

CATALYSTS OF CHANGE

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A RETROSPECTIVE

URBAN HABITATS FORUM

INDIA HABITAT CENTRE
LODHI ROAD
NEW DELHI - 110003
NCR, INDIA
TEL: +91-11-24682001-9
FAX: +91-11-24682010

MIRABILIS ADVISORY (P) LTD.
SUITE 1019, 10th FLOOR
DLF GALLERIA CONDOMINIUMS
GURGAON - 122009
HARYANA, INDIA
TEL: +91-124-423-8452
FAX: +91-124-423-8458

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Introduction

“Leveraging Sports and Culture for the Development of India’s Cities” was the focus of discussion at the third edition of the Urban Habitats Forum symposium series. The event held at the India habitat Centre attracted a diverse audience.

The Speakers of the event included Raj Liberhan, Director, India Habitat Centre, Manisha Malhotra, CEO, Mittal Champions Trust, Malav Shroff, CEO, Volvo Ocean Race India Stopover, Divya Kumar Bhatia, Festival Director, Rajasthan International Folk Festival, Shovana Narayan, Joint Director General, Culture and Ceremonies, Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Games Organizing Committee

The symposium was initiated by Mr. Raj Liberhan, Director of India Habitat Centre and Mr. Anupam Yog, Managing Director of Mirabilis Advisory who provided an overview and introduced the key points of discussion. In his welcome speech, Mr Liberhan stressed the importance of UHF as a platform for generating meaningful dialogue among various stakeholders on how to create vibrant and sustainable living spaces. The importance of sports and culture to achieving this was brought home by Mr. Malav Shroff CEO of Volvo Ocean Race and Ocean Blue in India who, through the example of the Volvo Ocean Race, illustrated how a mega sports event can have far-reaching positive impact on the social, economic, physical and cultural landscape of a city. The point was further driven home by Ms. Manisha Malhotra a former Olympian and CEO of the Mittal Champions Trust, who shared her observations of how the Olympic Games had benefitted Beijing as well as Ms. Shovana Narayan Joint Director General of the Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Organising Committee, who highlighted the opportunities and potential advantages for Delhi as the host city of 2010 Commonwealth Games. Mr Divya Bhatia Festival Director Rajasthan International Folk Festival (RIFF) wrapped up the symposium by demonstrating the importance of investing in culture to revive cities and keep alive heritage through a presentation on the RIFF. The presentations were followed by an engaging and interactive panel discussion.

Unlocking the Potential of Hosting a Mega Sporting Event

All four panelists concurred that mega sporting events present the respective host city with an opportunity to develop both soft and hard infrastructure and improve governance. Mr. Shroff specifically talked about the primary and secondary benefits that such events hold for a host city. According to him the primary benefits include sectoral and business growth, private and public investments in infrastructure, successful branding of the city and a positive multiplier effect on the local economy. The secondary benefits include post-event usage of infrastructure including public transport, continued employment generation, social and economic inclusion of various communities, increased value of land and property, enhanced global positioning for similar projects in the future, and an indication of the current and future state of a nation.

Mr. Shroff categorically stated that “the event is a catalyst to start a project and not an end to a project”, and emphasized the fact that planning for the event should be done in a manner so as to derive maximum benefits in the long term. Ms. Narayan spoke specifically about the 2010 Commonwealth Games and the way in which the event can act as a catalyst for developing Delhi into a sporting and cultural hub. According to her not only with the Games attract increased FDIs, but they will also act as a vehicle for urban regeneration as factors such as water usage, sewage, sanitation, waste disposal etc. are being addressed with renewed energy and a greater awareness.

The more intangible benefits of leveraging sports and culture for a city’s development were touched upon by Mr. Bhatia, who also talked about the importance of preserving the rich culture and heritage of India. He pointed out the way in which local communities can benefit from the promotion of a city’s culture. “The city reflects the culture of a place and forums for social cohesion are required to bond different cultures,” he said. According to Mr. Bhatia, “India can develop cultural cities by repositioning its culture in an innovative manner.”

Preparing the Ground

While they agreed on the potential of a mega event to positively transform a city, the panelists pointed out that cities and various stakeholders also need to achieve a certain minimum threshold of development and preparedness. Aspiration alone is not a sufficient precondition. Mr. Shroff very clearly outlined the key ingredients needed to successfully host a sports event. Among other things, he stressed on the extreme importance of picking the right location and went on to add that once that is achieved, all ideas need to be analysed and assessed, following which logical goals need to be set.

The most vocal supporter of preparedness was Ms. Malhotra who emphasised the need to develop adequate and suitable sports infrastructure in India, without which it would be impossible to create a pool of well trained athletes. She said that India still has a long way to go before it matches China’s sports facilities. “An athlete loses the motivation when faced with ill maintained stadia and dilapidated

sports infrastructure," she said. Ms. Malhotra also proposed that the responsibility of creating better facilities should be given to private corporates who have recently shown a lot of interest in supporting sportspersons and promoting various sports.

Ms. Narayan placed these concerns in the context of the 2010 Olympics when she pointed out that a great deal of attention is being paid to the quality of construction of various facilities. She agreed that maintenance of the stadia is as important as their construction. "The games can change our mindsets, aspirations and social behavior patterns." At the same time she also hoped that the Games will sensitise planners to people's needs, making Delhi a much more friendly host city.