

# World Bank Funded Slum Sanitation Programme in Mumbai

## Participatory Approach and Lessons Learnt

*Mumbai's Slum Sanitation Programme that seeks community responsibility and its involvement in the setting up of sanitation facilities in living areas holds out important lessons for similar collaborative endeavours between the government, funding agencies, civil society organisations and the affected community. While such a broadly participatory approach ensures the accrual of benefits to the beneficiaries, it can only function effectively if methods of implementation are transparent and key members play a facilitating role.*

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### I Introduction

Since the inception of development programmes for Indian citizens, particularly in last four decades, policy-makers and bureaucrats have held the entrenched belief that government in a 'welfare state' would provide infrastructure and adequate services to its people. Ambitious plans and programmes were drawn both by central and state governments to achieve these objectives. In urban areas, government agencies were created to supply water, remove human and solid waste and extend other basic services to urban residents. Their programmes of investment and corresponding technologies mainly targeted the better-off population of city dwellers.

The past experiences of urban governance and programme implementation have shattered the hopes for achieving a minimum standard of life for the poor through government policies and programmes. Local self-governments remained starved of funds and technical skills, and suffer from poor management. This was not been helped by widespread corruption and non-accountability of employees and public representatives – municipal councillors. Through adopting populist measures to attract vote banks, no returns on provided services were made available. Ad hoc grants from state or central governments hardly made any dent. The end result was that basic services and infrastructure has remained poor in most urban settlements, with the exception of a few cities which were either state capitals or economic growth centres. The infrastructure in these cities is, however, overburdened due to influx of migrant population in search of livelihood.

Several programmes that were implemented for improving quality of life in urban settlements – some of them through international funding – have had results far from satisfactory. For instance, the Department for International Development (DFID) UK made the following observations on 'poverty reduction programmes in some urban settlements'.

Implementation of such programmes is impeded by weak local capacities and conflicting interests of political leaders, bureaucrats and other interest groups... Resources are inevitably limited. Poor management leads to inadequate services, under-investment in

infrastructure and rigid adherence to rulebooks, lacking innovation. It is added to by over-lapping authorities by different tiers of government and territorial fragmentation... The approach has been one of control, rather than promotion of development (DFID, undated).

It is also true that the policies and practices of government continue to discriminate on the basis of class, gender, age, ethnicity, disability and such other social factors.

### II Grim Scenario of Slum Infrastructure

Given such a sad state of affairs of urban governance and creation of basic services, one can imagine the living conditions of slum dwellers, who constitute half the population in a few large cities, such as Mumbai. According to a recent social and technical survey of all slums conducted by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in 2001 under the slum sanitation scheme (SSP), 1,959 slum settlements were counted with a total population of 62.47 lakh, this constituted 54 per cent of the city's population. Of these, 137 are non-notified slums where about 5.25 lakh people reside. According to the above survey, as many as 38.6 lakh people (62 per cent of the slum population) – residing in 1,435 slum localities – are dependent exclusively on public toilets. A sizeable number of the slums (209) are devoid of public toilet facilities. Of these, households in only 18 slums have individual toilets, the rest use open fields.

The situation elsewhere may not be so different. According to a study of slums in Howrah city, around 68 per cent of the population had on-site sanitation facilities but they were over-used and largely unserved. Children and women faced acute problem of toilets, the former forced to mainly defecate on the drains or roads. Drains were choked with gutter water, resulting in over-flowing of sludge [Sengupta 1999:1292-96]. Kundu et al (1999:1893-1906) have presented data on basic services in different classes of cities across all Indian states, where it is observed that sanitation facilities in Class I cities were far from satisfactory.

### III

## World Bank Slum Sanitation Programme (SSP)

Though it may sound gratifying that in over 60 per cent slums in Mumbai city, public latrines have been constructed, a majority of them are overused and poorly serviced or maintained. Hundreds of them are badly constructed and therefore in dilapidated conditions. Conventionally, these latrines were constructed over the decades by Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) and Water Supply and Sewerage Department (WSSD) of BMC, through councillors/MLA/MLC/MP grants or ad hoc grants from the central government. These schemes to a large extent met the most basic needs of the urban poor, they were offered free of cost to the slum dwellers, as a populist measure for mobilising votes by political parties in power. It made everybody happy – the slum dwellers, the politicians, the bureaucrats and the contractors. The latter three developed a strong nexus where part of the funds towards the schemes were siphoned off as bribes and ‘kickbacks’. This ‘supply’-driven approach to the slum sanitation made the dwellers indifferent to their responsibility towards improving sanitation in their communities. Meanwhile, the influx of population to the city kept on burdening the existing facilities, and created growing needs in newly emerging slums. Since over a half of the slums are located on private land, they remain in dire need of sanitation facilities.

The BMC has been implementing ‘integrated water supply and sewage scheme’ since 1970, with the financial assistance of World Bank/(then) ODA. One of its objectives was ‘to improve health and environmental conditions in Greater Mumbai, including the slum areas’. Accordingly, a component of the Bombay Sewerage Disposal Project (BSDP) has been the construction of sanitation blocks (mainly the toilets) in slum localities.

Mumbai Municipal Corporation launched the Slum Sanitation Programme (SSP) on March 3, 1997 as an integral part of the Bombay Sewerage Disposal Project (BSDP), with funding from the World Bank. The SSP had a total budget of Rs 906 millions for constructing about 18,000 toilet seats [BMC 2000].

The main aim of SSP was to provide sustainable sanitation facilities in slums located on municipal lands. The SSP was to be a participatory programme involving communities in entire implementation process – right from the initial stages of forming community-based organisations (CBOs), and collecting contributions for operation and maintenance of proposed toilet blocks, then involving people from the planning stage to the completion of the work and handing over the facilities to the communities for future operation and maintenance. A significant departure from the earlier approach of ‘supply driven’ to ‘demand driven’ approach is thus the main feature of the scheme.

The present paper focuses on this community approach to the sanitation programme in the slums of Mumbai city, its outcome and the lessons drawn from the experience.

### IV

## Participatory Approach to SSP

International funding agencies, like the World Bank, have been insisting on beneficiaries’ participation in decision-making and implementation of programmes, that are funded by them and are directly linked to improving quality of life of the people. Such an attitude on the part of these funding agencies is due to earlier

stated factors that the state machinery in countries like India is considered to be highly corrupt, non-accountable, inefficient, manipulative, non-participatory and anti-poor. Such an opinion has also been emerging among the pro-people voluntary organisations and even among academics that ‘least governance is the sign of good governance’. Thus, ‘participatory approach is the new ‘mantra’. As stated by Baviskar (2001:1-15): “We are living in an era characterised by the decline or retreat of the state...accompanied by increasing attention towards civil society institutions. Among the social groups and associations of various kinds that are considered to make up civil society, NGOs have become especially prominent in the last two decades”.

In the present paper, the term ‘civil society’ essentially draws from Gramsci’s political thought, which uses civil society as a key concept. For Gramsci (as quoted in Dhanagare 2001:167-91), “civil society is not simply a sphere of selfish and egoistic individual needs, but of organisations representing broader community interests which have the potential of rational self-regulations and freedom”. Or, as stated by Chazan (in Baviskar op cit:7), “...civil society refers to that segment of society that interacts with the state, influences the state and yet is distinct from the state”. Thus, if strong, vibrant and lively civil society is the foundation of modern open democratic polity, NGOs are the very life force for the civil society [Baviskar, *ibid*].

In the present paper, therefore, the concept ‘participatory approach’ is operationalised in the context of participation of the beneficiaries (slum dwellers), their CBOs and the NGOs involved in the SSP launched by the Mumbai Municipal Corporation under the overall guidance of the World Bank – the funding organisation. One need mention again that the above participatory approach to the SSP was made a pre-condition by World Bank for releasing the funds. The inherent assumption here has been that the NGOs and CBOs to be involved in the SSP were accountable, non-corrupt and pro-people.

The implementation of SSP was phased out in four stages: programme publicity and selection of communities; demand assessment and preparation of plans for operation and maintenance; design and construction of sanitation facilities; and operation, maintenance and use of maintained facilities by the beneficiaries through their CBOs. Adoption of a demand driven approach, widening of technological options to include others besides centralised public toilets, contribution by communities to capital costs (around 15 per cent of the total cost as upfront contribution, including the cost of restitution wherever necessary) and community responsibility for maintenance of new and rehabilitated toilet facilities, were the other features of the scheme. Phase I of the SSP was expected to benefit a population of 2,92,856 from 141 communities in four wards of Mumbai city. In its final stage, the programme was to benefit about one million slum dwellers. Initially, it was decided to implement the programme in slums located only on BMC lands.

### Phase I (the Publicity Phase): A Non-Starter

Four NGOs of the city were engaged for programme publicity in 141 communities in the identified four wards. The NGOs were to discuss the programme with the slum dwellers, assess their needs (for public or individual toilets), motivate them to join the programme by obtaining the concurrence of at least 75 per cent members of the community and their paying the initial upfront amount (of Rs 100 per family), and then forming the

CBOs for further activity – including their registration with the registrar, cooperatives. Tata Institute of Social Sciences (the present writers of the paper) was engaged by the SSP for monitoring and evaluation of Publicity Phase (I).

The outcome was quite disappointing and surprising. Out of the 141 targeted communities, 105 (75 per cent) were not willing to join the SSP at all. Only nine communities reported 76 per cent of their members willing to join the SSP. In all, 19 communities applied for the programme. Among these, only nine communities paid the upfront contribution.

In the final stage of Phase I, only three sites could be chosen for constructing toilet blocks, more as demonstration (pilot) project in December 1988, after over a year since the launching of the publicity phase. Thus, the overall outcome of the need assessment and motivating exercise was almost insignificant. The Monitoring and Evaluation Report [TISS, May 1999] brought out the key factors of the SSP being a nonstarter. Briefly, these were:

- In the past, public toilets were offered to the slum communities ‘free of charge’ through grants from councillor/MLA/MLC/MP funds, or under ‘slum improvement programmes’ by MHADA or WSSD. This created a popular belief among the communities that as ‘vote banks’, they would get such facilities in future as well. Thus, till the above schemes were applicable (in fact some local leaders assured the community of such ‘free toilets’), the SSP was not acceptable to the people. The need was to opt for a single public scheme, i e, the SSP.

- The Slum Redevelopment Scheme (SRS), under present implementation, promises a free ‘pucca’ house to almost all the slum dwellers of city (registered till 1995). This overriding scheme (or the ‘mirage’) made the SSP irrelevant. In fact, of the contacted communities, five of them had opted for the SRS. Others hoped for the same. Thus, SRS proved an impediment to the SSP.

- People were willing to opt for the SSP but many of them did not pay the contribution. Many times, community stood divided due to ethnic and other factors, which influenced the formation of CBOs.

- The strategy used by the NGOs was an initial mass contact in first two months through widespread communication efforts followed by a focus on CBO registration. Direct contacts with people thereafter were limited. The nature of support and acceptance of CBOs in the community was hence critical to the outcome of the Programme Publicity. The NGOs concentrated only in those areas where response was good. Another issue was of credibility of NGOs. In communities where an NGO conducted Programme Publicity, but had no working experience in the area, the overall response was poor.

- As per the guidelines for SSP, the site for location had to be in consent of the people, and any restitution – caused due to relocation of housing structures – had to be borne by the beneficiaries. World Bank, being sensitive to the issue of ‘displacement and rehabilitation’, passed on this burden to the people. However, as expected, given the congestion and use of every inch of land in slum areas, suitable locations were not easily available. Wherever it became inevitable to relocate a few houses, their occupants approached the political leaders to halt it or even went to the court to appeal against their relocation.

- In the final run, the creation of toilet blocks had to be integrated with other components of the slum sanitation – solid waste disposal and improving the drainage system. These components

were simultaneously not taken up. This resulted in lack of motivation among the communities.

- The SSP was to be implemented only on the BMC lands. However, the fact remains that, over a period of time, sanitation facilities in older slums have improved. There the need was more of rehabilitating the dilapidated sanitation blocks. Toilets are urgently required on recently emerging slums – which are mostly on private or collector’s lands.

- Delinking the Programme Publicity from implementation, resulted in a wide time gap between the two, and affected the willingness of communities. For instance, levels of willingness of 75 per cent or above were recorded in nine communities in October 1997, but in January 1998 only one community recorded the same level of willingness. More importantly, the intense communication campaign in the first three months was not sustained, thus the credibility of the programme was affected and publicity messages were seen as empty promises. This affected the community response.

- Preliminary technical assessment was not incorporated in the design of publicity phase. Due to this, the communities were unsure of availing the services. The technical team (of BMC) started visiting the sites formally in November 1997, i e, towards the end of Programme Publicity. Moreover, they did not give any technical feedback formally to the CBOs or the NGOs. The CBOs came to know of the technical feasibility through informal discussions between the technical team members during their site visits. Hence the community response dwindled further.

- The leadership at higher level of BMC changed frequently and this had direct bearing on the outcome of the project. These changes occurred at different levels – additional municipal commissioner (AMC), deputy municipal commissioner (DMC) and chief engineer, etc. This resulted in different approaches, delayed decisions and sometimes reversal of decisions. This also created confusion about the project among the NGOs, the members of SSP team and the people.

- During discussions with various levels of officials associated with the SSP, it emerged very clearly that they showed interest in the programme mainly due to the pressure from their superiors – who themselves were under pressure from the World Bank. None were committed to the SSP, which hardly provided scope for bribes and kickbacks. All the more, it demanded accountability at each level of its implementation. The fact that SSP was to be implemented through the CBOs and NGOs irked many of the officials. Such an attitude on the part of officials demoralised the Social Work Cell staff within the BMC, which was enthusiastic about the SSP and considered it as a testing ground for their profession and better prospects.

- Political leaders (including the municipal councillors) and their local organisations were not given any role in the SSP. Their clout was felt during the Programme Publicity, and many newly formed CBOs proved to be ineffective due to indifference or opposition by such political groups. It was very evident that without active participation of political groups, the SSP would not succeed to a large extent.

The above points bring out the fact that the publicity phase did not meet the expectations of the programme, i e, to motivate slum dwellers to joining the SSP. It also came out that forming the CBOs was not that easy, given the division of people on political, ethnic and economic lines. Desperately, in order to show some progress on the SSP to the World Bank, municipal authorities decided to construct three toilet blocks in Padmanagar,

Chikalwadi and Plot No 43 (all parts of Shivaji Nagar Slum area) as the pilot project, to be constructed by three separate NGOs.

## V

### Mid-term Appraisal and Modifications in SSP

In addition to the 'Monitoring and Evaluation Report' by the TISS-team, BMC prepared its own report on the Publicity Phase. Not caring much for the inner-dynamics of slum community – leading to an insignificant outcome of the publicity drive – the BMC officials blamed the NGOs for not having much of a base in their areas of operation. Partly it was true as the NGOs, for various stated reasons, could not motivate people to opt for the SSP. Their claims 'to represent the people' did not hold much ice. It was also realised that these NGOs may be good in 'software' (interacting with the people), but they were ill-equipped in 'hardware' (expertise or resources) to implement the project by constructing toilets in the subsequent phases.

The World Bank team prepared its mid-term appraisal of the SSP (Mid-Term Review Mission of World Bank, 2000) and decided to introduce necessary modifications due to poor outcome of the programme over the past year's efforts. Some important decisions were, as follows:

- It was decided to conduct a comprehensive social and technical survey about the status of sanitation in all the slums – including the authorised or unauthorised, and on lands of BMC or others. Montgomery Watson (Consultants) and YUVA<sup>1</sup> (an NGO) were assigned the task.
- It was decided to implement the programme in all those slums which opted for the SSP, irrespective of their status 'authorised' or unauthorised', lands owned by BMC or the others. It was left to the CBOs to avail 'no objection' from the owners of private lands.
- Wherever possible and within the resources, the toilet blocks were to be connected to the sewer line.
- The rigid guideline of implementing the SSP in only those communities where at least 75 per cent people opted for it, was modified to include the 50 per cent also.
- Only those NGOs were to be invited to implement the programme (from motivating the needy slum dwellers to constructing and handing over the toilets to the CBOs), who had enough manpower and resources for taking up such a large programme. They were allowed to team up with private consultants who offered technical know-how to the project.
- Independent 'technical consultants' were assigned the task of monitoring and evaluating the quality of construction, design, etc.
- The conventional tendering procedure of the BMC, which is too cumbersome and rigid, was simplified for suiting the NGOs capabilities.
- The Maharashtra government was advised to issue a government resolution – henceforth constructing the public toilets in the city only through the SSP.
- Invited NGOs for implementing the scheme were to take into confidence the local political leaders including the MLAs/MPs.
- The construction of toilet blocks was (subsequently) to be integrated with the other important components of sanitation – garbage disposal and improving drainage system.
- Participatory approach, with part contribution towards cost of toilets to be borne by the beneficiaries, was still retained as the main guiding principle of the SSP.

## VI

### Inviting NGOs to Implement SSP

Under the changed strategy, it was decided to implement the scheme under various lots which involved allocating the work of implementation of the toilet blocks (from mobilisation of the beneficiaries to constructing the toilets, training the CBOs and handing over the completed blocks to the people) to approved NGOs. The key NGOs approved for the initial pilot project were: SPARC,<sup>2</sup> Sulabh International and Janseva. Subsequently, Sulabh International did not bid for the major work, as it found the financial terms quoted by other contractors unsustainable. They also did not believe in maintenance of toilet blocks through community participation. For the major construction work in seven lots, SPARC secured the major chunk of the work, followed by other NGOs, like Shiva Shakti Utkarsh Mandal, Yuvak Pratishthan, Bhartiya Mandal and contractors like Babulal Uttamchand and Narayan and Associates.

In all, till December 2004 total contracts worth Rs 64 crore had been awarded for construction of 8,000 toilet seats in 400 toilet blocks spread over 24 wards of Mumbai. Out of these, SPARC got a record 278 work orders covering 20 wards. Babulal Uttamchand got work orders for three wards and Narayan and Associates got work orders for one ward. This is the first time that a NGO has been awarded developmental work by the government on such a large scale in India.

It happened mainly because SPARC, as a voluntary organisation, has been active in Mumbai city for over two decades. It carries high credibility within and outside India, for its work with the urban poor. It had won praise from the government, people and international funding organisations when it successfully rehabilitated – the process is still on – hundreds of families living close to the railway tracks (the harbour railway corridor) and who were ordered removed as per the Mumbai High Court orders. It has also constructed toilet blocks in Pune city. Very recently, one of its main social workers, A Joakim was awarded the Magasaysay Award for impressive work among the slum dwellers (particularly the people of Cheeta Camp) of Mumbai.

SPARC's good working record and its accepting the task of implementing the SSP, came handy in its securing it the contract. It is also true that, unlike several NGOs or social activists in the country who have an impressive record of advocacy for the civil society and present a fierce critique of the present 'model of development' framed under the market economy, and therefore not inclined to implementing public funded projects for the poor, SPARC has shown a liberal attitude and, given the inequalities in urban areas, has not hesitated in working among the poor even through collaborating with the government sector. SPARC has also entered into capacity building up of poor women workers through strengthening their self-employment activities.

Though a few other groups are involved in implementing the SSP, the present discussion is confined to the main contractor, SPARC.

## VII

### Involvement of SPARC in SSP

Though only a few months have passed since SPARC has been involved in the slum sanitation programme in Mumbai slums, the impression one gets are indicative enough to draw lessons on the role of the state, the NGOs and the people in implementing an internationally funded project for the urban poor through the

'participatory approach'. It is to recall here that for almost two years the project remained a non-starter due to the very poor response from the potential beneficiaries. The initial idea of involving the four NGOs (Apanalaya, Siddhi, YUVA and the SRS),<sup>3</sup> who were involved in Publicity Phase (I), in implementing the construction of toilets and capacity building of CBOs, did not materialise due to some of the NGOs backing out from Phase II. It was not very surprising. Whatever may be the claims these NGOs held about their base among the poor of Mumbai city, the fact remains that they work only among a fraction of the slum dwellers. This is understandable, given the fact that more than a half the city's population – which numbers over five millions, lives in almost 2,000 slum localities. And given the dynamics of these communities, people are divided wide across political, economic and ethnic lines. There are no strong civil movements (by NGOs) which would help them reaching the people to empower them about their rights and opportunities to better their life situations. Therefore, with small organisational set-ups and their limited resources, these NGOs were not in a position to take up such a large and challenging assignment.

SPARC has been in a relatively better position due to a very favourable environment created by the World Bank team. The team has been pressuring the Maharashtra government and municipal officials for achieving some success on the slum sanitation programme. It virtually forced the government to forgo rigid rules for tendering (for the SSP) so that the NGOs could claim the contracts. All other schemes for providing public toilets were withdrawn. Concerned government offices were instructed to expedite necessary decisions on the SSP. Above all, help was sought from political leaders for the success of SSP.

While implementing the SSP, SPARC was allowed to invite private technical consultants for providing necessary technical inputs. The top workers of SPARC have direct access to the municipal commissioner, chief engineer and other senior officers. This way, all conditions were made favourable which in normal situations would otherwise not have been made available to government departments or private organisations. Now it was the turn of SPARC to show the results.

SPARC has been joined by the Vistar Architects and Purbi Consultants for providing technical inputs. Work started simultaneously in several wards, with the first step of motivating people to join SSP. It is learnt that SPARC faced the uphill task of motivating such a large number of households, and also maintaining the target of completing the construction work within next six months or so. Though the NGO has good expertise for such an activity (working with the people), the same has not been effectively utilised in motivating the beneficiaries and creating 'effective' CBOs. It is realised that the already existing political groups cannot be ignored and need to be taken into confidence. As a practical move, SPARC sought the help of a NGO, Pratishtan which is patronised by a member of Parliament. It also invited Antyoday Parishad – another NGO with political patronage – to reach out to the people.

The construction was to move hand in hand with the programme of health education and capacity building of the CBOs. It is learnt that nothing much is happening on these fronts which are actual areas of specialisation of SPARC. As expected, it would not be easy to vacate people from a few houses, if the space occupied by them was required for locating the sanitation blocks. In such situations, the only way out has been to take local political groups into confidence first rather than waiting for the consent of the

affected people, and relocate them elsewhere. If the formed CBOs coincide with the existing political groups/associations, the results are easily forthcoming. In fact, as understood from some officials of BMC, in several cases, people came to know about construction of toilets in their areas through political groups or formed CBOs. For them, the SPARC is more engaged in 'fire fighting' than a community based approach to the SSP. In some cases, steps are being followed in forming a CBO, collecting upfront contribution and registering the CBOs. In other cases, if this is not materialising, the decisions are being taken to go ahead with the selection of sites and construction of toilets, of course, with the consent of local politicians. In some cases, construction has started even without work orders.

For the BMC officials, the NGO, SPARC has taken on the role of a 'super contractor' backed by the top BMC officials, blessed by the World Bank team and supported by some politicians. They also state that to achieve the target of completing such a large number of sanitation blocks within the stipulated time, no other easy way was possible. They also admit the fact that the slum sanitation will improve and the quality of construction of toilets would be much superior than the past record of public toilet construction by private contractors where 25 to 50 per cent funds used to be appropriated by the interest groups.

## Conclusion

International funding agencies like the World Bank have been insisting on beneficiary participation in infrastructure provision programmes funded by them. The rationale behind this insistence is to put a check on the corrupt, inefficient, non-accountable and manipulative state machinery. Thus, participatory approach is the new 'mantra'. Local governments are by and large hostile to NGOs but have allowed space to NGOs in implementing programmes under pressure from financial organisations. The BMC implemented SSP in the city of Mumbai under the World Bank funding is one such example. The concept of participation as envisaged and as operationalised in SSP seems to be changing its contours as seen in the figure.

Do these changing contours mean an undermining of participation? Or does this mean that the naivete of the programme has now been practically moulded? Whatever the implication, the programme definitely raises several issues for reflecting and learning.

The implementation of a large developmental scheme (the SSP) by a NGO (SPARC) in slum localities of Mumbai city, through a participatory approach, has emerged as an interesting case study for future lessons in 'civil society in action'. The first lesson is that in a city like Mumbai, where over a half of the population (over six millions) resides in slums, no NGO has a mass base to mobilise these communities. Moreover, slum dwellers are divided wide across ethnic, political and economic lines. Any developmental programme has to take into consideration these factors.

**Figure: Changing Contours of Participation**

Envisaged		Operationalised
Plural organisations	→	Single NGO
Broad-based participation	→	Individual or CBO based as per convenience
Multioption based	→	Feasibility based
Consultation and involvement	→	Acceptability and use

A leading local NGO – SPARC, has perhaps made history in the country in the sense that it served a contract worth Rs 480 million under the SSP for developing sanitation blocks (toilets) in various slums of Mumbai city. This has happened mainly due to the impressive record of SPARC as a NGO working for the urban poor for over two decades.

Participation cannot be localised or fragmented, isolated from other forces and concerns. It is shaped by the broader socio-political context. Thus, the concept of financial contribution towards sanitation interplays with a larger ethos of free toilets, free houses, with a system which encourages largesse on one hand and corruption, and vested interests on the other. During the course of the SSP, therefore steps had to be taken to regulate the 'free' component in the area of sanitation services.

Encouraging participation at the locality level means an intervention in community politics. The assumption in SSP is that this politics can be moulded into genuine grassroots democracy. The experience suggests that there are already well-defined patterns of organisations, affiliations, resources and power distribution in communities. The programme's acceptability to people and its translation into a demand by a CBO is thus, heavily dependent on its interface with these patterns. The difficulties are compounded when there are factions or when the credibility of CBOs is under question.

Evolving a broadly representative peoples' organisation in a span of 2-3 months is difficult. The practice followed by NGOs was thus to identify CBOs most amenable to the programme and elicit participation through them; representing a further entrenchment of existing patterns.

SSP assumed a consistency of participation from the publicity to the handing over stage, without putting into place mechanisms for its sustenance or grievance redressal during long phases of delayed decision-making or implementation. A participatory relationship is an article of faith that is undermined when assurances given are not adhered to. Yet the element of choice is important. Currently, in the implementation of SSP while sanitation services are being delivered concretely, the involvement of people is being given secondary importance. The challenge of involving people in technical options and making those options feasible is being ignored in favour of the practical wisdom of 'what is feasible must be acceptable.

NGOs have always occupied a prime position in the discourse on civil society and participation. There is an assumption of unitary interest among NGOs and people. The experience of SSP suggests that this assumption needs to be reviewed. Relationships of NGOs to communities were often small scale and a geographical spread posed considerable challenge. The other dimension is that relationships were mediated through a few people or organisations, thereby relying on the motivation and credibility of these mediators to take the programme forward.

The key question which SSP raises is about the domination of discourse and space by GINGOS (Giant NGOs) who have well developed articulation, negotiations and connection capacities. Such domination leaves no space for smaller organisations who may have demonstrated capacities for certain aspects of work, e.g., mobilisation, construction experience, etc. Moreover, there is no criticality of reflection in their own style of work. They determine the boundaries and the agendas of the discourse.

If the BMC is understood as an organ of the state in which participatory mechanisms are sought to be institutionalised, the experience of SSP gives valuable insights. A large, widespread and multifaceted

and multilayered organisation like BMC has several internal contradictions. Inconsistencies among policies is more the norm than a consistent viewpoint. Institutionalisation if understood as an adopted set of practices is difficult in these circumstances.

NGOs involved in the publicity phase found it very difficult to liaise meaningfully with the BMC, given the above-mentioned conditions. Yet, SPARC with full support of the World Bank team has been able to obtain a similar level of support from the top bureaucrats of the BMC. It has succeeded in getting tendering procedures modified, has been permitted to involve private consultants to provide technical inputs, allowed to bypass critical components such as motivating people to join the scheme, and educating people on health and maintenance of facilities. It has thus become, according to some BMC officials, a 'supercontractor'. This is related to the organisation's credibility as 'acceptable to people and can do it' organisation. It is also related to the capacity of the organisation to articulate its strategic moves, e.g., entry into SSP as a construction agency (when other NGOs were being seen as inefficient), and its mobilisation of political support by giving space to political leaders and their NGOs. These, perhaps, are the ingredients of successful government-NGO partnerships.

SSP is currently poised at a critical juncture, with earlier programme being terminated but being scaled up through a new proposal (about US\$100 million). The acceptance of the earlier experience as a success story which would feed into this scaling up is given.

The dynamics of participation in the SSP reflect the discourse of civil society as it unfolds in the context of a liberalised market economy. In this context, when participation takes on a consumerist orientation while its other dimensions, e.g., education, empowerment get sidelined, change is translated into single-point agendas. Rather than becoming representatives of popular views and opinions, NGOs too seem to be co-opted by the system. There is a need therefore, to review the terms of the discourse and move towards plurality. [rns@tiss.edu](mailto:rns@tiss.edu)

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## Notes

- 1 YUVA an acronym for Youth for Voluntary Action is a Mumbai-based NGO with international accreditation for its work with urban poor. It was also one of the four NGO engaged for Programme Publicity in Phase I.
- 2 SPARC is an acronym for Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres. It is also a NGO with international accreditation for its work with urban poor women.
- 3 Slum Rehabilitation Society – a Mumbai-based NGO is engaged in housing and infrastructure for the poor settlements.

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