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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES, WATER SUPPLY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

PRO POOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN WATSAN at AHMEDABAD, INDIA

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Traditionally, because providing water and sanitation at the household level to slum residents were not seen as a priority by ULBs, mechanisms for obtaining such services were absent. The vacuum was filled by middlemen who charges huge amounts for sub-standard services. In Ahmedabad city, India, the ULB, slum residents and NGOs innovated a system which brought accountability and reduced corruption in the provision of watsan services. The mainstay of the system was charging affordable user fees which ensured that the users – slum residents – had leverage to ensure quality and time taken to install and maintain quality services.

The paper starts by showing the traditional approach and the resulting innovation. Pro-poor accountability arrangements are then listed. Three examples follow, one of a slum, the second of a middlemen and a third of a resident, of what happened when the innovation was put into practice

Background

In Ahmedabad city, almost 40% of its five million residents live in slums and chawls. There are about 400 slum pockets and 350 chawls. Almost all chawls are on private lands while 20% slums are on government land and the remaining 80% are on private land.

Chawls were originally built by mill owners to house workers. They are 2 room structures with common water and sanitation facilities. Today, because the chawls house more than double the planned population, the existing infrastructure is overstretched.

Up to the mid nineties, slums in Ahmedabad city could not access basic services at a household level. Inadequate water supply through public stand posts and sanitation facilities through public toilets were provided. Drainage at a household level was non – existent. The result was long queues and frequent quarrels amongst women(mostly) at the water stand posts, overflowing and dirty public toilets, waste from houses flowing on lanes which doubled up as open gutters, in all creating a serious health hazard.

Perspectives of slum residents who were the end users were not considered when provision of basic water and sanitation services in slums of Ahmedabad city was planned. The views and vested interests prevailing amongst planners, civic authorities, politicians and civil society up to the mid nineties were:

- ? Slum residents cannot afford to pay for basic services
- ? Slum residents were squatters who did not have legal title to land and therefore it was not possible to provide basic services.
- ? A minimalist approach towards provision of public services in slums.
- ? Elected representatives who saw slum residents as vote banks and wanted their patronage to continue leading to an insistence to provide free services which the city could not afford leading to a trade off by which free public services were provided for votes.

The innovation

A major rethinking towards the provision of basic services in slums happened after the city of Surat in Gujarat was hit by the plague in 1994. It was assumed that a major reason for the outbreak of plague was the unsanitary conditions in the slums of Surat.

In Ahmedabad city, an innovative approach, which has gained the popular title of Slum Networking Project (SNP) was designed. In SNP, the major innovations (and deviations from traditional approaches) were:

- ? Provision of basic water and sanitation services at a household level by the ULB
- ? Contribution by slum residents towards costs of installing basic services
- ? The role of the NGO as an interface between the ULB and slum communities
- ? A guarantee of non-eviction for 10 years by the ULB
- ? 100% coverage of slums

The basic services provided at the household level included a toilet, a drainage connection and a water connection, and at the slum level were paved roads and solid waste management.

The cost sharing was as follows:

Components of SNP	Amount of contribution by partners		
	AMC	Slum Residents	NGO
Physical Infrastructure	10,000	2,000	0
Community Mobilisation	700	0	300
Resident Associations	0	100	0
Total (Indian Rupees)	10,700	2,100	300

1 USD = 45 INR

Pro – poor accountability arrangements in SNP

- ? Slum residents partly pay for services. This ensured that the ULB, NGO and contractors became accountable to the residents and RAs.
- ? Slum residents did not pay user charges directly to the ULB or the NGO. This gave residents a leverage in case the physical work was not up to standard or was not completed in time.
- ? Slum residents individually saved their contribution in a bank account that only they can operate. This gave leverage to individual residents in case the RA, NGO and contractor collaborated in terms of quality or time taken.
- ? RAs formed to monitor progress and quality of physical works
- ? RAs decide stage and time to transfer their contributions to the ULB based on pre determined parameters
- ? Individual households approve transfer of funds from their individual accounts to the associations account, which is then transferred to the ULB's account

This arrangement ensured accountability for all partners in SNP

- ? The ULB was bound to deliver services on a pre-determined basis. If it did not deliver, then the RAs would not transfer resident's contributions to the ULB
- ? The quality of services and associated infrastructure was again pre-determined. It was to meet the guidelines of the ULB's minimum standards and schedule of rates. When there was a negative deviation, slum residents individually and through resident's association would point out anomalies and ensure that the poor quality structures were rebuilt. Again, the threat of not transferring contribution to the ULB's was a deterrent.
- ? The contractors who carried out the physical works were accountable to the RAs and NGO. If their work was not up to standard, the RAs, would complain to the NGO and ULB, who, in turn would pressurise the contractor. As a last resort, the RA would stop transfer of resident's contribution.
- ? The slum residents became accountable – if they did not contribute, then they too were denied basic services till they paid their dues.
- ? The NGOs were accountable to the slum residents and associations. In case the ULB did not meet pre determined timelines and quality, the residents would pressurize the NGO.
- ? The NGOs were also accountable to the ULB when the slum resident associations did not transfer contributions to the ULB and similarly when individual residents did not save and contribute as per schedule.

Case Studies

The case of Pravinagar Guptanagar 1 (PG1)

Pravinanagr-Guptanagar 1 (PG1) is a slum in the south west part of Ahmedabad city with a population of about 6,000 living in 1200 households. It occupies an area of about 180,000 square meters. The slum was formed after the flooding of River Sabarmati in 1973, when some of the riverbank households shifted to the site of PG slum.

When Saath, a local NGO started its Integrated Slum Development Program in 1993, there were no basic services provided by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation. 10 public toilets and 4 public water posts were provided which were inadequate for the population. Some residents had built toilets with soak pits. Residents in some parts had constructed a rudimentary drainage system which was not well designed or joined to the main city system resulting in frequent overflow.

Some lanes had managed to get a drainage line by paying about INR 1,000 to politically connected persons who used their influence in the AMC to get the lines laid.

Residents were not willing to wait any longer for free services, but were keen to get regular basic services by paying a user charge. This differed considerably from the myth that slum residents wanted free services. However, they had been cheated by various middlemen who had collected initial fees for basic services under the guise of being AMC personnel. They were wary of the AMC but trusted the local NGO, Saath.

Saath and the residents of PG started negotiating with the AMC in 1996 to get basic services under the SNP. The AMC gave approval in 1997 and the residents started saving for user charges of INR 2,000 and maintenance fees of INR 100 per household in individual savings bank accounts. The resident's approved an AMC prepared design in Jan 1999 work started in September 1999.

Six RAs were formed on the basis of caste and community identities. Each association played the roles of watchdog for quality control and design compliance, facilitator for resolving disputes arising out of location of manholes and widening of lanes and collector of usage charges.

When mutually agreed (by RAs and AMC) milestones were reached, the RAs would instruct the bank to transfer a certain amount from the resident's individual account to the RA's account, and then transfer the total amount to the AMC as user charges.

On completion of works, 80 - 90% of the user charges were paid in stages. Some amounts have been retained by the RAs as they are not satisfied with the water supply system.

The case of Mohan bhai

Mohanbhai (name changed) is a resident of the Ranavas area of PG1. He is a worker for the Congress Political Party and has connections with the elected representatives of the ULB which he used to get basic services in the slum on a piecemeal basis. His modus operandi was to answer the pressing needs of residents in PG1 for drainage lines in a controlled (scarce supply) manner. He would collect a down payment of almost INR 1,000 each from 30 residents in a lane under the guise of using the money to grease the palms of ULB officials. Once the down payment was given, he would get digging work started and would regularly extort money for getting the laying of drainage lines completed. The residents would end up paying almost Rs 2,000 for a drainage connection that was poorly designed and would regularly overflow, requiring more money for maintenance – which again would be facilitated by Mohanbhai for a fee. The residents agreed to this arrangement because there was no alternative by which they could get a legal drainage connection.

Mohanbhai was aghast when he heard that all basic services were to be provided in PG1 with the user fees of Rs 2,000. He first claimed that this was a fraudulent scheme launched by the NGO. He then privately told the NGO that the SNP scheme provided to much for the user fees of Rs 2,000. He claimed that he could get residents to pay Rs 5,000 for the scheme if the NGO collaborated with him. Then the regular user charges of Rs 2,000 could be paid to the ULB and the remaining – unaccounted amount of Rs 3,000 could be shared between him and the NGO. After realizing that the mechanisms of ensuring accountability were too strong, he adapted himself to the situation by becoming the leader of a RA and claimed that he had used his political influence to the SNP project into PG1

The case of Manuben

Manuben lived in the Harijan Vas of PG1. Her community, being Harijans – the lowest in the Hindu caste system – lived in the lowest and most flood prone part of the slum where all the drainage and waste water would gather. Manuben would have to walk a kilometre and wait for about two hours to collect a pot of water from the common public standpost. She had to defecate in the open and there was no way that they could get rid of the waste water.

About 120 resident's of the area had agreed to INR 1,000 to Mohanbhai (the well connected political tout) for a drainage connection. The drainage lines were laid about one meter above the house floor levels raising a basic question of the design feasibility of the illegal drainage line.

On hearing about the SNP scheme of the ULB, the residents met and formed an association called the Jay Bhim Association. They started collecting instalments towards the household contribution of INR 2,100. Manuben became a member of the managing committee of the association and was instrumental in convincing women residents about the benefits of the scheme, who in turn convinced their menfolk.

The physical work started in March 2000 and was completed by December 2002.

On completion of work, the resident's found that unlike other parts of PG1, water was not reaching the taps in their households. Manuben, approached the NGO and the SNP cell of the ULB and also refused to pay further instalments to the ULB for the services on behalf of Jay Bhim Association. In February 2003, the ULB relaid broader water supply lines, leading to acceptable water pressure in the taps. Jay Bhim Association then paid the due amount to the ULB. Today, Manuben facilitates regular maintenance of water and drainage systems by the ULB.

Glossary

AMC – Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation
RA – Resident’s Association
NGO – Non Governmental Organisation
ULB – Urban Local Body
PG1 – Pravinagar Guptanagar 1
SNP – Slum Networking Project
INR – Indian Rupees
HH – Households
GT – Gulley Trap

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