

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

The Performance Audit on 'Conservation and Ecological restoration of Lakes under the jurisdiction of Lake Development Authority and Urban Local Bodies' indicated weak institutional mechanisms and legal framework, with assigned functions and responsibilities not being effectively carried out by the entities involved in the conservation and restoration of lakes.

Community participation, which plays an important role in the conservation, restoration and maintenance of lakes, was also found to be minimal. Transparency in administration and disclosure of information on lakes in public domain was inadequate and no effort had been made to constitute a single window agency for a grievance redressal mechanism on lakes. LDA, the overall monitoring agency, did not have any substantial authority and acted mainly as a mediator between the public and the entities involved in conservation of lakes.

It was also observed that restoration works were carried out without adequate planning with no integrated approach amongst the different implementing agencies responsible for lake rejuvenation work. The disconnect in the efforts of the various implementing agencies resulted in irreparable damage in achieving the goal of conservation and ecological restoration of the lakes. The emphasis of the implementing agencies was seen to focus more on engineering measures rather than ecological preservation and restoration of the lakes.

One of the key requirements for preservation and ecological restoration of lakes is to update the survey and demarcation records. However, much work is left for completion of the same. Also, the implementing agencies did not have any proper database on encroachments, and hence the work of removal of encroachments from lake areas was only partial. Apart from encroachments, lake areas have also been diverted and given away in the form of grants by the Revenue Department.

Most lakes continued to remain polluted with the efforts to reduce sewage entry into lakes being inadequate. Sewage Treatment Plants did not have adequate capacity for treating fully the contaminated water and many of the existing plants also did not function effectively. Works were also carried out without proper planning and prioritisation as evidenced from numerous executions of non-core works. Even core activities were undertaken in a haphazard manner as observed from excessive desilting, formation of elevated ringed bunds, ineffective wetland constructions, *etc.*

Despite undertaking various restoration works, preservation of biodiversity of lakes was not adequate as seen from the loss of natural wetland with aquatic species, spread of invasive species, absence of buffer zones along the periphery of many lakes and destruction of habitat of aquatic weeds and birds. The implementing agencies had also not assessed the impact of pollution in lakes and its risks to human health, biodiversity and ground water.

The lake specific findings of the 12 test-checked lakes indicated that sewage was the major source of pollution. Also, many encroachments persisted and proper fencing of lake boundaries was inadequate. Restoration works carried out in these lakes were seen to have been more for providing recreation facilities rather than for preservation of the ecosystem.

Thus, the various agencies involved were not effective in taking sustainable initiatives for restoring water quality and maintaining ecological health of the lakes. If adequate and effective measures are not taken, we will continue to lose lake areas and will not be able to conserve, preserve and restore our lakes for the benefit of future generations.

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