

Request to Standing Committee of the MCGM – 19th December 2007

At the outset, we welcome and appreciate the initiative taken by MCGM to provide access to drinking water to the people living in slums post-1995. However, we have some basic questions regarding the scheme of pre-paid water meters:

- As per the MCGM's Water Charges Rules, 2001, persons living in the slums established post 1995, were denied access to water completely. However, the MCGM hopes to change this and set up prepaid water meters for regular supply of drinking water. How can the MCGM ensure that these persons will continue to receive water even once the credit balance will be over and if for whatever reason, they are unable to get it renewed on time?
- The MCGM claims that pre-paid water meters will prevent (or at least reduce) theft of water through breaking water pipes. How can one ensure the same will not occur when prepaid water meters will be installed? What mechanisms is MCGM putting in place to check the water theft through the licensed plumber's assistance once the prepaid meters will be installed?
- Could you give us some more details about these prepaid meters:
 - Who are the suppliers of the prepaid water meters
 - Terms of Contract with these suppliers
 - The manufacturing details of the meter and the kind of model that will be put into use
 - Installation and maintenance of the meters
 - The security that these meters will be maintained in functioning condition
 - Will this prepaid connection be shared between groups of persons living in the slums? Or will you be providing individual connections to each household?
- What safeguards has the MCGM taken to avoid an outbreak of endemic diseases (like cholera, typhoid, jaundice, etc) that could occur through the consumption of polluted water when persons are not able to access clean water as there is no available credit balance in their prepaid connections?

- Why does MCGM need prepaid meters to check non revenue water when it already has a system of putting a public stand post once the group has submitted water rental charges for 6 months in advance?

- The MCGM hopes to achieve better efficiency in water services through prepaid water meters. Are we talking about improving efficiency in the MCGM's functioning in water to the public? Or efficiency in revenue collection? Or efficiency in the way the private operators will loot the public over and above the taxes we pay to the government? Can't MCGM achieve the same efficiency through postpaid regular stand post connections as in the pre 1995 slums?

- Does providing water through postpaid connections in the pre 1995 slums give legal rights to persons living there? Will the same be achieved through prepaid water meters in the post 1995 slums? In that case why cannot the MCGM provide same post paid connections for water supply to post 1995 slums too?

- The MCGM is violating the rights of its citizens on many counts:
 - Their basic fundamental right to access to water
 - The Constitutional obligation of the State under the Directive Principles to provide basic minimum services like water to every citizen
 - Creating a divide between the post and pre 1995 slums over provision of water
 - Discriminating between the rich and the poor. There are an equally high number of persons living in residential colonies post 1995, but they get regular water supply

- Why is the MCGM insisting on creating a social rift between its citizens by providing water in different ways to pre and post 1995 slums?

- Will water provision by MCGM to post-1995 slums be a service that ensures regular, uninterrupted water supply (as is provided to pre-1995 slum dwellers, non-slum dwellers and commercial and industrial consumers) or is water going to be sold by the MCGM through pre-paid water meters?

- Last, will MCGM ensure that they will continue to supply water to the persons (even if through prepaid connections) as a State responsibility and not hand it over to private corporations as a step towards commodification of water and privatization of water supply

Unless MCGM can ensure, regular, uninterrupted access to sufficient, safe and affordable water supply to all (pre and post-1995 informal settlements), we do not understand how you will be able to ensure improved revenue collection and reduction in water thefts.

We ask you to deliberate on these aspects, before taking any decision on the proposal today.

In the best interest of water delivery services to Mumbai,

Thanking you,
Yours sincerely,

Afsar Jafri

Janak Daftari

Surabhi Sinha

Sitaram Shelar