Citizens, Not Technology make a Smart City

Karuna shared the award with four others -- Jane Henley, World Green Building Council CEO, Maria Sillanpaa, founder of Sustainability Advisory Group (Finland), Douglas Baker, Ecolab chairman and CEO, Amiya Kumar Sahu, founder and president, National Solid Waste Association of India. "I have been selected for evangelizing, arguing and presenting smart cities to the government not as those dominated by technology, but as harbingers of sustainability and equitable growth," says Karuna and adds, "In the smart cities area everything is pretty much seen through the prism of technology, my mission has been to demystify the concept of smart cities and reveal its core to all stakeholders. Smart cities are nothing but sustainable and livable cities."

Smart cities & Economic Growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to make India a 20 trillion dollar economy will be realised if Indian urban system turns smart says Karuna. But a number of questions rise along with this. "Can our chaotic cities with crumbling infrastructure be transformed into smart and sustainable cities? Are smart cities really a panacea for urban ills? Most importantly do citizens actually want smart cities? These questions are creating substantial noise in the development corridors of the nation," she raises and suggests, " Demystifying the Smart City should become the top priority of the government. It's not an easy task given the images of flying cars, robotic walls, personalised sunlight, wearable technology and all the surreal stuff that smart cities are associated with."

Global impact

Karuna explains that borrowing ideas from developed countries and implementing them is not a challenge. "A few weeks ago, a New-York based think tank announced 21 Intelligent Communities of the Year. These cities and communities represent models of economic and social transformation in the 21st century. What is perhaps very interesting about them is that they are not the most advanced 'technology centres'," she says.

Each exemplifies best practices in economic vitality, sustainability, job creation, innovation and digital inclusion. They are charting new paths to lasting prosperity for their citizens, businesses and institutions.

Sustainability an utopian concept?

"It is not. It is achievable and today smart cities are widely viewed as the perfect solution for poverty alleviation, job creation and inclusive growth," says Karuna. And the definition of a smart city is defined by its livability and sustainability. "People should understand that technology is not at the heart of smart cities but citizens are at the heart of smart cities," she points out.

Converging technology and ecology

Smart cities that are small and built afresh can be designed well using less technology but to turn existing cities we have no option but to take recourse to smart technologies.

Karuna elaborates why, "Indian metros like Delhi, Hyderabad and Bengaluru have violated the sustainable design principles and have become large unwieldy sprawls with crumbling infrastructure. Smart technologies and smart decisions are required to retrofit them. A large urban sprawl can be "shrunk" with public transportation but only smart technologies can manage electricity, water consumption. Technologies can prevent crime in large cities."

Hyderabad, an eco-friendly city

"The green cover in Hyderabad is about eight per cent and is among the lowest in the country. It is expected that developing ten forests around Hyderabad will increase its present green cover to 20 per cent. Metro Rail is great for the city as it is designed as an eco-friendly mode of travel - reduces carbon emission, fuel consumption and pollution," she says.

E-waste

In Hyderabad , safe disposal of e-waste still in a nascent stage, people are getting exposed to dangerous chemicals, toxic gases and heavy metals

Studies suggest that Hyderabad accounts for 25,000 ton of this e-waste, a figure that requires immediate attention and correction before it is too late.

About 95 per cent of e-waste recycling in the city still takes place in the informal sector that employs an army of dismantlers to segregate metals from the wastes or through incineration. This needs to be corrected.

A World Bank funded project Clean E-initiative was launched in four cities including Hyderabad, Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad last year.

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Reference: The New Indian Express

Link: http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/hyderabad/Citizens-Not-Technology-make-a-Smart-City/2015/02/25/article2685116.ece