

## **The view from below: Access for the urban poor to basic amenities and services.**

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### **Introduction:**

This paper attempts to bring to the discussion a view from “below” . By that we mean to bring into a national and international dialogue about basic amenities and service delivery to cities .... views about these issues which come from communities of the poor themselves. It is our hope that over the years the space created for such a view will create fora where community representatives can come to such meetings and say what their constituencies believe in and want without having to posture as paper-writers and present academically oriented papers. Such “gates” exclude the poor and create conditions for consultants and NGOs and others who can write papers and present them to make a representation on their behalf. In the absence of that option we take the next best solution: to come to this discussion with a experience-based perspective, which neither exaggerates what we know nor modestly belittles what this movement of the urban poor represents as a critical stakeholder in this discussion.

SPARC is a voluntary organisation which was set up in 1984 by a group of professionals who sought to explore innovative ways of establishing long-term partnerships with the urban poor with a view to seeking equity and social justice in cities for the urban poor.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are many SPARC publications which provide details about how these organisations work together. But very briefly, National Slum Dweller’s Federation (NSDF) is a network of slum leaders from 21 cities all around India who build capacity of grassroots leadership to take charge of issues affecting them while working with SPARC at city and state level to bring change in policies and programmes. The purpose is to create greater space for the poor to participate in development. Mahila Milan is a network of women’s collectives from those communities which are members of NSDF and its main goal is to strengthen collective functioning of women at micro-community levels and to give greater recognition to the roles and capacities that poor

This paper presents the views that communities of the poor associated with NSDF and Mahila Milan have on basic amenities and services to the poor in cities:

- a. Firstly they believe that minimum access to water, sanitation, pathways drainage and electricity to all those living in cities is essential for the health and survival of all in cities.
- b. Poor communities pay more in both absolute and relative terms and are denied the real subsidy designed to provide them relief, while others enjoy this privilege as a result of which inequities in cities increase as the poor pay a dual price for lack of access.
- c. The solution to universal access of amenities and services requires the participation of communities, city authorities and the state. And each have a distinct role and function to play.
  - The State defines rights of access and entitlements of finance and subsidies to schemes and really formulate the political and financial framework of the access issues. They also define what is norms and standards and recommend them to the cities.
  - City Authorities then have to actualise these commitments develop a city level strategy which outlines what it will do at a city level, and within that locate specific functions that micro communities and civil society institutions can play.
  - Micro communities and civil society institutions and for profit organisations then examine what they can do, and as and when necessary will re-negotiate who is presently equipped and how resources can assist the participation.

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women have when they develop habitat and infrastructure for themselves where none is provided by the state.

- d. Long term sustainability of all investments made in basic services require full participation of communities who must manage and maintain these services, thus engaging the city, the community and the state in a tripartite agreement of how a commitment to provide universal basic services to the poor in cities can be fulfilled.

**Background about the alliance:** (Who is who and who does what) SPARC is a non profit organisation established in 1984, with the objective of exploring innovative mechanism to work in partnerships with the poor As a result of SPARC's alliance with Mahila Milan and NSDF, the work of the three organisations has linked communities of poor informal settlements to each other, and has gradually facilitated dialogue with city and state departments working on the concerns that both the city and the poor have i.e. basic services to the poor.

While no one particular area of functioning forms the basis of the alliance, over the last decade, land tenure, housing, financing of credit needs of the poor and basic amenities have become the main areas of focus. These are clearly areas where however optimum self help seeks to be, it can never bridge the gap between what is needed and what poor can provide to themselves. These areas reflect the interconnectedness between city planning and resources allocation and whether these are adequate and reach the poor or not. In the absence of that communities develop survival solutions which work on a day to day basis but create problems and difficulties to both the city and the community.

Unlike many NGOs with a specialised focus, SPARC was started by a group of professional who sought to allow communities to identify priorities of concerns to work on. This created arenas of work that the SPARC staff knew very little about, namely housing, basic amenities etc. As is well known, in India, very few urban NGOs work on issues such as land tenure, amenities, and services which have traditionally been areas in

which there was little space for NGOs to function. By that we mean that cities and State governments and the National Government see the role of the state and its functioning institutions to be the major providers of services. This closes possibilities of non state or even civil society institutions to come in to participate. Unlike sectors like health and education where both the city and state have been more inclined to explore dialogue and number of NGOs working in these areas at some scale are in existence. As a result Private philanthropies and trusts may run schools and hospitals and so on...

As a result, SPARC staff and the core leadership of Mahila Milan and NSDF are almost "professional generalists", who now specialise in creating solutions with communities and negotiating for them with the city, state and private sector. Subcontracting works related to amenities and services have been done to increasingly include the constraints from the private sectors, however the specifications and choices continue to be made by city and state officials without any consulting with communities. The focus of the partnership in the alliance is to create space for both professional and technological know how and community insights and combine in order to articulate solutions and strategies that work for communities.

Within the alliance, the manner in which NSDF and Mahila Milan themselves are organised reflect this process. Communities who squat on the same land-owner's land form a federation. The logic behind that is simple. All issues of tenure, or security, access to amenities and services are today linked to where people stay. So for instance if the slum is on Municipal land, it gets amenities and services to some extent, however if they are on airport or railway land, the chances are almost non existent. All such federations in a city form a city federation. Women in these federations form Mahila Milan collectives and together they form a city wide network. Each federation, each city locates its own priorities,

chooses its pace of growth and learning, and has as its back-up the whole NSDF and Mahila Milan’s critical mass for negotiations, experience sharing and technical and financial transactions. This makes negotiations with cities more “equal”. Often a community leader if put in a meeting with a commissioner or even a ward official, may end up agreeing to anything as the situation and language may over power the logic which the leader may come to the meeting, this gets “equalised” when a delegation comes instead.

The goal of the alliance is to create a path between the aspirations of communities and their participation in the final solution to that problem. This way communities can truly begin to take part in development processes. The federations seek to be inclusive and make their learning process available to others. However, since all these strategies are based on the huge pool of human resources and experiential networking, individual communities or organisations working with individual communities often find these strategies hard to absorb. The “critical mass” of members in the federation create the basis of first affirming the problems communities face, and create the basis of dialogue .... firstly among themselves, to learn from each other as to how to address these problems, and later to explore collaboration with municipalities and state government departments to resolve the problems of basic amenities. The experimentation that communities within the federations do are gradually beginning to explore solutions to what cities are trying to solve in the area of housing basic amenities and services.

The organisational and mobilisation activities of the alliance seek to create a strong learning base in each community, then federate them and build within them and the alliance a capacity to learn and develop new knowledge and hitherto unknown insights into sectors of mutual concern .

**How does this process get started?** First of all, women in communities begin to talk about their concern in collectives facilitated by NSDF and Mahila Milan. The discussion is around problems women see themselves and their communities facing. Reflecting at what households do presently to deal with the problems is the starting point of creating a solution. Many communities remain at the reflection stage, a few begin to look at what they can do. And soon they begin to put together a possible solution. This solution is often incomplete because it reflects what communities know and can do themselves. (If they could have found the total solution, then there would be no problem.) So instead this attempt to explore a solution is encouraged and the alliance of SPARC Mahila Milan and NSDF begin to add ideas and strategies that they have. The process of experimentation begins.

Rather than romanticising community organisational and collective processes, the alliance believes that it is only when individuals and households cannot solve problems by themselves, that they explore the possibilities of doing things together. If they believe that even collectively they cannot achieve much, then there is no incentive to explore such a process and communities show no interest in collective behaviour. These initial "pilot" projects within the alliance help demonstrate that change is possible and communities can be central to that change. It has been the experience of Mahila Milan and NSDF that once poor communities begin to do things collectively and see what it is feasible to achieve, that achievement reinforces the value of collective choices and increases possibilities of working in co-operation.

When community after community finds it faces the same problem, an organisation like a federation is able to voice that collective concern, and it is through such articulation that land tenure, housing, basic amenities and services have formed the main areas of work of the alliance. In each instance, the path we have taken is one which does not start with what

others say “should be done” but rather, it begins with women being able to articulate what the nature of their problems is, and even more specifically, how they envision the solution. When the whole community begins to accept that these are indeed the priority concerns of the community, they begin to look at the solution, and look at what aspects of the problem they can solve themselves. They assess the human and financial resources they have and then they look at the skills and resources they need to acquire to achieve this goal. They also define what they cannot do and this forms the basis of the negotiations with the city and state. The framework of both the training and skill-building aspect of the alliance occurs through small groups of people DOING this themselves then in turn it forms the basis of the dialogue and negotiations they have with the city, state or any resource-providing institution.

This paper will try and attempt to first of all locate for the reader the basis of the experiences from which this view emerges.

- a. Firstly, we will try to provide the reader a glimpse of the range of experiences that the alliance has participated in during the last decade to build up these perspectives. While not seeking to present this perspective as the only or the best one, it seeks to share with those involved in infrastructure delivery to the poor, the insights which we have gained the hard way through our experiences.
- b. Secondly, we believe that this experience can help us to look at where and how communities and their organisations can be located in the conception, design and execution of projects and a range of mechanisms to scale this process up.
- c. Thirdly, we look at what international literature on the issues of water and sanitation have to say and how we see gaps in what is happening within our experience and what is said internationally. .

- d. Finally, we explore the potential for managing slum level and city level infrastructure needs to be placed in the context of the devolution of power and other emerging issues connected with wider governance. It is necessary to examine how state and city politicians, planners and administrators and professional/ technical consultants can engage with communities so that each side can learn from the other new ways to become collective stakeholders, who participate in bringing about sustainable change.

### **Locating the basis of our experiences:**

Our initial interest in issues of basic amenities and services for the poor was kindled when discussing the long term solution to evictions faced by communities of the poor, especially pavement dwellers in Byculla, Bombay. One of the many activities that was started was the designing of a plan for their settlement, the basic core house, settlement design and its infrastructure. While parallel efforts were made to work on issues of land tenure and the right of pavement dwellers to get land, the alliance felt that land tenure( although a major reason why poor communities do not have access to amenities and services) by itself would not solve problems of amenities and services as existing norms and standards would not permit poor communities to construct housing and infrastructure which they could afford. Therefore much of the exploration was in search of how costs could be reduced to an affordable level so loans taken by communities could pay for these houses amenities and services.

In search of possible solutions women pavement dwellers and staff of SPARC explored housing and infrastructure option in 1986-87<sup>2</sup>. Leaders of the communities, mostly women, visited housing projects, slum amenities and services provided by the cities to the poor, in at least five cities. To illustrate how this process lead to a solution which they believed

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<sup>2</sup> See "Beating a Path Bapat and Patel, SPARC 1988.



worked for them we give the example of sanitation. Women looked at toilets all over the city and Mumbai and other cities. They talked to women in those slums and city provided housing and observed the conditions of how toilets constructed, how they were used, their conditions and so on. This formed the basis for a reflection of what they would like for themselves. The choice they made was based on a balance on affordability and needs.

The design of the core house itself led to the first choice for a community based toilet as the costs of even self built house increased by 25% if there was a toilet attached, and reduced space by that same amount. They wanted to suggest to the city that they would build the toilet blocks, for which the city could pay for capital costs and which they would later manage and maintain. The ratio of toilets was one seat for 20 people, or one seat for 4-5 households. There would be separate toilets for men and for women, and children's toilets for the all those under six in the open outside the toilet. Children especially between two and 7 years would use these toilets. Then, gradually as households wanted, they could get toilets in their homes. This would be constructed at their own cost.

We understood then, as we do even better today, that for development to work for the poor, it has to operate incrementally and that it requires flexible norms and standards which are raised as people get more confident and begin to see investment as worth making. Another principle evolved from the experience is the importance of providing access to all in the community for a particular service before encouraging individual households to fulfil their private needs. In the case of sanitation, community toilets that cater to all must precede individual toilets that cater only to those who can pay. For in every settlement, there is some degree of inequality and equity demands the satisfaction of the minimum needs of all in the first instance.

For over ten years now, the alliance's experience has been that toilets built by the city are like orphans with no-one to assume responsibility for them. The contractors who build them are not accountable to the community: the designs they use, do not factor in the high usage and the materials are often sub standard. The conservancy staff of the Municipal Corporations though paid well, are conspicuous by their absence from duty and supervision is ineffective. In these circumstances, local communities - never involved in any stage- can hardly be expected to take responsibility. The poor maintenance that is a consequence both of the structural defects and a managerial vacuum is, however unjustly explained away as a failure of community initiative. <sup>3</sup>

Statistics of sewerage treatment, or access to drinking water statistics in the city level, hide the inequities of access and distribution within cities.<sup>4</sup> This inequity is often lost further in national debates when policy makers go into an urban and rural debate and ignore urban inequities because rural of India continues to house 75% of the population.<sup>5</sup> Huge back log of services and amenities in cities highlights the inadequacies poor communities face. As residents in informal settlements, they face restrictions to access of these services and amenities, the most glaring is water and sanitation.

Between 1989 and 1995 NSDF and Mahila Milan have constructed toilets blocks in 5 cities linking what communities aspire with what is a sustainable solution, and based on this experience now seek partnerships between communities and cities on designing, constructing and managing a range of services and amenities. This is most advanced in the

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<sup>3</sup> See Cityawatch 5, Newsletter by SPARC 1997

<sup>4</sup> See "waiting for water" Kalpana Sharma, SPARC 1994

<sup>5</sup> World Bank Poverty report 1998-99.

areas of sanitation<sup>6</sup>, but is growing in areas for piped water supply, solid waste management and electricity and so on.

Financially assisted by grant funding initially, then with the soft loans, NSDF and Mahila Milan first create the basis for the experimentation of initial strategy which communities developed, learning through mistakes, reflecting on these mistakes and making sure these did not get repeated and teach each other. These “projects” first and foremost allow communities to test their solution designs, and just doing something begins building confidence. Other communities, in the city and in other cities are encouraged to visit the project, and if they feel inspired, communities are encouraged to explore their own solutions. City authorities get invited to come and see what was happening and should they become interested in what communities are DOING, use that tangible output as the basis for a discussion. This experiment more often than not, encourage some modest joint ventures between communities and city, and gradually the process has grown.

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<sup>6</sup> See “TOILET TALK” SPARC publication 1998

**Locating a role for the poor in the delivery of urban basic services.**

Since 1988 to 1999, the alliance has gradually begun to participate in dialogue with many city authorities, state governments and bilateral and multilateral agencies on how the communities of informal settlements can get involved in provision of water and sanitation in informal settlements. This discussion always occurs in a difficult and strange situation. On the one hand, international literature increasingly acknowledges that provision of basic amenities and services to the poor in cities is essential for the city and the poor, and the two must work together, at a national and local level, none of the stakeholders either truly believe in this paradigm to create financial resources to make this happen, nor facilitate a real starting point to build capacities of different actors which are at different levels of readiness to link to each other.

***Linking health and sanitation and water and costs of being impoverished.*** For those who work with communities this link is undeniable, and so are the linkages clear to health professionals. This linkage goes back to the 1970s. In the early 1970s, WHO estimated that diarrhoea directly killed six million children each year and that parasitic worms infected nearly half of the entire population of the developing countries. This understanding was a radical departure from the past, and forced agencies to work together in co-ordinated manner.<sup>7</sup> This was a great change towards a more sophisticated idea of what causes ill health; However, such broad based development strategies were very hard to understand and more difficult to implement - and rarely could they fit the more narrow objectives of most development agencies.<sup>8</sup>

Communities associated with NSDF and Mahila Milan find municipalities rarely link their health related investments to supply of clean drinking

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<sup>7</sup> Cairncross, Sandy, Jorge E. Hardoy and David Satterthwaite, "The urban context" in Jorge E. Hardoy, Sandy Cairncross and David Satterthwaite (Editors), *The Poor Die Young: Housing and Health in Third World Cities*, Earthscan Publications, London, 1990.

water, good drainage and solid waste management and toilets. Communities constantly face a barrage of “trainers” who come and teach then about hygiene in settlements where there is no water, and toilets and no efficient garbage disposal....and about malaria eradication where pools of water provide flourishing mosquito colonies due to no proper drainage. These activities in themselves waste national resources and increase costs to the poor due to ill health. The strategy, in the eyes of the federation is that the process begins with community involvement in basic services delivery and then its optimisation with good practices of hygiene.

In its own experimentation, many communities have begin to build drains between the “lanes” of the houses, and composting biodegradable waste at collection points of 50-100 households to trigger this process. Today 3000 households in Mumbai compost their waste and demand regular pick up of non degradable garbage by the municipal vans. The incentive to communities to separate waste at source becomes possible when compost created is used by communities to set up small gardens or pots in front of the house or around the toilets. And the waste that leaves the settlement is just half or one third of what went before. This then becomes the incentive to ward officials and senior city officials to allow communities to demand accountability of garbage vans coming at certain intervals.

***Where should the funds for services and amenities be located:***

Controversies began in policy debates... should health be an explicit part of water and sanitation project design? The World Bank began stressing difficulties in establishing linkages between improved water and health. Then there was a basic question: was water and sanitation a social or economic investment? If viewed in social terms as a consumption item, then there would be so little attention given to developing of appropriate methods of programme financing and cost recovery. There remains a competition for funds between capital and recurrent investments.

Literature on what is happening globally indicates that the goal for expansion of coverage was so overwhelming that a sharing of new funds generated by the DECADE for water were channelled to the construction of new systems with wholly inadequate amounts allocated to operation and maintenance of new or old systems. Little attention was paid to whether the systems functioned as designed or indeed whether people actually used them.<sup>9</sup>

***The gate keepers to amenities and services as communities see it:*** As far as the reality on the ground is concerned, most cities first of all do not add up the total population needing services and amenities. The issue of land tenure hangs large on the choices that get made, and as a result creates huge back logs of access. Informal settlements then form a queue outside that gate on the basis of “being recognised” as slums. So for instance, while all the large piped water supply to the city of Mumbai went under Dharavi, these settlements did not get access to that water officially until many decades later.<sup>10</sup> What was the community response? They just dug into those pipes, put pumps and pulled up water for their needs. Enterprising people began to charge for that, and the city could hardly do much. Later group water connections were introduced, but again only on “recognised” slums.

***Who is involved?*** Since most water supply and sanitation development takes place within public works agencies, such work is traditionally viewed through the prism of a technical and engineering approach. Not surprising then, that an engineering approach involving a reliance on technology and the strict control of project inputs and outputs has tended to dominate the field. Mobilisation for Decade activities were entrusted to public works agencies who organized their work on the basis of existing experience and institutional mandates. These agencies and the external donors generally

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<sup>10</sup> See “Waiting for water” Kalpana Sharma SPARC 1994.

emphasised those aspects of project development that they knew best - technical design, equipment selection and construction. The saw the Decade in terms of hardware. Emphasis further got further reinforced because of lack of clear linkages between improved water and health benefits: the new focus on cost effectiveness began to expand its influence. Effectiveness was measured through how many people got covered, not improved health status. Little money or effort was spent trying to understand complex health linkages or developing health-related design criteria.

There were some Impressive results at a world wide level - Improved water for an additional 360 million urban dwellers and over 1000 million rural dwellers. 330 million urban residents and 450 million rural residents receiving adequate sanitation. Most of the rural gains in China were for water and sanitation.<sup>11</sup>

***Some changes began to creep in:*** Lack of financial and human resources needed to promote rapid expansion of coverage eventually forced governments and external agencies to adopt radically new approaches. Changes arose from the realisation that many more facilities could be built with existing resources and their use and maintenance improved if the intended beneficiaries were involved in all stages of development and operation. Water and sanitation agencies also began to be sensitive to the key roles that could be taken by women, community leaders and other groups with recognised competence and authority. There was a growing emphasis on the social and institutional elements of programmes.

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<sup>11</sup> Cairncross, Sandy, *Sanitation and Water Supply: Practical Lessons from the Decade*, Water and Sanitation Discussion Paper Series, DP Number 9, World Bank, Washington DC, 1992,

Community-centred concepts became increasingly important as the community and individuals within it became regarded as the lead players for water and sanitation development. **Twenty years ago, the term "community development" was used to describe the generation of local contributions. By the start of the Decade.....emphasis had shifted to the concept of "community participation" which stressed local involvement. Current terminology now refers to "community management" as a process in which there is local acceptance of responsibility for and control of water and sanitation services.**

To make this work, communities had to be motivated and adequately supported. Considerable strengthening was needed for hygiene education to orient users to potential health benefits. Through an understanding of health benefits, it was believed that people would more willingly become involved in project implementation. They would contribute to care and maintenance and thus to long-term sustainability, if they had vested interests. In practice, a strong incentive for local contribution to project development was the realisation on the part of the users that their efforts were a necessary first step to complementary financial investments by outside agencies.

Over the course of the decade, these new approaches to institution building, human resources development and hygiene education have focused on areas where major investments in water and sanitation remain scarce.

Some results of the decade include increased decentralisation of water supply and sanitation agencies, greater inter-sectoral action between government agencies, heightened role for community institutions and more involvement of water and sanitation institutions in primary health care programmes. It also increased reliance on NGOs; NGOs have proved especially effective in promoting low cost and appropriate



technologies in areas where they have had sufficient field staff to provide the necessary software support. See also an unprecedented move towards closer co-ordination of government and external support agencies - has facilitated improved practices for planning, monitoring and evaluation.<sup>12</sup>

New methodologies for project planning and evaluation, community organisation and participation and recognition of the crucial roles of women as teachers, decision makers and managers of water and sanitation services. Significant progress was made in the development of low cost yet appropriate technologies such as hand pumps which can be repaired by the local community and sanitary latrines that can be constructed by individual households. There was widespread agreement and co-operation between countries and external agencies. The recent establishment of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council was another step forward.

There however are many shortfalls: Total populations without proper water and sanitation decreased only by 600 million with respect to water supply and only by 30 million with respect to sanitation. There was continuing implementation of unsustainable water and sanitation projects. It is not unusual to find areas where projects go out of service almost as fast as new ones are constructed. Sustainable technologies and the associated human and institutional infrastructure necessary to support them still remain more a dream than a reality. There remains a need to support sustainability through appropriate technical designs, greater community involvement and management, effective operations and maintenance programmes and expanded efforts on technical training and user education.

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<sup>12</sup> Cairncross, Sandy, *Sanitation and Water Supply: Practical Lessons from the Decade*, Water and Sanitation Discussion Paper Series, DP Number 9, World Bank, Washington DC, 1992,

**How the federation views this process:**

***City provides but poor have no control over that:*** Until a decade ago communities of the poor believed that the city would provide them with basic amenities and services... when and where this would actually get provided depended upon political and other considerations. For instance in Mumbai, year after year allocations of ear-marked finances towards slum sanitation and water supply have remained un-utilized because of the popular perception and paranoia is that giving toilets to the poor was an invitation to migrants to come to cities. Most corporators have used water and toilets as poll promises which never got delivered and often, as a result, communities of the poor have a strong and almost non-negotiable stance of “ this is the responsibility of the city” attitude. This has an important bearing on the discussion today about ability and willingness to pay. The ability to pay is not the same as willingness to pay<sup>13</sup>. Very often these conceptual or “virtual” debates occur in a reality where there has been no history of transparent transaction between communities and cities. The poor are trained by the state ( through decades of experience) to understate their incomes, and often there have been no personal experiences of communities to indicate confidence in the belief that cities deliver what they promise. So this dialogue and exploration is vitiated by empty talk which rarely translates into any action on part of either the state or the poor. The underestimated willingness to pay of low income groups (low income groups negotiating for more funding from donor, or middle class officials underrating aspirations and hygiene standards of poor).

Further, the discussion of willingness to pay is contingent upon valuation of costs and tangible experiential perceptions of improved quality of life. Most communities have hardly any positive experience of state investments which have improved the quality of their lives and as is the

case with all our educational work with the poor, they seek “*jinda misals*” or live examples and testimonials. Such possibilities are often rejected by consultants and specialists, who dismiss this saying its “ re-inventing the wheel” . Confident references are made to projects in other parts of the world, glowing recommendations are made which everyone is supposed to believe. And yet every evaluation and assessment constantly talks about the need to formulate project systems and technology that have to be adapted to the local situation. Another element, introduced especially by the World Bank, regarding communities bidding against each other to be first to get sanitation add to the confusion and further makes mockery of this process.

In a sanitation program of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation, NGOs were invited to put in tenders to be contracted by the city to motivate and educate communities who could be entitled to participate in the sanitation project under a world bank funded scheme. Communities of the poor were to be “educated and motivated” to participate in collective bidding to become early birds for sanitation construction in their settlement. The alliance of SPARC Mahila Milan and NSDF strongly recommended that the investment towards education and motivation was better spent in assisting communities identified as having a representative typologies of situations within which sanitation who’d be provide to become demonstration projects. For instance, how to provide sanitation in a very dense slum, or in an area where there can be no sever connection for two decades, or where there is area, but there are so many adjoining slums, that those people would definitely use this area... They would then becomes the testimonials of how designs emerged to address these needs, and how partnerships between communities technical support and a city municipality were possible.

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<sup>13</sup> (Whittington, D. and D. Lauria, *Household Demand for Improved Sanitation Services: A Case Study of Kumasi*, Ghana, UNDP-World Bank Water and Sanitation Program, Program Report 3, World Bank, Washington DC, 1990).

Based on toilets constructed in other places by the NSDF, this demonstration of intent is the most effective and powerful mechanism to encourage participation. Most vital is the learning that occurs at all levels... municipal and community level, where both sets of actors learn new ways of working together as the work gets done. Mistakes in this early process form valuable learning which then get accommodated in the scaling up. And city systems become sensitive to working with the poor.

*The examples of successful low-cost water and sanitation projects, including those that achieved cost recovery, are generally projects considered by the low-income households who benefited from them as their projects.*<sup>14</sup> These households also recognized that external funding was limited. No household will accept low-cost solutions that also involve them in providing a lot of the management and labour input if they believe they can negotiate a much more expensive, contractor-implemented solution from governments or international agencies. In addition, alternative solutions to conventional piped water and sewer systems must be developed in full consultation with the beneficiaries and with considerable care taken not to make unrealistic assumptions about the extent to which individual households and community organizations can contribute to construction, maintenance and repair. For instance, external agencies have often assumed that all low-income households have time to contribute labour free to install and maintain new systems as they are 'under-employed', when virtually all adult household members work long hours; they only appear under-employed because the work they do is informal and unregistered.

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<sup>14</sup> Cairncross, Sandy, *Sanitation and Water Supply: Practical Lessons from the Decade*, Water and Sanitation Discussion Paper Series, DP Number 9, World Bank, Washington DC, 1992,

NSDF and Mahila Milan have worked out creative and interesting strategies where those households who actually earn more than minimum wages can give their work to the others who have very under paid jobs. Such swaps achieve two things. First those who are very poor begin to earn minimum wage and thus can make their contribution, and second, this becomes on the job training and has led to construction guild being formed informally which then work on other construction sites.

*There have also been problems with the maintenance of some of the cheaper on-site sanitation systems - for instance, where pit latrines were constructed with an unrealistic assumption about the capacity of municipal latrine-emptying services to expand their coverage.*

The point is that such micro planning cannot be done at city level and must remain within the community . Building community capacity to participate in these process is what people's organisations need to do. The efficiency and sophistication of the planning will only occur through practice and experience, and that continues to remain the difficulty as hardly any such partnerships actually exist. Top-down interventions have made this mistake at various levels. At Federal or central planning levels and when state level planning is done, no cognisance is taken to issues of those households who live in slums on central government land. They continue to be invisible in this debate, and their needs are over ridden due to the views of those authorities not wanting to give basic amenities due to the belief that at some point that land will be repossessed. 20% of Mumbai slums are on such lands, and while city planning continues, they are ignored. The same is the situation of all cities which have cantonments and defence lands as well.

At the city level, often the plans to begin dialogue with communities and NGOs begins long after all plans and financial allocations are finalised.

Involving communities is seen as replacing the "contractor" . When fundamental flaws are pointed out or problems arise, there is no flexibility because everything is already contractually agreed between the city and whoever finances the project. There is very little discussion on institutional learning that is needed across the board in this activity.

Will the real community organisation please stand up? In cities today most communities have leaderships which delivers them services through certain degree of extortion and exploitation. These communities reflect the society in which they are located, and the fact that entitlements of citizens often get provided as political favours. By and large, democratic functioning rarely occurs in communities whose traditional leadership facilitates either the provision of goods and services or protection to the community through formal and informal linkages with power structures in the city. They get paid for these services by the community and these arrangements rarely get into focus in discussions about community organisations. Hardly anyone in slums has experience for dialogue with formal institutions and their past experiences of filling forms and paying fees for house allotments etc. are all negative. These very same people are now informed that they must behave differently... this simply does not work. Much of the work of the alliance of NSDF and Mahila Milan seeks to transform these processes and create systems which address issues of equity for all in access to services. Its a long and arduous task which can never be accomplished FOT a specific project. Yet investments in organising communities only comes to minds of planners and policy makers at the time of a project.

**Looking at how learning occurs among the various stakeholders and how the issues of scale, power and knowledge and systems impact roles and relationships.**

Communities clearly learn because they want change and if they see how they can participate in change, their capacity to be organised gets enhances. However the time frame for this process learning and reflection has to occur long time before the “project” surfaces.

NGOs in urban areas have historically not done much in the area of services delivery because there has been no “space” for such activity. As a result their techniques remain at demanding access, demanding state provide for the poor, and highlighting impact and quantity of deficits.

If communities and NGOs are seen as essential actors in this process, they learning needs and participation in the process needs to come in much earlier than it does in projects. In all instances where SPARC has sought participation, this has occurred after the “project” has been finalised.

City officials and members of elected municipal bodies have little idea of how to engage communities in these projects, and firmly believe state delivery of services themselves. Their rules and regulations have never included communities in as potential contractors for the project and rules are skewed towards traditional contracting procedures. In such circumstances communities aspiring to work with the city do so under the conditions which ensure failure and perpetuate the belief that communities cannot deliver.

### **Conclusions:**

**Urban basic services are the urban safety net:** It is essential first of all to look at the location of urban basic infrastructure to the poor in the city as part of the basic safety net and closely linked to health and education. The Alliance NSDF and Mahila Milan believe that creating access to basic amenities and services to all those who reside in the city is essential, and yet remains the main crisis in the relationship between the city and its

poor. So while the debate about urban poverty is beginning to take shape, the central location of impact of poor amenities and services directly and indirectly on the poor is not being accepted.

The **unbreakable linkages between land security and informal settlement investments** is constantly ignored as macro-level and community-level debate continues about infrastructure. Cities can no longer justify lack of access due to illegality of settlements. The longer this continues the greater the back log and longer the resolution of city level planning actually leading to minimum cover for all.

**Who should pay for what:** Communities make many payments under duress, and often these are treated as evidence of “capacity to pay” in the planning and design of projects for infrastructure and the long term implications are not examined. Incremental upgrading, a wide possibility of partnerships and improved dialogue and demonstration of how these partnerships work are essential to demonstrate how communities can participate.

**Looking at large, medium and small towns needs as separate entities :** In a country where the evolution of informal settlements as being illegal and therefore not having the right to get municipal services has created several problems which the present policy-makers have to address. Firstly, it has created huge backlogs and traditions of non-involvement and hostile relationships, especially in large cities and towns. Dealing with this back long will require different range of actions than addressing the needs on those towns which need to address migrants needs as they grow. Secondly, the communities of new migrants now coming into growing towns and cities need to be managed in a way different from how cities have dealt with them in the past. Yet the “traditions of hostility and gate-keeping” continue. Rural poor who migrate to cities are punished for their entrepreneurial behaviour and given



negative signals from the first day. There needs to be some mechanism which creates the basis for linking the city to these new migrants.

**Looking at vulnerable sub-groups within the urban poor:** Migrants, tribal and pavement and railway track dwellers, those who live as construction workers . There are many groups like these whose growing numbers in cities create problems different from the “routine” provision of slums with amenities. There seems to be no solution other than a single formula for all in the new arrangements between cities and communities as designed by policy-making bodies.

**Examination of the issues of minimal for all versus one for each:** In view of the varying range of capacity to pay, consolidation of slums, and huge backlog... the need to develop a wide spectrum of options is denied while each one pushes for favourite solutions. When can we develop a cafeteria approach and try and bring each up to scale, look at problems it has and work on them instead of fighting over the drawing board?

**Impact of incremental investment and participation issues:** Given low resources for investment in this sector on the whole and the need to build confidence in communities that something is being done, an incremental approach is urgently needed.

**Who does what and how:** There will be a wide range of roles and relationships of all actors in the process which have to be re-negotiated. Communities cannot be “consulted” because they really do not understand options. Pilots which explore various options have to be seen as an investment and these must form the basis of community participation.

**Role of women in this process:** Women bear the maximum costs, both in financial and non-financial terms, i.e. physically, and yet they remain invisible in this process, Gender is treated very casually and concerns for

safety design and management remain in a system which ignores the need for women's central participation.

**Creating infrastructure provision as the first step for linking city administration** and the poor within local governance issues: In an era of increasing citizen participation in civic matters in politically, socially and financially - the need to create linkages and working relationships needs to be addressed urgently. Matters like infrastructure remain a major subject for what devolution must address and yet there is no "software" of insights and activities that are available for this discussion. These are essential agendas for devolution, in which citizens and municipality can dialogue and make some choices, and where community based innovation can be encouraged to widen the possible ways in which cities can solve problems.

**Creating institutional frameworks for this process:** The Infrastructure issue has such a range of actors and such an intricate chain from macro-planning at national and state and city levels, and micro-planning at slum level that this process needs a flexible yet well-defined institutional framework. Yet, much of this remains very diffused at the lower end.

**Role of bilateral and multilateral agencies** in basic delivery strategies: These agencies have now begun to play a larger role and have greater interest in such activities, yet they often play havoc in already vitiated and estranged relationships between cities and communities and need to reformulate what they do in such a situation. Systems to design projects and prepare plans, as required by bilateral and multilateral agencies, remain strange and different from the manner in which cities operate and even stranger to communities. The crisis of who owns these processes, and whose involvement is essential always gets confused and bilateral and multilateral project managers continue to own the process through their demand for compliance with respect to fulfilment of tasks and

functions. Community participation and organisation is initiated as a project task.... In a situation of project delivery, no community organisation and real partnerships are possible. Building community organisation seems to bound end in failure and rarely do these processes last after the project.

**How can real learning occur:** Clearly, in this sector as in many other sectors, the time to make things happen is urgent. . In general the perception is that everyone talks and no one does anything, the poor are very cynical and live with the paradox of dreaming of entitlements that they know no-one will deliver while not believing in what they can do for themselves. The complex roles of actors and their functions need to be examined in the reality and not in “virtual” processes. There must be a long term commitment that forms basis of re-negotiated roles and relationships.

**Making learning possible for the poor as well:** Making space for poor communities to learn must remain central to this process or no scaling up will ever be possible. This has to be part of the chain of everyone’s re-learning and must be done in ways that communities understand. Creating incentives for an organised response from communities is essential for the poor in cities to behave as part of civil society, when managing and maintaining infrastructure in collaboration with cities.

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