

Chapter 14

Creating Public Awareness through Information Dissemination Strategies

Issues

Much as the River Yamuna is revered as a sacred river and has deep religious, mythological and cultural association for Indians it has not received commensurate respect in contemporary times. Except at the time of idol immersion during Ganesh and Durga Pooja festivities, it has no human activity which would enhance its habitat. On the contrary it is a receptacle for waste generated through human activity river which makes it imperative to building sustained awareness about several different aspects of river cleaning and cleanliness. NGT has directed that awareness building activities have to be taken up on a wide scale.

Present Status

Presently there is no ownership for the river Yamuna. That is because it means nothing to the citizens as it is providing no opportunity for cultural activities, leisure or recreation. There is little knowledge about why flood plains are sacrosanct and why they must be preserved and protected. There is a need to plan for awareness building and permissible activities beyond the flood plains but for that there has to be a nodal Department to build awareness by spearheading permissible events and activities. Presently vertical responsibility lies with DDA, Irrigation and Floods and the Department of Environment & Forests. Others like DJB, the DMCs only look at sewage and maintenance of storm water drains but the connection with the river is remote.

Citizen involvement requires that there is knowledge of why the river is important, and why it is worth preserving and restoring.

Action Plan

The Monitoring Committee proposes to discuss a broad approach with the Chief Secretary and engage with MOWR, RD& GR, NMCG, MoEF & CC and MoUD to support activities which lead to awareness building. However without a media and awareness building plan the resources even when received can get scattered in small activities which would not attract visitors. There is a need for assigning nodal responsibility for creating public awareness to a consortium of agencies with an interest which can include international and national level NGOs engaged in building awareness about the environment, Delhi Government Corporations like DSIDC + DTTDC, schools, Eco clubs, RWAs, Rotary ,

Inner Wheel, Industry Associations, Market Associations and the Parks & Gardens Society.

The Chief Secretary needs to assume nodal responsibility or give it to an officer who has an interest and adequate field staff. In the totality of things it is a minor activity and concerns something that the public is not interested in presently. Ordinarily this should be co-ordinated by the Department of Environment & Forests of Government of NCT of Delhi by involving the DCs of the Districts, the Commissioner Lands and Director Horticulture of DDA and DMC.

The MC will ask the Chief Secretary to set up an Apex level consortium that can approve of specific awareness building projects. The response would be included in the progress report.

- a) MC would ask the Chief Secretary to encourage programmes that prevent gobar from dairies going into the river. Installing a biogas plant with the support of the Ministry of Renewable Energy for making gas out of gobar instead of letting it flow into drains at Ghazipur would make a visible impact. Technology for this is easily available and this can become an interesting school field trip too.
- b) The green model adopted by the B block Chittranajan Park is to immerse it in a deep pit with water in a local park in conformity with CPCB guidelines. This has been demonstrated to the concerned officers by the office bearers and DMCs and Divisional Commissioner have been asked to popularize it. This can build awareness about the dangers of river pollution.
- c) Waste from the river Yamuna (plastics, Pooja samagri and such like) needs to be mined out and recycled or up cycled. The waste includes flowers, coconuts, cloth etc and can either be composted and its collection and sorting would give livelihoods to waste pickers. The Chief Secretary would be requested to see whether any NGO can be asked to undertake a pilot in coordination with Department of I& FCD for turning the waste into marketable products to be done through a co-operative effort of waste pickers.
- d) The Yamuna is a unique birding destination. Therefore, birding needs to be popularized amongst schools. There is a need for DDA to preserve the birding hot spots with inputs from an established birder group in Delhi.

A periodic progress report would be given.