

Can Good Governance Fetch better Ranking for Erode City?



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B Chandrasekaran

Poor Ranking of Erode City

In the last few years, both the State and Central Governments have been sanctioning a huge amount of money for several schemes and programmes aimed at improving essential services provided to its people. Funds were also sanctioned for a few special projects for improving city development through innovative pilot schemes. It would be interesting to look at Erode city's performance at the national level ranking on different parameters over the years.

In 2010, the Union Ministry of Urban Development had ranked Indian Cities on sanitation with a reference to Review the **National Urban Sanitation Policy 2009–2010**. Erode city was ranked 60 out of 423 cities. The City scored just 43 out of 100 marks. Other cities of Tamil Nadu that ranked better than Erode were Trichy (6), Chennai(13), Alandur (20), Thanjavur (26), Neyveli (31), Thirunalveli (38), Pallavaram (39), Tambaram (40) and Nagercoil (53).

The Union Ministry of Urban Development conducted four surveys for the assessment of cities' cleanliness. The details on ranking of Erode city in these surveys are given below:

- In the first survey of 73 cities on cleanliness conducted in 2016, Erode was not figured at all. While other cities of Tamil Nadu like Trichy were impressively ranked (3), Coimbatore (18), Madurai (26) and Chennai (36).
- Out of 500 cities, 434 were covered in 2017 Survey. Erode was ranked 42 and the citizen feedback through Swachhata App showed a very poor performance by the city. Other cities of Tamil Nadu that ranked better than Erode were Trichy (6), Coimbatore (16) and Kumbakonam (37).
- In the **Cleanliness Survey of 2018**, covering 4203 cities of India, Erode was ranked 51 among 100 cities of more than one lakh population. The rank declined from 42 in 2017, mainly due to the poor performance of the City's urban services. Trichy and Coimbatore were ranked 13 and 16, respectively with better performances.
- In the **Cleanliness Survey of 2019**, covering 4237 cities of India, Erode did not figure at all. While the ranks of Trichy and Coimbatore were declined to 39 and 40, respectively due to the poor documentation of urban services provided.

Erode on Ease of Living Index 2018

The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has brought out the **Ease of Living Index 2018** covering 111 cities of India measuring **critical pillars of urban development (Physical, Institutional, Social and Economic) and uses 78 indicators across 15**. All 12 city corporations of Tamil Nadu were included in the Index Ranking. The following are the summary of the results:

- In the **overall ranking**, Erode was ranked 26 with a score of 43.55. While other cities of Tamil Nadu that ranked better were Trichy (12) with a score of 48.82, Chennai (14) with a score of 47.24 and Coimbatore (25) with a score of 43.61.
- In the sub-Index of **Institutional ranking** of cities, Erode was ranked 63 with a score of 8.64. The better performers of institutional ranking in Tamil Nadu were Chennai (20), Madurai (28), Thoothukudi (28), Salem (34), Tirupur (37), Coimbatore (41), Vellore (47), Trichy (51), Tirunelveli (53) and Thanjavur (54). **The institutional ranking of these cities is relatively better and shows strengths to deliver the services to urban residents. Though it is not surprising to note that there is not a single city in Tamil Nadu which ranks in the top 10 cities in better institutional systems.**
- In the ranking of **Social Sub-Index**, Erode was ranked 20, Trichy 2, Chennai 14, Tirupur 16 and Coimbatore 19. **This is the only indicator in which the performance of Erode was good compared to other cities of Tamil Nadu.**
- In the sub-Index of **Economic category**, Erode was ranked 37. While other cities of Tamil Nadu that ranked better than Erode were Tirupur (5), Coimbatore (17), Trichy (19), Dindigul (23), Madurai (28), Tirunelveli (35) and Thanjavur (36).

- In terms of ranking of cities in the **Physical Sub Index category**, surprisingly Erode was ranked 15, Chennai 14, Trichy 17, Madurai 25 and Coimbatore 27.
- In terms of assessing the ranking of top 10 cities on the above **Four Pillars**, in the Institutional Pillar and Physical Pillar ranking, not a single city was featured from Tamil Nadu; while in Social pillar, Trichy was ranked 2nd and in Economic Pillar, Tirupur was ranked 5.

City Needs Reforms in Governance Structure

The poor ranking of Erode city over the years reveals the pathetic status of governance. The city has been implementing several projects but a huge time lag of five to eight years is resulting in the escalation of cost due to rampant corruption at all levels. At present, under the Smart City Mission, the City has proposed a total of 23 projects worth `916.08 crore. Out of these, 14 projects worth `658.68 crore are under implementation in different stages. However, there is no cost-benefit analysis for any of the projects proposed under the Smart City Mission.

On April 24, 2017, the independent rating company Brickwork Rating, Mumbai, gave BB+ rating to the Erode City Corporation after assessing the financial performances for the years 2015-16 and 2016-17. However, the rating agency did not reaffirm the rating further and withdrew the rating of the Erode City Corporation on April 26, 2019 due to the non-availability of the latest key financial data of the City Corporation after 2016-17. It indicates the failure of the governance system in the City Corporation.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India had conducted a performance audit of the Erode City Corporation in 2015 and observed the city **"did not meet the Service Level Benchmarks in respect of water supply and underground drainage. Execution of Underground Sewage System was delayed. There was a loss due to poor contract management in the implementation of road works."** It further lamented that **"The Maternity Centres and Urban Health Posts operated by the ECMC showed poor delivery of services and these institutions had shortage of staff. Coverage of students under School Health Programme was not comprehensive. Solid waste was not segregated and scientifically disposed off... Available Public conveniences were not adequate, thus paving the way for open defecation. Lands available for development as parks either remained idle or were encroached. Majority of schools did not have adequate facilities."**

Conclusion

All the above factors led to poor ranking of Erode city in most of the parameters assessed for the past few years. The CAG's warnings on several important areas were ignored by the City Corporation. There is no innovation in projects implemented under the Smart City Mission. The existing governance structure is even worse than in the past. Therefore, Smart City projects would yield little impacts on the sustainability of their objectives. Until there is a major overhaul of the city's governance system with reasonable transparency and accountability of bureaucrats and

the book of accounts, the city will be stuck with providing poor quality of services to its residents who will raise objections to the increase of taxes and levies.

B Chandrasekaran is Research Fellow at CPPR. He is an economist and public policy expert working in the areas of city development, urban governance, urban community development, civic awareness, education and skills development.

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