

Public Lecture
On
"Should Delhi Go Vertical"
15th February 2012
Toxics Link

Need for Delhi going vertical- an idea mooted by the Union Urban Development Minister Kamal Nath, has ensued interesting debates and discussions on the issue. Architects, town planners, urban designers and the ministries are today divided over the prospects of Delhi going Vertical. It is in this light that Toxics link though it imperative to discuss the issues and concerns surrounding the issue. As a part of the Environment and Health Public Lectures series held in collaboration with the India International Centre, New Delhi, Toxics Link organized a Public lecture on February 15th , 2012 to discuss "Should Delhi Go Vertical" and the several anomalies surrounding the idea of verticality.

Mr. Ravi Agrawal (Director, Toxics Link) inaugurated the sessions by welcoming the Panelist and the audience. The panel included eminent speakers like **Prof. A.G.K. Menon**, Delhi Convener, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTRAC) **and Dr. Bhwani Shanker Tripathi**, (Secretary General, Mission Gurgaon Development). While Mr. Ravi Agrawal and Mr. Satish Sinha (Associate Director) moderated the session.

Mr. Ravi Agarwal briefed on Toxics Link's Engagement and its concern on the issue of Delhi going vertical. Throwing light on the pressures Delhi is facing and the vision required for the city, he said that cities like Delhi are the main economic engines and center for economic growth, thus the way these landscapes are developing impinges and inflicts on the idea of environmental resources of the country like air, water and other scarce resources. He also raised pertinent question on the character and the planning process of the city.

Prof. A.G.K. Menon seemed pessimist about the idea of Delhi going vertical and said that verticality was not the only answer. With limited area and increasing population of Delhi, he urged for the need to come up with alternatives rather than going vertical. In his view the idea of growing vertical is based on the siege mentality. He pointed out that the problem lay in perception, as the people perceive that Delhi is being flooded primarily due to the influx of migration and one of the ways to respond to the problem is by going vertical.

Mr. Menon further elaborated on the idea of Sustainable density and explained that the area build cannot go on increasing, as at some point of time supporting it because of the obvious constraints of resources like water and power will become difficult. Open land will become less; quality of life will be adversely affected. He further explained that one acre of land cannot have 300 units or 20- 30 stored buildings. Thus, there is a need to work out the carrying capacity of a place like Delhi and how much can Delhi sustain with a certain quality of life. Another factor that needed due consideration in Mr. Menon's view was aspiration. Delhi like aspiring world cities wants to emulate cities like Singapore or Shanghai and the definition of world cities is high rise buildings and gigantic



towers. He pointed out that places like Manhattan have witnessed vertical growth with high rise buildings and skyline towers. These buildings and landscapes are serviced well and the services are much more intensive which is unlikely to achieve in a city like Delhi. The city will have to suck up the resources of the entire country to afford these services.

He further pointed out that lot of studies has been done on low rise- high density developments where the quality of life is optimal. There is no heavy capital resources involved in low stored buildings, one can have enough light, air and ventilation and a good quality of life. Thus, the argument for low rise becomes more and more compelling and explained that neither density nor aspirations are rational reasons for Delhi to go vertical.

Briefing on the National Policy Prof.Menon said that in the year 1988, National Urbanization Commission was set up and duly made recommendations. It was a very dynamic document and tried to access the National problems of the country and came up with resolutions that were necessary. One of the major suggestions made by them stated that planning should be much more dynamic and supportive of the forces that are in play.Mr. Menon suggested that dynamic planning could be one of the tools through which some of the traumas could be escaped.

Dr. B.S. Tripathi showing his concern on the issue explained that places like Gurgaon have already started facing the brunt of going vertical. He shared that the Aravalis in Gurgaon are the only hills that protect the sand dunes from inundating Delhi and Gurgaon but the way they are being cut down and mined, will soon lead to land dunes. Echoing the concerns raised by Prof. Menon, he briefed that life was becoming more and more energy intensive and with the current energy constraints in a city like Delhi sustaining vertical growth will be a problem. As the city does not have its own power resources; it draws power from various states. Neither does the city have water as the Yamuna which could have served with some amount of water has become a drain. In his view, going vertical with such inadequate provision for power, water and other resources to support the gigantic dwellings seems highly skeptical. He pointed out that the people need to be provided with not just spaces but also a good quality of life which seems a distant reality with such scarce resources.

Further, Mr. Tripathi explained that the water level in Delhi is constantly decreasing which in turn will also impact the holding capacity of the soil and the soil will soon start turning brittle. Also, despite the best technologies, going down the depths of Earth to extract water for gigantic buildings will be a problem. He also said that high rise buildings are actually swayed by the wind, higher dwellings will require sealing of these houses and making more ventilation proof, huge cost will be incurred in constantly a-conditioning them, thus adding to the cost of energy.

While Former Cabinet Minister Jagmohan Malhotra briefed that the glitch lies in the approach the country has as the issue is being treated like a local wound that can be disinfected, bandaged and cured. Whereas the crisis lies in the huge economic and social imbalances; corruption; the self centered attitude the people have on such serious issues. He further pointed out that great cities are created by constructive creative and honest people. On a skeptical note he said that with 80% of the population living on \$ 2 per day how can the city aspire for such infrastructure?



Further, he pointed that going vertical will increase the density beyond a sustainable limit while the city does not have the energy to sustain the high rise buildings. Every city has its own character and plans should be made keeping in character of the respective city. He said that there was a need for a lot of vision and commitment.

Mr. Satish Sinha (Associate Director Toxics Link) in his closing remark briefed that the floodplains and the ridge are the two beautiful landscaped eyed by everyone and if people don't fight for it and protect it, it will be lost soon. He said that going vertical does not really answer the problem and pointed out that there are many such examples across the world, where the quality of life is much better in cities that have not gone vertical. Citing examples of San Francisco he said that the city has not allowed vertical growth except in certain places and the quality of life is much better.

This was a question and answers session, where pertinent questions were raised on the rationality behind selecting 60 dwelling units per acre by the DDA. There were questions on the availability of the Master Plan in the public realm. Also some significant suggestions were made on discouraging the non agricultural use of land .There was a general consensus among the participants on Delhi not going vertical some participants suggested that Delhi should not go vertical as the city lies in the seismic zone.
