Report and Recommendations:

Creating a TDC Communication Strategy / Platform

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1. Why does L’Avenir D’Auroville/TDC need a communication strategy?

L’Avenir D’Auroville, like many other Auroville working groups, has developed a culture of top-down governance, characterized by the lack of:

- transparent information sharing,
- community participation,
- effective decision making,
- coherent implementation of decisions taken.

This results in a perceived divide between the Residents Assembly (RA) -Auroville’s civil society - and the Working Groups and ultimately led to an erosion of trust along this rift. The erosion of trust is also visible within the RA and within the Working Groups themselves along lines of different value and idea systems. These in turn result in a slow, fragmented and contested planning and development process.

We suggest that L’Avenir D’Auroville / TDC, owning one of Auroville’s essential tasks as their mandate - planning and building Auroville’s physical environment - takes the lead in establishing a culture of transparency and participation.
2. **What is the aim of the L’Avenir / TDC communication strategy?**

The aim is to:

- Inform the community and stakeholders in the bioregion about Auroville’s development and encourage their input.
- Gather all information required to make an informed community decision through a simple, easy to use process.
- Inspire, encourage, enable and reward responsible development.
- Engage Auroville’s, the bioregion’s and external expertise and experience.
- Ensure development is appropriate for the context.
- Ensure development and buildings are maintainable, both practically and financially.
- Provide a fair, transparent and understandable internal decision making process.
3. **What are the activities of a L’Avenir / TDC communication platform?**

3.1 **Resources & Systems**

- Recruit, train and establish a communications team as part of the technical team as opposed to as part of the coordinator team. This will facilitate continuity, competence and neutrality. This team needs to consist of minimum three members supported initially by a team of consultants.
- Create an information desk / single window with clear opening timings and purpose. This will ideally be a combination of a staffed desk and a „self-service desk“ where the public has access to a computer with an information database, to hardcopy files with reference material, to a clearly marked shelf with various forms etc.
- Create a public space/ notice board at the Town Hall and a virtual copy of it on Auronet for information sharing, including a calendar with important public events and a feedback box.
- Establish a clear and easy to use communication channel between the RA and L’Avenir.
- Hold regular consultancies / open meetings with the community at large.

3.2. **Stakeholders & Networks**

- “Who are we and who is this for?” Identify the various stakeholders (Auroville Residents Assembly, population of the bioregion, local farmers, village panchayats, local and regional NGOs, local and regional planning authorities, Tamil Nadu government, Auroville Foundation, Governing Board, Government of India…) and relevant communication strategies.
- Strengthen ties with the TDCAC – who is there and what role can they play?
- Network and cooperate with external experts on participatory planning, community engagement and organizational communication. Some examples:
MindMixer – is an online platform that allows communities to gather ideas, review and respond to feedback, and find solutions (http://www.mindmixer.com).

Loomio – is a collaborative decision-making tool that reduces the cost of participation in decision-making, making it easy for any group to translate online communication into real-world collective action (https://www.loomio.org).

Praxis – is an institute that devises practices to enhance a community’s participation in all its endeavors while at the same time acknowledging that ‘participation’ is not a technical or a mechanical process that can be realised through the application of a set of static and universal tools and techniques, but rather a process that requires reviewing existing structures (http://www.praxisindia.org/).

Meta-Culture – is a Bangalore based organisation process experts, trainers and consultants dedicated to improving human relationships – be it in teams, organisations, neighbourhoods or families – by using tools such as consensus decision making, corporate community dispute management, facilitation and mediation (http://www.meta-culture.in).

- Cooperate with the Residents Assembly Service and other existing AV structures to optimize the quality of our community interactions.
- Connect with the ongoing process of reviewing Auroville’s self-governance (e.g. proposals for participatory neighbourhoods, an active residents’ assembly, a restorative conflict transformation platform etc.).

3.3. Competencies, Processes & Tools

- Design and schedule team workshops to explore and mitigate blockages to an effective community engagement. While evaluating past efforts to establish a L’Avenir communication platform, the single main obstacle to achieving this aim seems to be a lack of coherence caused by internally divided teams that were unable to agree on a unified vision and approach to planning and developing Auroville, let alone form a commitment to participatory planning.
- Design and schedule regular trainings on communication skills and team dynamics with the entire TDC team. Communication and team work are competences that can and in fact must be learned. The basics of communication, working together and the difference between process oriented work approaches versus result oriented work approaches are essential knowledge to any organisation.
- Focus on designing strong processes and systems, including group internal ones such as a clear and transparent decision making process and external ones such as community engagement and participatory processes.
4. **What is an example for a process that could be designed and implemented by a TDC communication platform?**

4.1. **Process Flow: Creating an Implementation and Development Phasing Plan for Auroville**

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<th>DATE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>AIM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Prepare and distribute / display information material- brochures/ graphic panels/ web pages.</td>
<td>✓ To demystify the technicalities of the planning process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Create a public space for displaying information.</td>
<td>✓ To enable on-going and accessible sharing of information.</td>
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<td>✓ Organise and conduct focus groups on the question “What can I contribute to building Auroville?”</td>
<td>✓ To establish ownership of the planning and implementation process in the community.</td>
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<td>✓ Develop a questionnaire, conduct 400 interviews and compile results for distribution / display.</td>
<td>✓ To gauge the community’s understanding and opinion about the Master Plan, the Auroville Charter, and the vision of Auroville.</td>
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<td>✓ Develop and coordinate household surveys through AVNet and door-to-door/ Solar Kitchen surveys.</td>
<td>✓ To create a baseline survey with technical information related to planning and implementing the city.</td>
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