

## Women-led Participatory Urban Governance Model

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### Introduction

In the Indian context, the accelerated increase of the urban population, especially as a result of migration from rural areas, has led to significant inequities across socio-economic indicators (Shaw 2012). Presently, around 40% of city residents in India reside in “slums” in unsanitary and hazardous living conditions, lacking access to safe shelter, water and sanitation and affordable energy. Their status as “Informal Citizens” prevents them from accessing basic services and excludes them from public infrastructure investments. Trapped in under-employment, they are part of the informal economy with no job security, social security, and limited access to credit. They lack knowledge, resources, and a collective voice to meaningfully participate in decision making process. Their access to their democratic representatives is often restricted to the five-year election cycle wherein they are viewed as a ‘vote bank’ to tap into (Auerbach, 2019).

### Purpose

Given the obstacles mentioned in the introduction section, Mahila Housing Sewa Trust (MHT) implemented a project titled “Participatory Governance in Urban Sanitation in Jaipur” between April 2017 and March 2020 and this paper presents the impact assessment of the project. The project was supported by the Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI).

Jaipur is the capital of India’s Rajasthan state. Like many Indian cities, the implementation of the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act & Community Participation Law (CPL) is almost nonexistent in Jaipur. The shift towards creating more participatory institutions has already occurred on paper in India through the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments, though the process of inclusion has had varying degrees of success in reality (Patel et al. 2016). This has resulted in a lack of responsiveness to the needs of the poor, and the absence of participation of or connection to ordinary citizens. Bad governance is one of the reason why slums mushroom. Governments have failed to recognize the rights of the urban poor and incorporate them into urban planning, thereby contributing to the growth of slums. This is clearly evident from lack of essential services like water and sanitation, paved roads, sewer lines, access to primary health etc. in many slums of Jaipur.

The aim of the project was to establish a transparent and participatory process in urban service delivery at the community, ward and city level. The project targeted ten identified slums spread across eight wards of Jaipur Municipal Corporation (JMC).

The project was conceptualized based on the theory of change developed for this project by MHT as given below:

*Support disenfranchised communities to build social capital and empower them with technical knowledge to affect change.*

*Facilitate last-mile delivery of habitat services by enabling access to finance and carrying out building of infrastructure where necessary.*

*Build on its grassroots experience to bring about policy and regulatory changes towards more inclusive planning and service delivery processes.*

Theory of change is entrenched in the belief that if the grassroots collectives of women are provided with the requisite knowledge, technology and skills to identify and assess development issues, they will be able to constructively engage with governance and planning process to lead transformation in their own communities. They will further come together as a peer group of informed and articulated citizens to participate in shaping urban development.

There has been significant literature in the “democracy and development” academic space that reiterates the claims made by the proponents of participatory governance (Fischer 2012). Solutions that are contextual and sustainable can emerge when communities participate in a dialogue with policy-makers and are included in decision-making processes. This is particularly true for marginalized communities whose realities are often misunderstood, invisible, and deprioritized by those with decision-making powers and continue to grapple with fundamental issues of access to basic amenities (Chattopadhyay 2015). For the communities in India’s urban informal settlements, participatory governance is a means to access resources and meet their needs, as well as an end in itself – the emergence of an empowered citizen.

Building upon the evidence generated from this project, this paper demonstrates that building capacities and empowering communities (especially women) to become equal partners with state agencies is the most effective way to access the right to basic services like sanitation. Hence, the partnership

between the state agencies, primarily the local bodies, and the community needed to be established. Strengthening the partnership of communities with the local administration also leads to improvements in ecological sanitation and health. This paper argues for promoting participatory governance, for using technology to bring in transparency and accountability in the service delivery system and for improving processes to ensure more efficient and equitable service delivery.

### Methodology

The study methodology was designed to generate data in order to assess the pre and post project status of a set of envisaged sanitation outcomes that are a result of empowerment and capacity building of women in the slums working as a collective. A set of key indicators was identified at the time of the baseline.

- I. Indicators to assess outcomes of empowerment, like enhanced social capital in the community, improved leadership quality, participation and sphere of influence and the collective impact on the Urban Local Bodies' (ULBs) policies and processes leading towards improved, accessible and affordable sanitation and water facilities for the poor;
- II. Improvement in water and sanitation facilities is a measure of the impact of the empowerment and capacities of the women's collectives in the project and as such is assigned a separate set of indicators for pre and post intervention assessment. Number of households with access to individual toilet and legal water connection was used to measure improvement in water and sanitation; and
- III. Indicators to assess the pre and post project improvements in the institutional and policy processes that would make water and sanitation services accessible and affordable to the poor in the urban areas. These include enhanced capacities of government officials and office bearers in designing and implementing pro-poor, gender sensitive water and sanitation programmes and processes, greater participation of grassroots women and girls in sanitation governance at ward and city level, policy briefs and advocacy meetings.

The survey used both qualitative and quantitative methods. As the lockdown imposed due to COVID-19 restricted field activities, the survey used digital and telephonic media to capture data.

Household surveys were undertaken to assess progress against key indicators. These largely focused on behavioral changes and impact. A household questionnaire aligned to the baseline household questionnaire was constructed and applied in the field.

Telephone interviews with selected key officials from the Public Health Engineering department (PHED) and Jaipur Nagar Nigam (JNN) and ward councilors were undertaken using an open-ended short questionnaire.

Group discussions with selected women Community Action Group (CAG)<sup>1</sup> members and *Vikasinis* were carried out on Zoom. The purpose of these discussions was to capture the changes that have occurred and to deep dive into the factors that contributed to these changes.

### Key Findings

Pivotal for development is the building capacity of the most vulnerable (particularly women) and amplifying their voices which in turn leads to increase in access to services/commodities.

Services to the urban poor settlements can be improved if there is informed participation of the communities and when there is effective demand for services. The empowered community-based institutions can be effective even without formal recognition by the concerned agencies or the state, as long as they are well informed, organized and work as a collective with the strength of numbers. As such, a strong social capital within such communities needs to be nurtured.



*Fig. 1: Adolescent girl, member of the CAG, assisting a community member to complete an application form (Photo: MHT 2019)*

The core strategy as well as the principle reason for the success of the project was the establishment of empowered CAGs (Fig. 1). The project was particularly effective in transforming women who

<sup>1</sup> Group of 15 to 20 women from a settlement whose leadership qualities are developed to represent slum households

were initially shy, suspicious and extremely reluctant to interact with outsiders or even each other, into informed, knowledgeable and skilled community groups with strength and capacities to access facilities and services on their own as a collective.

Apart from trainings, the practical input of demystifying programmes and schemes and the face-to-face interactions with officials and departments were most effective tools in encouraging the community groups to subsequently visit concerned departments and meet with officials (Fig.2). One example was the successful demystification of “Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)” scheme which has helped to deliver individual toilets to 601 households by mobilizing public funding amounting to INR 86,88,000 (Approximate USD 115,840).



*Fig. 2: Women leader from a slum interacting with government officer regarding their application status (Photo: MHT 2019)*

The CAGs were effective because of the time and efforts invested in mobilizing them and building their capacities (Fig.3). Gaining the trust of the community women was the first step in bringing them together. Trust was also built by interacting with them on their own terms and level, exposing them to similar work.



*Fig. 3: Community meeting for needs assessment (Photo: MHT 2018)*

Encouraging public participation by developing participatory tools like a Sanitation Report Card and engaging *Vikasinis* and CAGs to work for improvement of services at the ward level brings in accountability in urban governance. The Sanitation Report Card is an online tool with which citizens can tag places in their neighborhood with open defecation or solid waste lying unattended. Local administration can view this data directly with its GPS location and picture on the portal. This helps them to deploy their staff and address issues immediately.

### **Conclusion**

The Women-Led Participatory Urban Governance Model has generated reliable evidence, proven its credibility and shown its potential for application in urban areas with similar characteristics. The strength of the model lies in the fact that it is a community driven endeavor and not an intervention led by the government. As such, this approach needs to be retained. The key elements of such a model, hence, would be (a) an empowered community (especially women) at the slum level; (b) a motivated group of officials at the level of the service agency; (c) responsive elected representatives; (d) and *Vikasinis* (senior women leader) to provide support and continuity.

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