



PRESS RELEASE

New Delhi, 23 June 2017

New List of 30 Smart Cities Announced Amidst Continuing Human Rights Concerns

The Ministry of Urban Development just released the next list of 30 cities to be developed as ‘smart cities’ under India’s Smart Cities Mission. The new list, topped by Thiruvananthapuram, also includes Srinagar, Bengaluru, Dehradun, Amaravati, Naya Raipur, Aligarh, Aizawl, and Gangtok. With this list, 90 of the 100 planned smart cities to be developed by the year 2020 have been selected. The remaining 10 cities will be chosen from 20 cities contesting in the next phase of the smart cities challenge.

Launched on 25 June 2015, with an estimated budget of Rs 48,000 crore (USD 7.5 billion), the Smart Cities Mission will soon complete two years. There is still, however, no common understanding or a clear definition of the term ‘smart city’ in India. A report released earlier this month by Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), India, highlights several human rights concerns and challenges related to the Mission.

The report titled ‘**India’s Smart Cities Mission: Smart for Whom? Cities for Whom?**’ presents an analysis of the guidelines of the Mission and the first 60 selected Smart City Proposals, through a human rights lens. It also provides recommendations to the government and other involved agencies, with the aim of fulfilling the realization of human rights of all residents and promoting inclusive, equitable, integrated, and sustainable national development.

HLRN’s study finds that the positive components of the first 60 Smart City Proposals lie largely within the ambit of formulating technological solutions, developing renewable energy sources, and building resilience of cities. The proposals— developed by private consulting firms—however, lack a comprehensive vision for the future, and omit the needs and aspirations of cities and their inhabitants, especially the majority who live and work in cities.

HLRN’s analysis also highlights the following concerns and challenges related to the Smart Cities Mission:

- Absence of a human rights framework.
- Lack of an inclusionary and sustainable approach to development.
- Dilution of democracy and trend towards privatization of governance.
- Denial of the rights to participation and information of city residents, especially low income groups.
- Forced evictions and displacement resulting from smart city projects and greenfield development.
- Unrealistic reliance on technology and threats related to surveillance, data control, and the right to privacy.
- Corporatization of cities, with high dependence on foreign and private sector investment.

It is yet to be seen whether these concerns have been addressed in the 30 newly-announced smart cities, and how the smart city development process in these cities will take place in the absence of human rights indicators or well-defined targets.

Given the experience of the 60 cities selected before, HLRN believes it is important that the central government and other agencies and involved actors pay heed to the **following recommendations**:

- Incorporate a human rights and social justice approach in all stages of the Mission.
- Develop clear human rights standards and human rights-based indicators to monitor implementation and progress of the Mission.
- Ensure that implementation of smart city projects does not result in the violation of any human rights.
- Undertake comprehensive human rights and environmental impact assessments before any smart city project is sanctioned.
- Ensure the free, prior, and informed consent of all affected persons.
- Guarantee adequate people's participation, including women, minorities, and marginalized groups, at every stage of the Mission's development and implementation.
- Revise the structure and operational principles of the Special Purpose Vehicle to ensure that it works within the framework of democracy, in accordance with the Constitution of India.
- Promote integrated rural and urban development, invest adequately in rural areas, and address issues related to the agrarian crisis, land-grabbing, landlessness, internal displacement, and distress migration – through adequate budgetary and policy interventions.
- Ensure comprehensive convergence of the Smart Cities Mission with other government schemes. Develop an overarching human rights and environmental framework to monitor all government schemes.
- Link implementation of all schemes, including the Smart Cities Mission, with the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, and ensure compliance with India's international and national legal commitments.
- Regulate the role and functioning of the corporate sector, prevent privatization of basic services, and make sure that all private and foreign investment projects comply with human rights and environmental laws and standards.
- Ensure that technological and infrastructure development plans promote inclusive development, and are based on local requirements, comprehensive need assessments, clear guidelines, and human rights principles.

According to *Shivani Chaudhry, Executive Director, Housing and Land Rights Network*, “With the list of 90 ‘smart cities’ declared under the Smart Cities Mission, there is an urgent need to ensure that the government immediately develops human rights indicators to guarantee that the trajectory of development in these cities and their surrounding areas emphasizes inclusion, social justice, equality, non-discrimination, and the progressive realization of human rights of all city residents, especially the most marginalized. No government can justify the creation of 100 high-tech urban enclaves at the cost of human rights of the marginalized, at the expense of holistic development of the rest of the city, and at the price of development of other cities and villages in the country. That is definitely not a smart choice for India.”

HLRN's report – **India's Smart Cities Mission: Smart for Whom? Cities for Whom?** – is available at: http://hlrn.org.in/documents/Smart_Cities_Report_2017.pdf

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