempt to decentralise services to reach the people more directly and to improve administration so as to enhance accountability and transparency.