

PLANNERS' CIRCLE Master Plan(ning) for Urban Water Bodies

CONVENED BY
TREADS@CPR in collaboration
with NMCG and NIUA

KEY INSIGHTS

1.
Master Plan is the sole statutory plan, but it is limited by its spatial nature. For it is conceived as a land use plan, Master Plan can at best delineate and designate the critical areas/zones for water bodies. Development control regulations (DCRs) for these zones, incorporating existing laws, may help.
2.
Can urban planning prioritise water-centric imaginations? Prioritizing water bodies may conflict with other important considerations of land development and economic growth.
3.
Water-centric planning solutions must find a middle ground. Search for contextually driven middle ground between engineering and natural solutions for urban and river interface. The fickle forces of urbanization make extreme positions untenable.
4.
Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) may be a manifestation of inadequacies of existing urban institutional structures and cultures. The flexibility to create SPVs is a worthy innovation for water body centric urban governance.
5.
Programmatic plans are distinctly different from the statutory Master Plan. The distinction with plans for smart city/sanitation is blurred. It leads to diluted policy discourse.

6. River/water body focused projects are often ex-post interventions. Advanced technology tools (GIS/water-sensitive) can help accommodate these concerns ex-ante.
7. Urban river/water bodies may be treated as commons to search for governance alternatives. The alternatives may explore support from byelaws/DCRs.
8. Urban environmental risks including those associated with climate change are often extra-territorial/jurisdictional. Requires ULBs to build enduring links with institutions beyond their jurisdictions and establish institutional processes to cope with the risks.
9. Master Plan can supplement the efforts of river/water body specific institutions. Spatial planning elements can be creatively used to support aligning river/water body governance institutions like Mithi River Development Authority.
10. National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) offers a repository of experiences for rejuvenating water bodies. With its role as a regulator and

an implementor, NMCG's experiences can offer useful lessons for reimagining river/water body centric Master Planning.

11. Innovative application of Transferable Development Rights (TDR) kind of instruments can be limited. Weak real estate markets may impact the effectiveness of TDRs for water body protection.
12. The usual buffer zones remain relevant. Buffer zones need not be 'No Development' zones. Creative application of byelaws/DCRs/regulatory instruments can help.
13. Evolving case law of urban river/water body protection can inform spatial planning. Master Planning related laws can be informed by cases such as the GO/111 in Telangana and Yamuna in Delhi.
14. Environmental protection laws must be sensitized to accommodate spatial planning scope and limitations. Urban planning and governance should be able to leverage the laws effectively.

Disclaimer: These are insights gathered from expert consultations and do not necessarily reflect our position. These will inform our research.

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Planners' Circle is a forum conceived to draw on expert planners' experiential wisdom about reimagining the structure and the rationalities of the statutory Master Plan instrument for better planning and governance of urban water bodies in Indian cities.

Master Plan is the sole statutory instrument for promoting and regulating urban growth in India. The concept, configuration, rationalities of, and the institutional structures surrounding the instrument are conceived by legislations drafted before 1970s – by states, per the federal organization of powers. In contrast, India's environmental renaissance began after the Stockholm Conference in 1972 - when the Government of India enacted the Water Act 1974, to control and prevent water pollution. While this is a central legislation primarily focused on industrial pollution, the legal and institutional frame of Master Plan remained unchanged with its archaic conceptions for planning and governing urban growth in India.

On the other hand, India's urban growth confronts newer challenges: degeneration of water bodies and their ecosystems, urban floods, groundwater depletion, climate change linked risks, and so on. Despite the growing awareness and enhanced efforts by the state institutions as well as the civic society, urban environmental management remains a challenge.

For a NMCG supported research project, TREADS@CPR seeks to critically engage with the instrument of Master Plan to revisit the idea of statutory spatial planning for environmental management. We are conscious of the ambitious nature of this goal; hence a beginning with urban water bodies.

We want to convene Planners' Circle periodically, where we will have a roundtable of expert planners (with experience of preparing statutory Master Plans) engaging in free-flowing conversations over a set of questions below. No presentations are expected.

QUESTIONS TO DEBATE

1. Building on specific experiences of preparing Master Plans, in what ways did you find the components of a Master Plan (such as land use plan, DCRs) and their rationalities inadequate to address protection and management of urban water bodies?
2. What possible ways of reimagining the instrument of Master Plan can we consider for addressing this challenge? What kind of changes/additions/reforms are needed in these components? Discuss using empirical examples and experiences. For example, water bodies drainage mapping to be included in Base Map preparation, drafting DCRs/Byelaws for protection of water bodies, using instruments such as TDRs for restoring water bodies etc.
3. What kind of reworking of institutional organization and cultures are needed? For e.g., multiplicity of institutions for development and regulation (corporations, parastatals, SPVs for say, river front development) – whether supplement or constrain protection of water bodies?

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