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Public Audit of Shimla Municipal Corporation: A Study

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A HISTORICAL development associated with the evolution of local self government in Himachal Pradesh (H.P.) goes back to the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. The state came into existence only in April 1948 as a union territory with the integration of some 30 erstwhile small princely states with an area of over 27,000 sq km in 1954. Through an Act of Parliament another state Bilaspur was merged with H.P. This position remained till November 1, 1966 when the hilly areas of Punjab namely Kangra, Kullu, Lahaul Spiti and Shimla were integrated with it. A prolonged and peaceful struggle of H.P. under the leadership of Y.S. Parmar bore another fruit when it succeeded in getting H.P. declared as the 18th full-fledged state of Indian Union on January 25, 1971 from the status of union territory. In 1972, the districts of the state were reorganized and their strength was raised to 12 with the carving of Hamirpur and Una out of Mahasu. In the 19th Century, the process of urbanization and emergence of townships and cantonment areas in the hilly region was directly associated with British groups, which was established in two phases, i.e. after the anglo-Gurkha war of 1845-46. Immediately after the first successful intervention in the region in 1815, the British retained Subathu and Kotgarh. Shimla enjoys the distinction of having the first municipality in the region and it dates back to 15th December of 1850. On January 25, 1971, H.P. was granted statehood and it became the 18th State of the Indian Union. In 1971 there was one Municipal Corporation, 18 Municipal Committees and nine Notified Area Committees in Himachal Pradesh. In addition, there were two census towns during this year; the small town committee of Paonta Sahib was converted into Municipal Committee. In 1972, with the re-organization of districts the district of Una and Hamirpur were carved out of Kangra district. Una already had municipal committee; Hamirpur was also converted into municipal committee. In 1975, there was one Municipal Corporation, 19 municipal committees and 11 Notified Area Committees. In 1981, there continued to be only one Municipal Corporation and 19 municipal committees in the state. However the number of Notified Area Committee increased to 17. In addition there were seven Cantonment boards and two census towns. Thus

the total number was 46 between 1981-1991. No change took place in the number of Municipal Corporation, Municipal Committees and Cantonment Boards. However, the number of Notified Area Committees increased to 30 while that of census, towns decreased to one only, thus, raising the total number to 58. At present after the 74th Amendment of 1996, there are 48 urban local bodies in Himachal Pradesh. Out of these bodies there is one Municipal Corporation, 19 Municipal Councils and 28 Nagar Panchayats.[1]

URBANISATION IN SHIMLA CITY

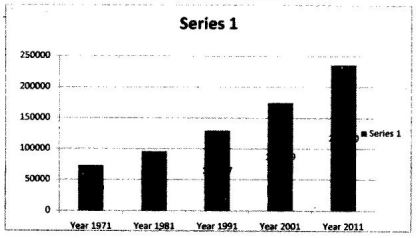
The trend of urbanization in Shimla city has been spectacular. The urban population in Shimla city has increased during this century in a tremendous way. Table 1 reveals the growth of population of Shimla city during 1971 to 2011.[2]

TABLE 1: TOTAL POPULATION OF SHIMLA CITY

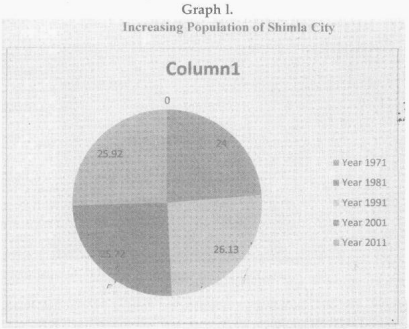
Years	*Total Population*	*Percentage Increase in Population*
1971	72870	-
1981	95891	24
1991	1,29,827	26.13
2001	1,74,789	25.72
2011	2,35,970	25.92

SOURCE: Municipal Corporation Office, Shimla.

Graph l. A
Total Population of Shimla City



Graph l.
Increasing Population of Shimla City



From Table 1, it can be seen that the population of Shimla in 1971 was 72870 and it increased to 2,35,970 in 2011. It clearly shows the population of Shimla within a period of 40 years has the doubled necessitating the emphasize the need for effective urban governance in city.

Municipal Corporation, Shimla

The Municipal Corporations set up in the big cities are governed according to the respective state Municipal Corporation Acts. The Corporation form of urban government is meant essentially for big cities where civic problems have acquired a high degree of complexity.

Municipal Government was first introduced in Shimla in December 1851, under the provisions of Act XXVI of 1850. It was with a view to manage the local needs that the Municipal Committee was converted in September, 1970 into Municipal Corporation. When Shimla was a part of Punjab state, the Shimla Municipal Committee was established under the Punjab Municipality Act 1911. Later, Punjab government issued notification No.9 dated June 4, 1968, to change the constitution of Himachal Pradesh and Municipal Committee was dissolved on 27th June, 1969 and replaced by a Corporation consisting of an administrator and 10 nominated members, out of which one was to be a woman and one to be a Schedule Caste. Then again, Shimla

Photograph 1 a

SOURCE: Municipal Corporation Office, Shimla.

Municipal Corporation was established under Himachal Pradesh Municipal Act, 1968.

Objectives of Study

(*i*) To study organizational setup and functions of Shimla Municipal Corporation;

(*ii*) To analyze the citizen's perception about municipal governance; and

(*iii*) To derive important policy issues pertaining to Municipal Corporation governance and to facilitate sustainable development efforts for better development of Shimla city.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive and diagnostic in nature as it was an attempt to understand municipal governance with special reference to Shimla Municipal Corporation. Study pertains to period 2006-2011.

Primary Data: Primary sources included first hand data given by the people. The primary data for the present study was collected through interview schedule. A sample of 375 residents of Shimla city were taken from all the 25 wards of the city. In order to make the sample representative, 15 households were selected from each ward. One beneficiary from each selected household was taken from each ward of the city.

Secondary Data: To make the study more relevant and authentic, various secondary sources were consulted. The secondary data was collected from various published books, journals, periodicals, magazines, and research articles having direct bearing on the research problem. Shimla Municipal Corporation's annual administrative reports, budgets, files of proceedings of the Municipal Corporation meetings were also consulted to collect secondary data.

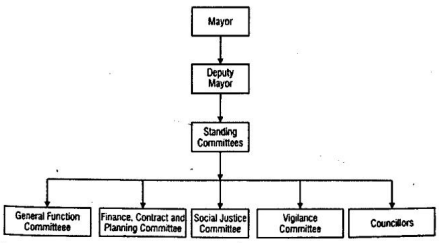
ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE OF SHIMLA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

Governance of Shimla Municipal Corporation is through an elected body comprising of elected Councillors headed by Mayor and administrative body headed by Commissioner. Administrative body is responsible for strategic and operational planning and management of the Corporation. There are two 'wings working in Shimla Municipal Corporation—Deliberative wing and Executive wing.

Deliberative Wing: Deliberative wing of Shimla Municipal Corporation consists of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Councillors and four standing committees. It is constituted by the elected members who are accountable to people for safeguarding the interests of electors. Deliberative wing has 25 elected and three nominated members. Nominated members have no right to vote in'the meetings of the Corporation. The deliberative wing is headed by the Mayor and has one Deputy Mayor assisted by Secretary to the Corporation.

Chart I.B

Deliberative Wing of Shimla Municipal Corporation



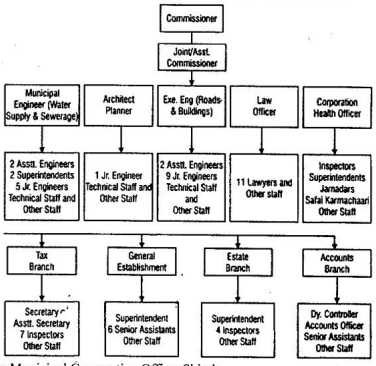
SOURCE: Municipal Corporation Office, Shimla.

Executive Wing: Municipal Corporation Shimla, functions under the control of local self government department which is headed usually by a cabinet rank Minister and the Secretary local/self government assists the Minister in administration. In accordance with the provision of Himachal Pradesh Development and Regulation Act, 1968, the corporation was headed by an I.A.S. officer designated as Administrator which was changed according to Himachal Pradesh Municipal Corporation Act, 1994 but the designation of the Commissioner has been retained. The office of the Commissioner is based on the philosophy of keeping separate policy making functions from its administration.[3] The organisational or administrative setup of Executive wing operative in Shimla Municipal Corporation is as:

Administrative Body: The Commissioner Municipal Corporation Shimla appointed by the State Government is the administrative head of the Corporation. The organization structure of administrative body is presented in the following Chart I.C.[4]

CHART IC

EXECUTIVE WING OF SHIMLA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION



SOURCE: Municipal Corporation Office, Shimla

Public Perception about Functioning of Shimla Municipal Corporation

Public audit adds value not merely by analyzing and reporting what has happened after the event but also by being forward looking, by identifying lessons to be learnt and by disseminating good practice. Keeping the importance of public audit in mind an attempt is made in the present article to know public perception about working of Shimla Municipal Corporation.

In the surveyed sample the groups were identified to represent a cross-section of the society. The public sample covered students, businessmen, government employees, journalists, and social workers.

TABLE 2: PUBLIC PERCEPTION ABOUT ATTITUDE OF THE COUNCILLORS

Groups	*Friendly*	*Co- operative*	*Indifferent*	*Total*
Students	33(44.00)	7(9.33)	35(46.66)	75(100)
Businessmen	16(21.33)	32(42.66)	27(36.00)	75(100)
Government Employees	11(14.66)	37(49.33)	27(36.00)	75(100)
Journalists	15(20.00)	25(33.33)	35(46.66)	75(100)
Social Workers	17(22.66)	22(29.33)	36(48.00)	75(100)
Total	92(24.53)	123(32.08)	160(42.66)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages).

Table 2 shows that 24.53 per cent people felt that behaviour of the Councillors was friendly to them, 32.08 per cent admitted that behaviour of the Councillors was co-operative, but majority of the people, i.e. 42.66 per cent people had the opinion that the Councillors behaved indifferently when they approached them for some work. So, it was concluded that the behaviour of the Councillors left much to be desired. Thus it can be concluded that majority of 42.66 per cent public had the perception that the attitude of the Councillors of their locality was indifferent towards them whenever they used to approach them for some work. However, most of them admitted that the attitude of Councillors especially during pre-election time was more co-operative.

TABLE 2A: PUBLIC PERCEPTION ABOUT ATTITUDE OF MUNICIPAL CORPORATION EMPLOYEES

Groups	*Very Sympathetic*	*Sympathetic*	*Rude*	*Total*
Students	37(49.33)	11(14.66)	27(36.00)	75(100)
Businessmen	13(17.33)	28(37.33)	34(45.33)	75(100)
Government Employees	12(16.00)	35(46.66)	28(37.33)	75(100)
Journalists	10(13.33)	29(38.66)	36(48.00)	75(100)
Social Workers	11(14.66)	22(29.33)	42(56.00)	75(100)
Total	83(22.13)	125(33.33)	107(36.26)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages)

Table 2A depicts that 22.13 per cent of the citizens felt that the behaviour of employees with the citizens was very sympathetic, 33.33 per cent of public told that the behaviour of employees was sympathetic only and 36.26 per cent of the citizens told that the behavior of employees was rude towards them. Thus, it can be concluded that the 36.26 per cent of public felt that behavior of employees of the corporation was rude and not up to the expectations of public. This rude behavior adversely affects the general public expectations.

Complaints of the Public

For any problem or any complaint, the citizens normally approach the municipal authorities directly. They do not consider it necessary to bring their complaints to the notice of the Councillors. But when their demands are not fulfilled by the officials, they approach the Councillors. The extent of contacts between the officials and the citizens could also be analyzed on the basis of the frequency of complaints against the municipal administration. In order to know whether the municipal staff properly attends to the complaints pertaining to civic problems, the sample responses as, received from the citizens, are given in Table 3.

Table 3 reveals that 36.26 per cent of citizens expressed that sometimes the municipal staff properly attends to the complaints about civic problems. While 36.08 per cent citizens replied that the staff attends their complaints "Rarely". Other 7.46 per cent of them told that the staff never attended their complaints and 19.46 per cent had admitted that municipal staff always attends to the complaints about civic problems. Thus it can be analyzed that 36.26 per cent of general

TABLE 3: STAFF ATTENDS THE COMPLAINTS ABOUT CIVIC PROBLEMS

Groups	*Always*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total*
Students	22(29.33)	17(22.66)	27(36.00)	9(12.00)	75(100)
Businessmen	10(13.33)	27(36.00)	32(42.66)	6(8.00)	75(100)
Government Employees	10(13.33)	35(46.66)	25(33.33)	5(6.06)	75(100)
Journalists	19(25.33)	22(29.33)	29(38.66)	5(6.06)	75(100)
Social Workers	12(16.00)	35(46.66)	25(33.33)	3(4.00)	75(100)
Total	73(19.46)	136(36.26)	138(36.08)	28(7.46)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages.)

public had the opinion that the staff sometimes attended their problems and 36.08 had the version that the staff attended complaints about civic problems, rarely.

TABLE 4: MOST COMMON COMPLAINTS OF THE PEOPLE

Groups	*Sanitary Condition*	*Drainage System*	*Sewerage System*	*Electricity System*	*Total*
Students	15(20.00)	37(49.33)	15(20.00)	8(10.66)	75(100)
Businessmen	14(5.33)	26(34.66)	28(37.33)	7(9.33)	75(100)
Government Employees	19(25.33)	31(41.33)	20(26.66)	5(6.66)	75(100)
Journalists	22(29.33)	22(32.00)	15(20.00)	14(5.33)	75(100)
Social Workers	17(22.66)	35(46.66)	15(20.00)	8(10.66)	75(100)
Total	87(23.02)	153(40.08)	93(24.08)	42(11.02)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages)

Most common complaints of a majority of citizens as per Table 4 were regarding the problem of sanitary conditions, drainage, sewerage and lighting systems. Table 4 clearly shows that 23.02 per cent of the citizens told that they observe sanitary problem in their area, 40.08 per cent of the citizens told that there are problem of drainage system in their area, 24.08 per cent of the citizens felt sewerage problem and only 11.02 per cent of the citizens identified lighting problem in their areas as the common complaint. Thus according to the majority of 40.08 per cent of general public, drainage problem was the most common problem in their area. Although they had not denied other problems in their locality yet they considered that the biggest challenge before Shimla Municipal Corporation is to provide proper drainage system.

TABLE 5: STREET LIGHTS ARE PROPERLY MAINTAINED IN YOUR AREA

Groups	*To large extent*	*To some extent*	*No opinion*	*Not to large extent*	*Not to some extent*	*Total*
Students	7(9.33)	8(10.66)	7(9.33)	28(37.33)	25(33.33)	75(100)
Businessmen	4(5.33)	5(6.06)	2(2.66)	27(36.00)	37(49.33)	75(100)
Government Employees	3(4.00)	4(5.33)	--	20(26.66)	48(64.00)	75(100)
Journalists	13(17.33)	12(16.00)	3(4.00)	24(32.00)	23(30.66)	75(100)
Social Workers	8(10.66)	15(20.00)	4(5.33)	21(28.00)	27(36.00)	75(100)
Total	35(9.33)	44(11.73)	16(4.26)	120(32.00)	160(42.66)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages.)

Table 5 shows that only 9.33 per cent of the citizens had the opinion that, to large extent, streetlights were properly maintained in their area, 11.73 per cent of the citizens admitted that, to some extent, stated that the streetlights are maintained, 4.26 per cent of the citizens had no opinion, 32.00 per cent of the citizens had the opinion that the Corporation maintained them but not to large extent, and majority of the citizens, i.e. 42.66 per cent of the citizens streetlights were maintained, not to some extent. Thus, it can be concluded that majority of 42.66 per cent of the general public admitted that street lights were not properly maintained in their locality. Majority of them had complained that despite repeated complaints regarding street lights, they were not properly maintained which causes a lot of inconvenience to the general public while coming back to their houses expecially during late night hours.

TABLE 6: MUNICIPAL CORPORATION SHIMLA DOOR TO DOOR GARBAGE COLLECTION PLAN WAS PROVED EFFECTIVE IN IMPROVING SANITATION

Groups	*To large extent*	*To some extent*	*No opinion*	*Not to large extent*	*Not to some extent*	*Total*
Students	22(29.33)	38(50.66)	5(6.06)'	5(6.06)	5(6.06)	75(100)
Businessmen	18(24.00),	42(56.00)	---	7(9.33)	8(10.66)	75(100)
Government Employees	25(33.33)	38(50.66)	---	2(2.06)	10(13.33)	75(100)
Journalists	24(32.00)	36(48.00)	---	6(8.00)	9(12.00)	75(100)
Social Workers	28(37.33)	30(40.00)	2(2.66)	7(9.33)	8(10.66)	75(100)
Total	117(31.02)	184(49.06)	7(1.86)	27(7.02)	40(10.66)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages.)

Table 6 indicates that the 7.02 per cent of the citizens had the opinion that the Shimla Municipal Corporation's door to door garbage collection scheme had proved effective in improving sanitation, not to large extent, 10.66 per cent of the citizens felt that it was not effective even to some extent, 1.86 per cent citizens had no opinion on this statement, 31.02 per cent of citizens felt that, to large extent, door to door garbage collection had proved effective in improving sanitation condition while 49.06 per cent considered that garbage collection scheme proved effective to some extent only. Most of them told that scavengers who come for garbage collection were not regular while the scavengers had complained that the rate of garbage collection per household was Rs. 40 only which is quite low.

TABLE 7:GETTING SUFFICIENT WATER SUPPLY

Groups	*To large extent*	*To some extent*	*No opinion*	*Not to large extent*	*Not to some extent*	*Total*
Students	5(6.06)	22(29.33)	13(17.33)	17(22.66)	18(24.00)	75(100)
Businessmen	5(6.06)	4(5.33)	7(9.33)	27(36.00)	32(42.66)	75(100)
Governments Employee	10(13.33)	17(22.66)	8(10.66)	12(16.00)	28(37.33)	75(100)
Journalists	4(5.33)	7(9.33)	4(5.33)	32(42.66)	28(37.33)	75(100)
Social Workers	5(6.06)	18(24.00)	12(16.00)	19(25.33)	21(28.00)	75(1 00)
Total	29(7.73)	68(18.13)	44(11.73)	107(28.53)	127(33.86)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages.)

According to Table 7, only 7.73 per cent of the citizens had the opinion that they were getting sufficient water facility to large extent, 18.13 per cent people had the opinion that they were getting sufficient water in their locality, to some extent, 11.73 per cent of the citizens had no opinion on this statement, 28.53 per cent of the citizens felt that they were getting sufficient water supply, not to large extent and only 33.86 per cent of people maintained that they were getting sufficient water supply, not to some extent. It can be concluded that people were not so satisfied with the water facility provided by the Corporation, especially during the summer season. The plausible reason behind this water shortage may be the influx of tourists during summer in Shimla that causes water shortage in Shimla City.

TABLE 8: CONDITION OF ROADS IN YOUR LOCALITY

Groups	*Highly satisfactory*	*Satisfactory*	*Not satisfactory*	*Total*
Students	19(25.33)	34(45.33)	22(29.33)	75(100)
Businessmen	17(22.66)	16(21.33)	42(56.00)	75(100)
Government Employees	22(29.33)	6(8.00)	47(62.66)	75(100)
Journalists	18(24.00)	25(33.33)	32(42.66)	75(100)
Social Workers	19(25.33)	27(36.00)	29(38.66)	75(100)
Total	95(25.33)	108(28:08)	172(45.86)	375 (100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages.)

It is pertinent from the analysis of the Table 8 that 28.08 per cent of citizens reported that the condition of roads in their area was satisfactory, 25.33 per cent of the citizens reported that the condition of roads in their locality was highly satisfactory and 45.86 per cent of the citizens suggested that the condition of roads was not satisfactory.

It can be concluded that majority of (45.86%) respondents had the version that the condition of roads in their locality was not satisfactory. Thus, the maintenance of roads by the Shimla Municipal Corporation is not fully up to the expectations of general public.

TABLE 9. SATISFIED WITH THE DRAINAGE SYSTEM IN YOUR LOCALITY

Groups	*To large extent*	*To some extent*	*No opinion*	*Not to large extent*	*Not to some extent*	*Total*
Students	5(6.06)	3(4.00)	5(6.06)	29(38.66)	33(44.00)	75(100)
Businessmen	1(1.33)	3(4.00)	— —	33(44.00)	38(50.66)	75(100)
Government Employees	1(1.33)	1(1.33)	3(4.00)	27(36.00)	43(57.33)	75(100)
Journalists	5(6.06)	15(20.00)	— —	26(34.66)	29(38.66)	75(100)
Social Workers	11(14.66)	12(16.00)	7(9.33)	23(30.66)	22(29.33)	75(100)
Total	23(6.13)	34(9.06)	15(4.00)	138(36.08)	165(44.00)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages.)

Table 9 reveals that only 6.13 per cent of the citizens were satisfied with the drainage system to a large extent, 9.06 per cent of the citizens were satisfied to some extent, only 4.00 per cent of the citizens had no opinion on this, 36.08 per cent of citizens told that they were not satisfied, to large extent, with drainage system and majority of 44.00

per cent citizens had the opinion that they were satisfied with drainage system of their locality, not to some extent.

Thus, it can be concluded that a large majority of 44.00 per cent of respondents were not satisfied with the drainage system of their locality. They told that the drains were not properly cleaned and maintained in their area which poses problems to the residents in their locality.

TABLE 10: CONDITION OF SEWERAGE SYSTEM

Groups	*Satisfied to large extent*	*Satisfied to some extent*	*No opinion*	*Not Satisfied to large extent*	*Not Satisfied to some extent*	*Total*
Students	7(9.33)	5(6.06)	2(2.66)	25(33.33)	36(48.00)	75(100)
Businessmen	4(5.33)	7(9.33)	— — -	20(26.66)	44(58.66)	75(100)
Government Employees	2(2.66)	3(4.00)	— — -	30(40.00)	40(53.33)	75(100)
Journalists	12(16.00)	10(13.33)	8(10.66)	20(26.66)	25(33.33)	75(100)
Social Workers	8(10.66)	6(8.00)	— — -	31(41.33)	30(40.00)	75(100)
Total	33(8.08)	31(8.26)	10(2.66)	126(33.06)	175(46.66)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages.)

Table 10 shows that only 8.08 per cent of the citizens were satisfied, to a large extent with the condition of sewerage system, 8.26 per cent of the citizens were satisfied, to some extent, 2.66 per cent of the citizens told that they had no opinion, 33.06 of the citizens admitted that they were satisfied, not to large extent, and majority of 46.66 per cent citizens confirmed that they were satisfied, not to some extent with the condition of sewerage system of their locality. It can be concluded that majority of 33.06 per cent public, to large extent, and 46.66 per cent, to some extent, were not satisfied with condition of sewerage system of their locality.

Table 11 shows that 100 per cent of the general public was against the new house unit tax policy. Majority of them had grudged the fact that services provided by Shimla Municipal Corporation were not proportionate to new house unit tax policy and that's why they opposed this new tax policy being imposed on the general public.

Suggestions to Improve Working of Shimla Municipal Corporation:

Following suggestions if taken into consideration can prove to be effective in improving functioning of Shimla Municipal Corporation.

TABLE 11: IN FAVOUR OF NEW HOUSE UNIT TAX POLICY

Groups	*Yes*	*No*	*Total*
Students	– –	75(100)	75(100)
Businessmen	– –	75(100)	75(100)
Government Employees	– –	75(100)	75(100)
Journalists	– –	75(100)	75(100)
Social Workers	– –	75(100)	75(100)
Total	– –	375(100)	375(100)

SOURCE: Primary Probe. (Figures in parentheses are percentages.)

Urgent need of sensitizing the Shimla Municipal Corporation to public needs and ensuring ward committee participation

- Municipal bureaucracy must be sensitized to civic problems and attitude of officials and Councillors towards general public must be helpful and cooperative so that public can approach them in case of any inconvenience that will definitely improve public service delivery.
- Municipal Corporation must develop appropriate mechanism to provide proper drainage system. Door to door garbage collection scheme must be made effective. Scavengers who come for garbage collection must be regular and they should be given appropriate incentive to be regular and in case of their irregularity, they should be terminated on complaint basis. Municipal Corporation must improve service delivery by providing, clean, adequate water facility and timely water connection on demand. Special drive must be carried out by the Corporation to link houses with pedestrian roads. Haphazard construction of houses must be checked and appropriate action must be taken against encroachers so that such violations can be properly checked in future also.
- Municipal Corporation should give contract to some good company to catch hold of stray dogs and sterilize them in order to have a check on their population.
- To achieve good governance in its working, the Corporation must be made free from political interference. Proper health facilities must be provided in the corporation area and all test facilities must be made available in the laboratory of the Municipal Corporation. Their reporting should be authentic and more primary health centres and primary dispensaries should be opened in Municipal Corporation area. In these dispensaries, there must be adequate

staff, medicine and equipments and the Municipal Corporation should be efficient in distribution of chlorine tablets as and when required. Ambulance facility provided by the Municipal Corporation should also be improved.

- Street lights should be properly maintained in all the localities. Services provided by Shimla Municipal Corporation must be made proportionate to the new house unit tax so that Shimla can be acknowledged as one of the beautiful cities of India.

There should be proper maintenance of lighting, water supply and drainage as well as sewerage system. Complaints from general public regarding civic amenities must be promptly redressed. Initiative taken in this direction by formulation of citizen charters is praiseworthy yet much more is required to be done in this direction to win public confidence in the working of the Shimla Municipal Corporation.

Application and Upgradation of Technology in Shimla Municipal Corporation

Technology plays a crucial role in minimizing the need for staff, cutting costs and enhancing the satisfaction of clients. Application of remote sensing, satellite imagery, Geographic Information System (GIS) and computerization of basic records and processes, can greatly improve the planning capabilities at the Shimla Municipal Corporation. Computerization of property tax and water charge information coupled with scientific door numbering and billing can raise the efficiency of revenue collection, substantially. This is amply proved by the recent municipal reforms in Hyderabad. Appropriate technology in areas such as garbage collection and disposal, leak detection and repairs in water mains, cleaning of sewer lines, street sweeping, road maintenance, etc. can greatly enhance municipal efficiency. A spectrum of various citizen-friendly services must be provided through a chain of computerized Integrated Citizen Service Centres. On-line transaction processing facilities must be available to citizens including payment of utility bills such as electricity bills, water and sewerage charges, property tax, trade licensing fee, telephone bills, issue of certificates such as birth and death, issue of permits and licenses such as learner's license, driving license, etc. Municipal Corporation should start providing the citizens with facilities of online payment of taxes, registration of births and deaths, registration and knowing the status of building applications, complaints and grievances disposal and essential civic information. These initiatives will be instrumental in creating a new municipal culture of citizen-friendly service

provision. It is essential to build e-capabilities of Shimla Municipal Corporation to simplify corruption-prone municipal processes and thereby improve their functioning.

Proper Demarcation of Wards Should be Made

In Shimla Municipal Corporation area, there should be proper demarcation of wards. Those wards where population is too large that it is difficult to manage should be re-demarcated and extra area should be merged with smaller area wards. Allocation of grants to wards must be made on the demands of people of that area and Councillors of the Corporation must take a clear stand on apartment policy. Civic amenities must be improved in wards before implementation of apartment policy in respective wards.

Code of Conduct for the Councillors Must be Strictly Enforced

A code of conduct for Shimla Municipal Corporation must be established and strictly enforced in order to ensure that councillors fulfill their obligations to their communities and support the achievement of the municipal objectives set out in Shimla Municipal Corporation Act.

Eco-friendly approach must be strictly followed in Shimla Municipal Corporation

(*a*) Proper and scientific handling of garbage in the urban area.
(*b*) Providing of sufficient number of tool and plants and equipment relative to local topographical and climatic conditions.
(*c*) Involving community participation through NGO's and voluntary organizations.
(*d*) Proper laying down and setting right the overall drainage system.
(*e*) Awareness programmes in collaboration with NGO's people groups, schools, Mahila Mandals, etc.

Accountability of Shimla Municipal Corporation to the citizens' charters, NGO participation, etc. may be ensured

- Proactive efforts for formulating citizens' charters.
- Inviting public representations and hearings for city planning.
- Proactive disclosure under the RTI Act, 2005 by Shimla Municipal Corporation.

- Social audit of public works, expenditure.
- Involvement of NGOs / civil society platforms in planning, execution, monitoring and audit of Shimla Municipal Corporation activities.
- Representation of civil society in all major committees / bodies of Shimla Municipal Corporation at all levels.
- Compliance to local fund audit.

Citizen's Charter must be strictly enforced in Shimla Municipal Corporation.

Citizens' Charter can enable capacity building and serve as an effective tools for transparency and enhancing accountability in Shimla Municipal Corporation. In order to improve systems, Shimla Municipal Corporation has also announced its citizen charter. There is an urgent need for effective implementation of citizen charter to improve service delivery in the Municipal Corporation.

Ward Offices should be opened in all wards of Shimla Municipal Corporation

- Although ward offices were set up in Phagli, Kuftadhar, Bharari, Kasumpati, Kaithu and Tutu, yet in other wards also the Municipal Corporation should speed up the process of setting up of ward offices.
- Under National Urban Sanitation Policy, City Sanitation plan is going to be drafted in Shimla Municipal Corporation. This plan should be implemented as early as possible so that 29 MLD of sewerage production of Shimla city reach the treatment plant.

There should be a national fund to support ward committees.

This fund should assist especially weaker ward committees to provide for capacity building training, resources and stipends for ward committee members to strengthen their role in municipal governance.

Ward committees should be accountable for their activities to the communities

There should be clear lines of responsibility and accountability between ward councillors, ward committees and community development workers. Ward committees should complement, rather

than detract from, other spaces for public participation in local governance. Ward committees should be seen as only one of the number of mechanisms and channels for public participation in local governance. Councillors and officials in particular should be cautioned against seeing ward committees as the only representative structure of communities. All Councillors of Shimla Municipal Corporation must 'be provided with separate room with well equipped infrastructure like, Computer, internet facility and trained staff in the Municipal Corporation premises so that people of their respective wards can contact them in office and there should be online lodging of complaints also, by people to their respective Councillor and there should be a provision for time bound redressal of the grievances.

Ensuring Public Participation

To overcome the difficulties in execution of development works, it is suggested that more co-operation and the sense of helping each other should be there especially with the department of irrigation and public health, PWD, forest and revenue etc. Moreover, public co-operation may be ensured in order to improve the implementation of the different programmes for the development of urban areas, it is essential to have community participation of the persons getting benefits out of the programmes and other voluntary groups and non-governmental organizations may be involved in creating awareness amongst the masses and seek their cooperation. The community participation can be achieved by creating committees/ groups like neighborhood, community etc. These groups can start work from informal association and gradually stand collective power. This collective power will assist the Corporation to know the needs and requirements of the people and further generate a sentiment of their own work for the programme.

These suggestions if earnestly incorporated in the working of Shimla Municipal Corporation can pave the way for ensuring good governance.

Footnotes

[1]Edward J. Buck, *Shimla Past and Present*, Delhi, Sumit Publication, 2005, p. 172.

[2]Harinder Singh Walia, *Planned Urbanisation*, Chandigarh, Linister Books, 2006, p. 8-9.

[3]Data Collected from Municipal Corporation, Shimla, January 9, 2011.

[4]Infrastructure Corporation Development Limited, 2011.