In the 3rd part of our campaign, we focus on a development model that the city can emulate

'If Hyderabad could come up trumps, why not Gurgaon?'

Vineet Gill | TNN

Karuna Gopal is the president of Foundation for Futuristic Cities. She is a mentor for the World Bank Institute certification programme on Urban Management and delivers lectures at some of the top management schools in India. Her work towards providing knowledge support to government agencies in Hyderabad and improving administrative efficiency has won her several awards.

Do you think multiplicity of authority has an adverse effect on the overall development of a city? Do you think Gurgaon, as a city, would be better managed by a single central administrative body?

The multiplicity of authority is just one of the reasons why Indian cities are failing. Our cities' governance structures are very complex. They are products of archaic municipal laws. It is difficult to restructure radically and break free from these legacy issues. If it's just a matter of cohesion and coordination between city agencies, cities can infuse innovation and create mechanisms. There are enough best practices and precedents that Gurgaon can look at. In fact, what appears to be a lack of cohesion, prima facie, may actually be a systemic problem. Most of the city agencies in India have a huge capacity and capability gaps that do not have sophisticated communication protocols, rely on outdated processes and procedures, and thus, cannot absorb technology. After almost six years of working, we have just begun to understand what works for our cities: a governance framework, institutional structures, city level reforms, capacity building and citizen partnering.

You worked with the government. How difficult was it to work hand-in-hand with the bureaucracy in Hyderabad? Does Gurgaon also need agencies like that of yours to come to the government's aid?

We worked with several cities on their reform agenda. Each city had its own challenges but most of the bureaucrats were very progressive. Transformation was not quick enough for all the reasons stated above. Gurgaon can look for an anchor agency that forges and fortifies partnership between the government and the citizens.
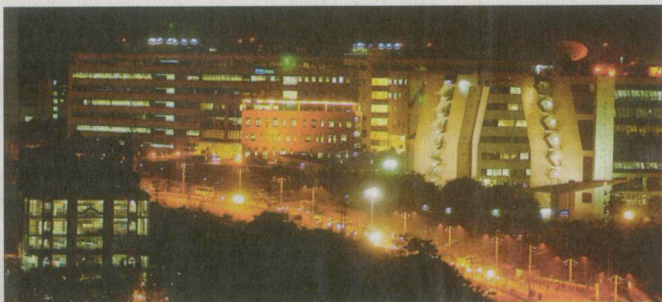
What are the crucial changes you brought about in Hyderabad? And what can Gurgaon learn from this?

Based on the theme 'Vibrant cities for a vibrant economy', we created an ecosystem for accelerating Public-Private Partnership in Hyderabad. We wanted corporate houses to align their CSR goals towards city development. I thought it's a wonderful way to achieve our goals, while making their host cities livable. So we launched the campaign: Citizens for City. We demonstrated that more than 100 top-notch firms are keen on working with us. Key government agencies partnered with us. We pioneered this initiative and piloted it in Hyderabad. As it is scalable and replicable, other Indian cities, like Gurgaon, can also use this format.

How important a part do the residents of a city play in shaping its future?

I am convinced that cities can be revitalized only if there are more hearts that resonate to the city's aspirations, more minds that meditate on the solutions and more hands that shape the contours of development. Gurgaon is no different. All world cities were built on a healthy partnership between the government and the citizens. We have to get past these blame games. If the economic vitality of the nation depends on how well we make our cities perform, then isn't it time that we partnered meaningfully? Cities become vulnerable if citizens stay out of the game. Tell me, can any business house succeed if the city itself fails? City-specific visions are the key. These visions have to be collectively articulated. In fact, it is a mandatory process under JNNURM. Collective wisdom is very powerful. The city administration and the corporates in Gurgaon can collectively articulate a vision, define outcomes, distil strategies, nuance processes and protocols for a livable Gurgaon. I would say better sooner than later.

GUARDIAN FOR GURGAON
OUR CITY NEEDS A SINGLE AUTHORITY

CITY FOR THE FUTURE: Hyderabad has emerged as a hub for modern industries like biotechnology and IT; (right) Karuna Gopal, president of the Foundation for Futuristic Cities

PEOPLE TALK

I feel there is a need to have a single authority in Gurgaon that has the power to take decisions, as it happens in any corporate setup. That way, there will be more accountability
Arun Kumar

They say too many cooks spoil the broth. The same seems to be the case in Gurgaon. It is a sorry state of affairs with different agencies blaming each other and ensuring nothing gets done
Minthang

Having too many agencies just leads to passing the buck. It also adds to the confusion. People end up visiting one office after another to get simple work done. Power should be vested in the hands of a few officers for greater clarity
Anuradha Sharma

We have no clarity about most things. Who is responsible for the sewage system? The HUDA or the MCG? If the road belongs to HUDA and the drain belongs to MCG, then we have a bigger problem. Our judiciary system does not feel the necessity to take on important issues like the demarcation of areas and work on resolving them. Many cases take years to be resolved. Who should be blamed?
Latika Thukral