

# Climate change: Work half-done will not pay off



## Adi Valliappan

About one-and-half months ago, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) released the 'Chennai Climate Action Plan' (CCAP) draft report in English, giving only two weeks' time for the people's feedback. But after parties including the CPM criticized the Corporation on this count, the draft report was also released in Tamil and feedback time extended to one month.

In fact, the 52-page draft report was drawn up according to the needs of the C-40 Cities, a global network of Mayors taking action to confront the climate crisis. The GCC's draft report and the feedback time-limit bear out the truth that we have an indifferent attitude towards the climate change. However, the report has sounded alarm bells which can hardly be ignored.

The sea level in Chennai will rise up seven meters, devouring 100 meters of landscape. As a result, there is a 60 per cent likelihood of the two power plants in north Chennai and 18 Metro stations being drowned. Once in five years, Chennai is flooded. So, 30 per cent of Chennai's landscape will likely be affected by floods. By 2100, 67 sq.km of Chennai's landscape, that is, 16 per cent, will probably be surrounded by water. Consequently, 10 lakh people will be affected. People living in 7,500 dense apartments built under the Urban Livelihood Mission near the rivers and water-bodies will also be affected.

## Directionless report

It is a welcome change that the Greater Chennai Corporation has started thinking about the climate change problem, learning lessons from the 2015 and 2021 floods. But the purpose of the Corporation is put into question, going by the patchy nature of the report which is hardly full-fledged because the report is so full of maps, figures and data that it is not understandable to the people, nor does it enable the people's participation in the issue. Written in departmental jargons, it reads like a collage of information and data already published as if it was prepared for someone else. There are no arguments in the report, which explain the problem scientifically.

"This report mainly talks about technological features, not in the least bothered about the socio-economic problems arising out of the climate change. Though the Corporation says that over 200 consultative meetings were held, no consultations were held with the people, nor with the fishing community," said Nithyanand Jayaraman, a prominent environmental activist. The report at several places talks about the need to reduce green gas emissions and to mitigate the inimical effects of climate change. But it hardly speaks about how to adapt to the climate change and how to re-configure the city in such a way that no natural resources are exploited.

The projects put forward by the CCAP draft report are for the most part speculative and not pragmatic.

Following are some questions arising out of the report:

A Metro railway station is being constructed now a few hundred feet away from the Gandhi statue on the Marina beach. The draft report says that 18 Metro stations face the risk of being drowned in water owing to the sea level rise. What if the seawater enters into the underground Metro stations that link several parts of the city? So, what plans do the Corporation and Chennai Metro Rail have to tackle this challenge? What are the plans to reclaim the three important rivers, the Buckingham canal and several extinct lakes of Chennai which has shrunk in size. Without retrieving these water-bodies, how can we tackle winter floods and summer drinking water needs?

The report says that as the people living in hutments will be more affected in large numbers, houses that can withstand the onslaughts of increasing heat will be built for them. How can these houses reduce heat without air-conditioners? Where will they be constructed?

What will the rescue mission and precautionary measures be like when climate change-triggered disasters hit the city?

"It is the people living at the lowest rung of the society, who have so far been the most affected in the Chennai floods. This report points out that they will be the most hit in the disasters caused by the climate change too. But the report has no information about how they will be rescued and rehabilitated," says Avilash Raul, principal scientist of the IIT-Madras, who has done research on Chennai's probable sea level rise.

**Ensuring security**

Climate change is a great challenge not only to Chennai but also to Tamil Nadu, India and the world as a whole. It is a global problem that is likely to accentuate disasters the world over. But we are not prepared for it even in terms of principles. Just because people are not greatly aware of this problem, the government too should not exhibit its ignorance. It is the need of the hour for the government to join hands with the people and increase the awareness at all levels about the looming problem that has the potential of letting loose natural disasters the world over. So, the government agencies such as the Greater Chennai Corporation should ensure transparency in the climate action plans.

The GCC cannot on its own bring about a change that has no precedent at the level of Tamil Nadu or at the national level. But a city that is home to lakhs of people and supports their livelihood must ensure their safety and security. All initiatives powered by good understanding must start right now to make Chennai a safe place to live in and resilient at that.

**Adi Valliappan, [valliappan.k@hindutamil.co.in](mailto:valliappan.k@hindutamil.co.in)**

**Translated by V.Mariappan.**