



IIT DELHI



CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR
RESEARCH ON CLEAN AIR
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, DELHI
HAUZ KHAS, NEW DELHI-110016

MITIGATION OF AIR POLLUTION IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION OF DELHI: ROLE OF URBAN LOCAL BODIES (ULBs)

Dr. Palak Balyan, Consulting Staff Scientist, HEI's Global Health Program, Based in New Delhi

Air pollution is among the leading risk factors for human health in India. The magnitude of air pollution is massive all over the country covering both Urban-Rural areas. The National Capital Territory of Delhi is among the most polluted cities in the world; PM_{2.5} levels often exceed the Indian National Ambient Air Quality Standards, especially during winter months. Major sources of air pollution in Delhi-NCR include vehicles, road side dust, industries, garbage burning, construction & demolition dust; most sources are anthropogenic and therefore require targeted mitigation efforts.

As per the estimates of UN World Population Prospects, the city of Delhi (NCT) is home to 30.5 million people. The urban local bodies (ULBs) are under the purview of the state/national government and are responsible for maintenance of the infrastructure and smooth operations within Delhi and the region. Taking cognizance of the rising air pollution, the Minister of MoEFCC, Mr. Javadekar emphasized the need for concerted efforts by all stakeholders. The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) document envisages the role of ULBs in air pollution control in a significant manner. Certainly, the urban local bodies are one of the key stakeholders in this endeavor. There are visible lapses on the part of ULBs in taking measures for control of air pollution. Sectors such as transportation, solid waste management, regulation of construction activities and disposal of construction waste, cleaning of public places, paving of roads and footpaths and greening of open spaces are under the purview of ULBs. I had an opportunity to interact with the staff of ULBs functional in NCT of Delhi in the course of conducting sensitization workshops on air pollution mitigation designed specifically for them. From my formal and informal interactions with them, I identified several hurdles and obstacles in their workflow. In most cases, workers are acutely aware of the obstacles but find themselves ill equipped to bring meaningful change. Below, I discuss the key obstacles and some ideas to address them:

1. *Multiplicity of agencies*: Delhi has a plethora of urban local bodies with overlapping of geographical boundaries of their work, but limited interactions within and across the different agencies. For example, the cantonment area is managed by the military establishment, railways have their own bodies. New Delhi has a separate municipal body, different from rest of the city.
2. *Gaps in understanding*: Staff members at ULBs have inadequate knowledge and understanding of their roles in pollution mitigation, and as a result, they have a casual approach towards their work. Furthermore, the morale of the grassroot workers is often low and they do not seem to identify with the cause.
3. The workers fail to understand how their work is significant to reducing air pollution in the city and thus develop a casual approach to their work.
4. *Lack of supervision*: the quality control is a key component of effective action. Quality supervision is lacking in most of the places due to paucity of staff as well as due to lack of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the purpose of supervision.
5. Standard indices of performance assessment and impact assessment are not in place
6. *Lack of ownership of tasks* to be performed for control of air pollution by the stakeholders make them complacent.

7. *Personal grievances and lack of amenities* demotivate the workers from optimum performance
8. *Lack of resources*: The supply and maintenance of materials and equipment are erratic, and often, old dysfunctional equipment is not replaced in a timely manner. Staff frequently experience lack of requisite materials like broom, waste collection carts & trucks, personal safety gears (gloves, shoes, aprons, etc.), water for sprinklers, etc.

It suggests that the workers are aware of most of the obstacles but find themselves ill equipped to contribute to bring the desirable change, because they believe that they are not heard. Further, the interaction between various stakeholders is minimal. For example, digging of the roads is done by electricity supplying companies or telecom companies but once the holes have been dug, they are not properly repaired and often become a source of dust, detriment to traffic flow etc. exhaust resulting in more air pollution. Similarly, construction and demolition debris are left unattended on the roadside for several days, which continues to re-suspend and pollute the air. Solid waste disposal and dumping methods are not friendly to the environment. Open transportation and open landfills incessantly continue to pollute the air.

In light of these problems here are a few suggestions

1. Sensitization of ULB staff towards their roles and responsibilities
2. Check list-based supervision system
3. Prompt remedial measures for errant activities
4. Frequent engagement of all stakeholders at highest level and fixing of accountability and responsibility
5. Ensuring timely supplies to avoid stock outs
6. Keeping the equipment under proper maintenance and ensuring functionality with minimal downtime
7. Developing a team of middle level managers to supervise through objective supervision techniques
8. Setting of norms, goals and SOPs for smooth functioning
9. Frequent feedback and prompt action on complaints, grievances and breakdowns
10. Preemptive actions and in advance preparations for peak pollution causing seasons and events.

Clean air is a right of every citizen; thus, the agencies need to join hands and make concerted efforts to address the problems and make the city livable and get rid of the 'most polluted city' tag.
