
Governance of Auroville - Present and Future - an alternative way

by [Paul Vincent](#) on October 30, 2019, 11:09 am

GOVERNANCE OF AUROVILLE-PRESENT AND FUTURE

As stated in earlier messages, the Auroville economy needs a complete overhauling and change of direction... That is not a reflection, it is a fact and it is long overdue...

It is a reasoned opinion held by many that the management of Auroville's economy has taken a wrong path some 35 years ago when the impetus was made to make Auroville a free market economy, when maintenance in kind was replaced with maintenance in cash, when commercial units now defunct were encouraged to make export and produce money regardless of the real needs of Auroville in terms of self-sufficiency as envisaged by the Mother for her city...

Therefore, it is very important now to find new selection processes of all working groups adapted to the survival of Auroville. We can not afford to run further adrift from the aims and purpose of Auroville. Our working groups have failed; they should now give back to the Residents Assembly the power to find a new direction that will be 180° from where we are now... The working groups are here to execute the wish of the Residents Assembly; not to govern it.

Here is an overview of what needs to be amended:

1 - Lack of proper business policy: According to Mother, our industries should primarily produce items that we now purchase from the open market. Therefore, these industries which are now stopping production should hand over the premises and connected assets, including reserve funds, savings, fixed deposits, etc... to the FAMC. Necessary funds for proper maintenance(s) of outgoing executives would have to be guaranteed by Auroville.

Presently, our industries are primarily producing items for tourists and for foreign luxury markets... When we look at our business houses, we see that we have created a free market economy, often with personal income and Auroville's assets which makes some of us independent of the collective economy and therefore with no stake in its success or failure. Some of us have created assets and capitals through our commercial units which do belong to us only on paper but are the properties of the managers for as long as they live. They are not at the disposal of the community and no one else has the right to question.

We have vindicated the superiority of our business units to services units and given more tacit freedom, so much so that most of our services have been forced to become commercial enterprises in disguise. The outcome: we all pay taxes when we use our services. Besides, Mother's essential guidelines for commercial units have been discarded while we facilitated these to become more or less private. As a result, most if not all products made in these units are in any case too expensive for

the average Aurovilian and are of no use for the community at all, except to generate funds out of which only small part of it come to the community fund.

Nowadays, due to the world economic recession, the largest commercial houses of Auroville are closing down one after the other and funds contributions to the community are shrinking. The major share of the wealth of commercial houses has been gathered in bank accounts which are not available for the community. The management posts have always been immovable and aged bosses are unwilling to hand over to younger executives; they are also allergic to Aurovilians workforce. Whereas all commercial enterprises of Auroville should have been only production departments of Auroville and executives only managers like what Mother has created in the Ashram in Pondicherry...

2 - Lack of proper education policy: Auroville is past fifty years and it is supposed to be a city in the making. However, even after such long time, no training center for the corporations of builders has been established in Auroville. To build a city, there is a need of masons, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, painters and allied jobs required for such activity. Value education should be imparted right from primary school of Auroville. Value of workmanship should be fostered in a city that is supposed to be guided by Karma Yoga.

We have many schools facilities, more than we really need; a large part of the students coming out of these school ends up going abroad to follow higher education that are not required for building a city in stead of staying and learning in a technical training center to help build the city with their hands. Our schools are only made to create bureaucrats and the like. Very few young Aurovilians end up doing manual work here. However, we employ an army of paid workers to build our city; in short, we have created a new type of neocolonialism. This represents a large drain of our economy and it is not sustainable. In the long run, paid workers based economy is much more costly and not viable.

3 - Lack of proper farm policy: Today, except for Auroorchard and Annapurna, we do not have any farms worth that name. There are no community approved farm policy and no accountability regarding food production. All farms put together produce a maximum of 5% of our global consumption. Moreover, the 5% that is produced is sold at higher price under the label of "bio" or "organic", making it out of reach for the average Aurovilians. It is found that actually, there are no directive given to the farmers to produce food that is required by Auroville and there are no factual farm policy supported by the groups in charge of economy and assets... This call for a review by the community to ensure that the farms get necessary budgetary supports and produce accordingly. Should there be a real world financial critical situation; the only option to feed the community would be from its farms production as it happened in the end of the seventies.

4 - Lack of proper land use, land management and purchase policy: Presently in Auroville, decisions related to land exchanges, acquisitions, developments and management occur in a haphazard manner with no proper mandated policy direction, no technical analyses or criteria for exchange/ development, or structured process in place. Prior to any exchange, sale or development, a site-specific

analysis must determine that the lands considered contain no significant environmental, agricultural or other resource values, the loss of which could have long-term consequences and where possible not lead in displacement of existing residents.

The various land related development groups in Auroville lack a predictable and systematic process in developing future land use development strategies. Any process adopted in the future should incorporate community needs and sound technical analyses prior to taking any decisions related to reclassification of land uses or sale or exchange of lands.

Would it not have been an idea worth considering, hiring an external agency to purchase the land for Auroville? This suggestion was made as the master plan was in the making. At that time the Land & Estate Management, the ancestor of present LCC (Land Consolidation Committee) was plagued by the same problems that the LCC, then the Land Board now faces: lack of professionalism, wrong estimation of land values and accusations of corruption. Many of the members of these committees being residents coming from the local villages have family ties to non-residents and even if one consider some of the accusations of corruption and malpractices as being simple gossip to be dismissed with contempt, it appears practically that often the lines of conduct have been blurred thereby reinforcing the public perception that something was amiss.

In fact there has never been any attempt to consider the alternative mentioned in the first sentence of this paragraph. This despite several incidents that have confirmed that indeed some money changed hands during land transactions... On 23rd April 2009, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation said in a letter No AF/Conf.1/219, that: "*The FAMC had decided to probe the land transactions done by the erstwhile LCC members for the last 5 years and this work is going to be entrusted to IPAI, Special Auditors...*", why the summary of this audit was never shared with the community? Since then, we have had 3 Lands Board committees, and there were a series of mismanagements leading to huge loss of funds, of lands and court cases. Why is it that brokers have constantly been hired and paid for by these groups?

5 - Lack of proper building policy: Right from the creation of the housing group in the early nineties, the divergence from ethics started to reach today momentum. We are fighting against real estate encroachers on one side, but this group has become a real estate by itself; buying and selling Auroville houses which has been paid for by the first resident; when the person who build the house leave for whatever reason, this house is sold at a higher rate that the initial cost, and that is often repeated many times over the years, the house is actually sold at market rate; that is what real estate agents do. The catch is that the cost of buildings in Auroville includes the following overheads expenses: contractor 15%, architect 5%, infrastructure 15%, Housing Service 10%, Unity Fund 1%, Land Fund 1% and the TDC 1%. As on today (In 2014) the lowest price in AV is Rs 15000 per square meter, the highest is above Rs 25000 per square meter, yet none of the occupants become the owner of the house he pays from his pocket...

Most of the times, the contractor is Aurovilian, often not registered and not qualified, and again, most of the time there are absolutely no contribution by contractors to Auroville central fund (compulsory for Guesthouses, for commercial units, etc...). Therefore, when a contractor builds a building complex costing Rs 1 crore, his share will be Rs 15 lakhs... There are several building complexes that have been built in the last 7 years to the tune of much more than 25 crores of Rupees, however the contribution from Auroville contractors and architects is next to nil... The same thing can be said about the architects, though to a lesser extent, except when the architect is also the contractor... The question, which arises here, is who take care of the infrastructures fund and ensure proper utilization?

To conclude this topic, there is a need to create a construction department that will be devoid to commercial profits and who will be able to purchase building materials in bulk directly from the factories without intermediary. There is also a need of establishing a “building completion certification” composed of engineers not connected with the actual building work.

6 - Aurovilians having lands inside the master plan area of AV. (ancestral): While there is a hot topic being discussed by a few, that is the so-called ancestral lands owned by a few villages families related to some Aurovilians, and while there is a lot being done to exchange outside lands so to secure remaining lands in the city. This topic is to be dealt with some tact and meaningful negotiation and it should not be confused with the next one.

7 - Aurovilians purchasing lands in and out of the Master Plan area: There is another connected topic that Aurovilians carefully avoid: which are lands being purchased outside Auroville area by Aurovilians. According to information available, it is not a small amount of land that is involved here. It may be between 50 to 100 acres or more and these lands are being purchased privately, mostly in benami names, or in the name of bogus organizations for Aurovilians of foreign origin and in family members' names for Aurovilians of Indian origin, (PIO, or OCI).

While often the funds utilized for this purpose are earned by Aurovilians who are running a registered unit under the Auroville Foundation, using this unit as a cover to divert funds, to obtain outside unregistered and unaccounted contracts or in some cases using an official job to get kickback unofficially; in other instances, some Aurovilians are also running undeclared units and obtain funds that they use privately. In addition, some of them are actually in an official position of the Auroville Foundation. There are also those people who have genuine fear for the future of their children and do purchase private properties with funds coming from their families...

Obviously, no one is willing to open the Pandora's box to investigate this issue, but some of them gather in groups and sub-groups to ensure that those who had the bad luck of having family lands are pressurized to the maximum extent, even running the risk of expulsion from Auroville, because according to them these fellows are the ones that must be punished and prosecuted. I think it is time to look frankly at the issue of private properties owned by Aurovilians acquired with funds earned in the name of Auroville and at the discrimination against some but not

others when there is an issue of land.

The apprehension of those villagers having ancestral properties is more genuine than the fear of those Aurovilians who have no faith in the Charter, and besides, with the money spent in buying and developing private properties, many lands in the city area could have been purchased. Many local Aurovilians would have no problem to exchange their ancestral lands situated in the Master Plan area, should the LCC and now the Land Board be composed of people genuinely negotiating, however, it is not the case presently...

8 - Dependence of external sources of energy: Today, Auroville is looking for additional source of electricity to cater the needs of a growing city in the making... That is a fact and talks are going on about having a new electricity power sub-station in the immediate vicinity of the Auroville city (In fact in Adventure, Green Belt, in contradiction to Green Belt guidelines...

Now, when we talk about sustainability and at the same time adds more conventional electricity power facilities from the state of Tamil Nadu, we are confronted with a dilemma... Indeed, dependence of a source of power that is not produced by the city tend to reduce to nil the sustainability that we want to achieve, even if at present, Varuna pays the whole electricity bill, we will still use electricity that is produced by conventional means like nuclear or coal power...

Right now, to put the whole picture in front of you, the Tamil Nadu Government has ordered 62 new TNEB sub-stations (see-attached annex1) and 2 huge coal power-generating power plants within less than 50 kilometers north of Auroville in eco-sensitive water bodies including near Marakanam, on the proximity of Kaveli... These power plants will use imported coal, therefore making two new ports and conveyor belt across the ECR and farm lands... Moreover, when the northeast monsoon blow, it is highly likely that there will be smoke pollution over Auroville... It is up to you to analyze what types of chemicals this smoke will contain... Not to speak about disposal of fly ashes... So, by accepting more power from produced in the local area, we are increasing the carbon footprint.

There are several alternatives to avoid depending of conventional power production, we just have to want it and change our pattern of living a little bit without suffering. The first thing would be to save energy consumption by replacing **all** existing light bulbs with LED light in every buildings, houses and offices of Auroville; this alone will reduce the consumption by a large portion, then with the funds thus saved, installing autonomous(*) solar panels and batteries in each and every house of Auroville one after the other. This would reduce further more the electricity consumption... This is the most logical and economic way to reduce largely our dependency on external power...

(*) Not connected to the grid: indeed, we should avoid one single power operator to prevent monopoly. When you connect your solar system to the TNEB, you give them soft energy that is given free by the sun at a low rate and then use conventional and polluting power that is sold to you at a higher rate. The only way to gain sustainability is to be free from the grid. It is much safer for us as a model city for

the future to have many small independent units of soft and free power generation; the same apply for water distribution. The idea of collective water system is to ensure a monopoly to enforce power control over individuals.

Conclusion: Some of you may think that the above topics are not connected. That would be a mistake to believe it; all these issues have a direct side effect on Auroville's economy. If we should be the people entrusted by Mother to realize her Dream, "the city that the earth needs", then we carry a greater responsibility than the rest of humanity. Simply stating that we are ordinary human being like any others is not enough. We are often looked upon as people who have sacrificed to be here, however, by being far below what she expected from us, this leaves us open to village politics, critics and mutual dependency which is unhealthy.

While employing an army of paid workers, we start to discover the real cost in terms of financial burden; on one side Aurovilians must be maintained, on the other, salaries of paid workers become more and more expensive and so are the allied expenses such as pensions, insurance and retirement fund. In the end of the day, to enrol Aurovilians would have been a better investment and the funds paid for would have remained largely within the system...

Right now, we have grown beyond our capacity to sustain ourselves for the number of people we are and the amount of money we have circulating. Without funds input from the Government of India, we would have been declared an economic failure. We have the ambition to be better and have more but somewhere we have lost simplicity, modesty and to a large extent honesty. Keeping quiet and doing nothing is not an option today...

Annexes

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENTS FROM AUROVILLE'S IDEALS

A Dream

"There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of good will, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments. In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their soul. Education would be given, not with a view to passing examinations and getting certificates and posts, but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place titles and positions would be supplanted by opportunities to serve and organise. The needs of the body will be provided for equally in the case of each and everyone. In the general organisation intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will

find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities. Artistic beauty in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the opportunity to share in the joys they bring being limited solely by each one's capacities and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign lord. Individual merit will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position. Work would not be there as the means of gaining one's livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side would provide for each one's subsistence and for the field of his work. In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood..."

Aug. 1954

"Sections like industries which participate actively will contribute part of their income towards the development of the township; or if they produce something (like foodstuffs) that is useful to the citizens, they will contribute in kind to the township, which is responsible for feeding its citizens."

30.12.1967

The Auroville Charter:

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations.

4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

The Mother. 28 February 1968

"At Auroville nothing belongs to anyone in particular. All is collective property. To be utilised with my blessings for the welfare of all."

14.5.1970

"To the inhabitants of Auroville

Only those who have resolved to stay in Auroville for good have the right to intervene in its organisation."

22.1.1971

**THE
AUROVILLE FOUNDATION
ACT, 1988**

(N° 54 of 1988) {29th September, 1988}

An Act to provide for the acquisition and transfer of the undertakings of Auroville and to vest such undertakings in a foundation established for the purpose with a view to making long- term arrangements for the better management and further development of Auroville in accordance with its original charter and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Whereas Auroville was founded by the 'Mother' on the 28th day of February, 1968 as an international cultural township...

Regarding industries in Auroville:

A disciple wrote, "[Names] will be the partners in this project to construct a factory named Aurosteel. They will invest various sums of money. How should the profits be distributed? In proportion to their investment, or some other way? [Name's] will be the biggest share. All told it needs Rs two lakhs." : *"They do not seem to know that in Auroville after all expenses are paid, including their own maintenance, the profits go to the town."*

17 October 1969

From Mother's Agenda - Probably early 1969 - During the time Auromodèle was being set up, these guidelines for industries were approved.

PRINCIPLES FOR STARTING INDUSTRIES IN AUROVILLE

"The objective of Auroville as it has been defined, is that all economic activities, whether industrial, agricultural, handicrafts or community services, shall be carried out by Aurovilians.

Since Auroville provides the material needs of the Aurovilians, they should work without any monetary recompense. This aim, which should under no circumstances be forgotten or delayed in its application, remains the ideal to be realized.

An intermediary stage of practical experimentation and `running-in' remains necessary before reaching it. During this stage, industries to be established in Auroville, within the framework of the `Aurovilian' conditions, may employ for some time, according to their needs, specialists and technicians who will be paid.

In any case this employment will be for a limited period, under an annually renewable contract. Their role will be to enable the launching of the industries concerned, and to help train as quickly as possible an Aurovilian labour-force capable of replacing them.

In addition, all arrangements in the organization of the work are to be made in harmony with the ideal of Auroville.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AT AUROVILLE

1. All industries should belong to Auroville from the beginning or eventually.

2. until Auroville acquires an international status, the industries will be subject to the Indian laws.

3. Beginning of industries at Auroville: a Central Fund for the development of economic activities should be set up which would help Aurovilians to start proper industries and to provide any other assistance that may be necessary. All surplus profit will go to the Central Fund.

** Those who wish to start industries may give money to the Central Fund conditionally or unconditionally, and let the Central Fund handle the money.*

** Others may start industries on their own and work under the supervision of the Central Fund conditionally or unconditionally.*

** Those who wish to donate only a part of their profits to the Central Fund, could start their industries anywhere in the world."*

"Auroville will be a self-supporting township.

All who live there will participate in its life and development.

This participation may be passive or active.

There will be no taxes as such but each will contribute to the collective welfare in work, kind or money.

Sections like Industries which participate actively will contribute part of their income towards the development of the township. Or if they produce something (like foodstuff) useful for the citizens, they will contribute in kind to the township which is responsible for the feeding of the citizens.

No rules or laws are being framed. Things will get formulated as the underlying Truth of the township emerges and takes shape progressively. We do not anticipate...

I want to insist on the fact that it will be an experiment: it's to make experiments -

experiments, research, studies.

An experimental city?: Yes... Auroville will be a city that will attempt to be, or strive or want to be, self-supporting, that is ..."

Mother Agenda - December 30, 1967

All the above lead to the facts that there will not be any private shops, enterprise, industry or business in the city area of the Master Plan of Auroville as envisioned by its founders... And these fundamentals should be clearly enshrined in the Master Plan approval...

What will happen to Auroville if there is a real world financial crash?

Our finance experts of the BCC tell us that Auroville keeps a cash reserve ratio for 3 ½ months survival in that eventuality... Now, in this scenario, which is not far away from happening, what will really happen after we have spent that reserve fund? Simple! Those who have other means will not bother so much, the rest will beg; why? Because, as a community, we have not learned our lessons from past experiences... The last time Auroville faced a real financial crisis was in the late seventies when the SAS starved the community by blocking our incomes... We could survive primarily because we were much less than we now are and because our lands were almost empty... Moreover, we were young and without fear to put our hands at the fork... And, many of us became farmer by necessity, it was a vital need.

Now, most people from outside would think that we have made a huge progress on this area since the last 30 years and have reached a stage where this cannot happen anymore! Wrong! Today, we are computer experts, companies managers, guesthouses owners, etc... We are not even ready to face any critical situation, should the need arise. There are no farmlands worth that name in Auroville, except AuroOrchard and perhaps Annapurna. Autonomy in food production for Auroville was a dream of the Mother; however, it is NOT a priority for the Aurovilians... I wonder what the majority of Aurovilians would eat if they had no money in their pockets and no funds in Auroville accounts...

Why the FAMC, the BCC, the TDC and all others working groups do not take the warning seriously? Why they do not allot farmlands to farmers and promote farming on a massive scale? Why the Farm group and the Forest group sit silently? Are we waiting another kick in the ass to react?

While there are quite a bit of valuable lands for farming, today, the little food grown here which is found on the shelves are for the upper class of Auroville who can afford to buy 'organic' food. The rest (that is more than ¾ of Aurovilians) are doomed to eat food that is grown and purchased in the rest of India's farms with chemicals and pesticides... Why? Simply because we do not have people with a vision in the management groups of Auroville. Are you satisfied with this situation?

If not, what can you do to change this trend? Moreover, would the bosses of Auroville agree to let you do farming for the community? Would they let you have lands, would they help you financially? And would the amateur farmers that are now on the field allow you to do so? Let's see...

Paul Vincent

29/10/2019

Posted in [Auroville governance : a new economy, Discussion](#)

by [Mandakini Lucien-Brun](#) on October 30, 2019, 3:23 pm

Thank you Paul. This is an excellent analysis, a comprehensive view and a very pertinent reminder.

by [Paul Vincent](#) on October 31, 2019, 6:54 am

No Renu, this is 100% my writing, this document matured over the last 5 years...

by [Egle](#) on October 31, 2019, 11:11 am

Thank you very much, Paul. I'm sure many of us do appreciate the information and the points of view you share in your article. It should be published in the News and notes, once it is back again.

What you write also makes us reflect upon ourselves and where do we stand in the face of what has to be done and how we can participate best. This is maybe the most important input of your article.

I just have to always think that auroville is as it is because of the people... Change your self - then change the world.

We have a lot of work, do not have time to write long articles and attend too many meetings... But if some common action could be taken, many would participate... For example that half of residents would refuse to follow the numerous rules of all these groups! What is their legitimacy after all? I know, it sounds unwise and too radical... Just it was in my mind for the last days.

by [Grace](#) on October 31, 2019, 12:32 pm

Thank You Paul and we appreciate your long research of our Governance of Auroville.

We feel that you experienced and explored your studies "Governance of Auroville Present and Future" of last 50 years.

by [Suryanina](#) on November 1, 2019, 2:55 pm

Thanks Paul. Also very impressed and in agreement with almost everything (for instance, more of our farms are really doing good and it is a bit unfair to generalise like this.) But I really appreciate this posting and hope we can all relate and change our cristallized patterns!

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