

# **Strengthening Citynet**

## **A roadmap for goal setting and action**

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# **Aspiration/Goal:**

**A stronger Citynet to meet Asia's urban challenges and opportunities**

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:Making Citynet Stronger means making it more

- Purposeful
- Relevant
- Strategic
- Innovative
- Proactive
- Influential
- People biased
- Poor sensitive
- Developing country focused

# Asian Urban Challenge and Citynet

- Asia's urban footprint is so vast and heavy that what happens here—also what does not happen here-- would have repercussions in the entire world. There are global implications to Asian response to the urban challenge
- If the Asia region and the Asian nations fail to handle their urbanization properly and manage growth of their cities imaginatively, it would be a big blow not only to their poverty alleviation, modernization, economic growth and super power ambition, but also to the entire world seeking more sustainable ways to grow, develop and prosper.
- Managing Asian urbanization, therefore, is a threat as also an opportunity. Cost of failure is high. Returns for success are immense-- locally, regionally and globally
- The region needs some influential and resourceful organizations to address its daunting urban challenges
- Citynet is there, must rise to the demand of the challenge and carve out a role for itself
- The Asian urban challenge is the Citynet challenge and must define its shape and structure. And that is a compelling reason to aspire for a more influential, effective, purposeful and stronger Citynet.

# Citynet :Strengths

- 1 Membership: Numbers and spread with over 130 members in the major countries of the region
- 2 With almost two decades of existence and activity Citynet has a visibility and presence in the region
- 3 Having been structured creatively with the cities and the civil society/NGOs as members, it has a positive balance in its polity and a representative character
- 4 Having maintained a democratic, inclusive, participatory and consultative style of functioning Citynet has developed certain healthy traditions
- 5 Over the years it has evolved a fairly extensive work plan in response to the member needs
- 6 Citynet listens, is responsive and prepared to learn



# Structural, Organizational and Operational issues

1 Has not been very strategic in its engagement and as a consequence has marginalized itself by operating on the margins of the issues

- Organizing training and exposure visits on solid waste management is useful. But not necessarily strategic.
- It is an engagement in capacity building. But not in a critically strategic area or way.

## 2 Does not appear to see its larger role with confidence and conviction

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### 5 Main Roles

- (a) Capacitating cities for better governance and management
- (b) Strategic engagement with the governments to promote appropriate urban development policies, strategies and institutions
- (c) Taking new knowledge, experience, strategies, methods and technologies to the cities for problem solving and charting new directions in governance and management

- d) Education, awareness building and strategy formation on the larger global issues in the regional perspective and local context, such as global warming and climate change, urban sustainability, urban poverty, rural–urban interface (crucial in the Asian context, as some 60/70 percent of Asia is still rural), etc.
- e) Promoting an understanding on the role of the civil society in urban governance and promoting models of cooperation and partnership at the city level

This status--engagement mismatch seems to hurt both ways: the big organization remains rather small and marginal in impact and the big issues remain unaddressed

### 3 Yet to establish its profile, niche and influence as a regional urban spokes agency

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Has not engaged itself adequately at the appropriate levels--be that networking and interacting with other regional political and economic forums (such as SAARC, World Economic Forum at Davos, etc ) or with the national governments, who seem to be either neglecting the urban sector or overawed by the enormity and complexity of the urban challenge.

# 4 Has rarely used the resources, strengths and power base of its own constituency and members

- . The effort to use and synergize the individual and collective strengths of its diverse membership consisting of cities, civic organizations and citizens seems inadequate

What is Citynet doing with these power houses on its member roll?

What is it doing with their skill, experience, knowledge resources and financial muscle?

Shanghai, Seoul, Mumbai or ACHR

5 Engaged mainly in project activity of peripheral/non-strategic nature, Citynet has seldom worked for and advocated critical 'reforms' and 'changes' in directing urbanization and managing the region's cities.

Tackling the complex urban issues require major changes in the mindset, policies, institutions, legal framework, approaches, strategies and technologies

## 6 Organizationally Citynet seems to act, behave and work as what it is not and that is probably hurting it.

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It is not an UN organization, though it has imbibed its functional style, mannerism, processes and bureaucratic culture

It is membership organization, not even a loose network, with city authorities/ agencies and civic organizations as members, with mutual obligations and responsibilities

The style and perceptions are causing unspoken disconnect, even 'cultural' alienation—city agencies and civil society members work and behave differently



7 Citynet, for all its years and work, has not been able to inspire “ownership” among its members. Not many call it “my organization”

- Can it happen in a representational arrangement where representatives change time and again?
- Why are concerned, change seeking, ‘emotional’ NGOs less than enthused in calling it their own?
- Why are other arms of ‘civil society’ such as ‘business’ and corporate so scantily present? Aren’t they civil society?

# 8 Location of the Secretariat matters

In developed or developing country?

Symbolism

Cost

Issue and context sensitivity

How much central? How much accessible?

How expensive to be in and manage?

Length of stay

Evaluate Yokohama

Plan Seoul

Vision next location

## 9 Leadership

- . Citynet has not been able to throw up inspiring, making--things--happen - leaders.

Is the structure a constraint?

Is the 'culture' a constraint?

Is its inability to nurture and inspire 'ownership' among the members a problem?.

# **Strengthening Citynet**

## **Suggestions for Consideration and Action**

**An Agenda for change in the structure,  
organization and working of Citynet for  
higher relevance and greater impact**

# 1 Think big and act strategic

- (a) focus on strategic rather than peripheral issues
- (b) see advocacy, educational and idea generator role more seriously
- (c) find more resources for activities over and above the administration of the secretariat
- (d) bring into play the formidable resources of the members: both cities and civil society
- (e) bBuild Strategic and issue focused partnerships
- (f) engage with the power structures in the region with a mandate, resources, political clout and accountability
- (g) Build adequate organization in response to the need and enlarged agenda



2 Change style, procedures and systems.

Appear, behave and act less like an UN agency and more like an organization of the city authorities and civic organizations

3 Become a membership and member driven organization in its spirit, image, operational style, procedures, work agenda and communication

## 4 Establish presence and develop relevant agenda at the national level

- Move from symbolic gestures and tokenism to a greater commitment to issues and ideas idea.
- Allocate more energy, priority and funds for promotion of National Chapters
- The current failure demands an analysis and the arrangement a re-look as a substantive national presence is a sound concept.
- An effective, not notional, presence will attract new members, afford a greater and better interface with the national governments and make policy engagement/advocacy more effective
- Attract and induct more and capable members
- Build a profile in the sector and visibility at all relevant levels



## 5 Develop strong leadership, besides an efficient and pro-active secretariat.

- To make an impact, to become a truly influential regional agency, Citynet needs a strong leadership to emerge from its members
- The current apathy and non-interest by the members are a cause for concern. The situation must change and trend must reverse
- The constitutional, operational, political, and environmental factors need to be examined to initiate changes aimed at enhancing member interest, member stake-holding and member 'ownership' in Citynet.
- Pro-active and efficient secretariat is necessary. But it is no substitute for member activation and leadership.
- Working with limited staff and inadequate funds is counter productive. Build appropriate organization. Deserve and find more money for the organization and activity
- The litmus test is not what it does in-house but what it causes to happen. Activating, engaging and motivating others will help achieve scale, enable multi-tasking and develop a diverse work agenda—a need of the sector and the hour

## 6 Make serious efforts to build relationship between member cities and between city and civil society members

- Promoting, facilitating and supporting interaction, dialogue and working together of the members would strengthen Citynet.
- Exchange of ideas, experience and technology and sharing of successful approaches and strategies between the cities themselves and between the city and the civil society members would enhance member stake in the organization
- It would make Citynet more relevant and useful to its members-  
- a necessary precondition for the investment by the members and the leadership to emerge.

## 7 Find more resources to invest in activities over and above administration and running of the secretariat

- The ratio between the administrative costs to activity investment is a good indicator of an organization's health, efficiency and productivity. Citynet needs to tilt that ratio substantially in favour of facilitation, development and advocacy activities.
- If Citynet is 'useful'; if Citynet "strengthens" them; if Citynet leverages their position Vis-à-vis- the national governments in form of favorable policies and resource devolution; if, citynet shares useful and profitable information and ideas, the cities would not hesitate to invest in Citynet. And if that happens, Citynet would have enough resources to work and grow.
- The argument is not that other donors are not needed. It is working in a manner that raises resources while servicing the members
- Seeing the resources equation in the performance (on part of Citynet) and stakeholding (on part of the members) context would change the Citynet politics. It is not donation versus investment. For a financially healthy Citynet, it is both.
- Be innovative and if necessary use professional help in fund raising

## 8 View the civil society members as a different kind of resource

- They can't contribute money. But ideas, analysis, alternative approaches, and especially understanding and knowledge of what works with the people and the poor are their strengths and assets
- NGOs and the civic groups need not be second class citizens in Citynet. Their status needs a revisit. Ensure their position in the hierarchy and position of office.
- Recognizing and putting to creative use their skills and talents is also a “resource management” and “constituency activation” task
- Making the NGO members stakeholders is as important as making city members stakeholders.

# 9 Develop diverse agenda in partnership with members

- Macro: on major regional global concerns such as climate change; rural urban interface; migration; alternate energy sources; water crisis
- Micro: on making cities livable, accessible, manageable, safe, secure and humane for the people
- Cities need seeing from the top and bottom; for the present and the future; for the systems and the inhabitants; for the machines and the communities, and for the material as well as spiritual
- The city governments and urban bodies are so preoccupied by immediate problem solving—they are seldom planning, they are perpetually fire-fighting-- that they neither have the time, nor the resources, nor the luxury to see things differently, to look for alternatives
- Structure and equip Citynet to facilitate this



- Some examples of “Thinking Big” but do-able ideas and achievable targets
- Active National Chapters in 50% of the member countries by 2013, before relocating the secretariat to Seoul
- Substantial partnerships with the Corporate and Business and development assistance agencies in the major donor countries and some of the developing countries (such as Nissan in Japan, Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction, L.G. In Korea, Tatas in India, Philippines Business for Social Progress in the Philippines and many others) on
  - Global warming and climate change
  - Sustainable Transport
  - Alternative Energy Sources
  - Solid waste Resource
  - Water Management
  - Employment Training for the urban poor youth
  - Urban Poor Fund
  - MGD and Poverty Alleviation Strategies
- 100 Million Dollar Urban Poor Fund , on the ACHR model, linked to slum upgrading and affordable housing for the urban poor to be managed jointly by the city authorities and the NGOs

# Thank You

