



Sparking a Transformation of Agra's Slums

Agra is one of the world's great tourist destinations—each year, millions travel to this city in Uttar Pradesh to visit the Taj Mahal and other Mughal monuments. There is enormous potential to develop a strong, broad-based economy centered on tourism, but the city's rapid expansion has been chaotic, leading to insanitary conditions and other deterrents that could cripple its most valuable industry.

Slum-dwellers have suffered the most. Nearly half of Agra's 1.6 million residents live in under-served settlements, and nearly half of these men, women and children lack access to toilets. They must defecate in the open and endure embarrassment, illnesses and lost productivity that help to perpetuate their poverty and stymie the region's development. Mounds of untreated human sewage also foul the environment.

That is now starting to change, thanks to a grant from the Cities Alliance, plus additional funding from one of its members, USAID, and implementation support from the Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE).

This enabled Agra to prepare an inclusive city development strategy (CDS), based on hard data on the informal settlements, and to launch two pilot projects—the Mughal Heritage Walk and a partial upgrading of the Kuchpura settlement. Next they developed an inclusive,

“This is the first time I have seen a development project engaging people through discussions, resource maps and various other techniques. It has led people to have an ownership of their problems and also their solutions.”

Siromani Singha, Ward Councillor, Agra

Project: City Development Strategy and Slum Upgrading Plan for the Heritage City of Agra (India)

Key Partners: Agra Municipal Corporation, Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE), USAID, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), Water and Sanitation Programme – South Asia (WSP-SA)

Duration: 2006 – ongoing

Cities Alliance Financing: USD 740,000

Key Aspects:

- Leveraging initial grants to attract much larger investments
- Supporting local partners in leading the city development strategy and slum upgrading plan with broad community participation
- Taking a city-wide approach to slum upgrading

citywide slum upgrading plan—the first of its kind in India. It marked a notable departure from the conventional project-based resettlement approach, and it predated the national slum-upgrading programme, Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY).

While funds are still being sought to implement the comprehensive plan, the first endeavours are already bearing fruit: The state government is expanding or replicating the pilot projects, and slums have become a key component of the development agenda, leading the state government to improve services to these areas. The Cities Alliance grant has thus already triggered \$22 million of additional investments.

Building on the early successes

The Mughal Heritage Walk involves trained local youths guiding about 500 tourists a year among the lesser-known monuments in and around Kuchpura. The tourists are also shown traditional practices and can purchase specially

designed souvenirs. The income is split among tour guides (who earn nearly double the official minimum wage), residents who provide other services, and a community development fund. Due to the walk's success, a similar tour is now being designed in the old town area surrounding the Taj Mahal; the city is also planning to spend US\$4 million for physical improvements to roads, drains and other infrastructure components along the tour route.

The other pilot programme improved Kuchpura's sanitation by building toilets, paving streets, and improving drains. This spurred the community to seek assistance from the private sector to improve the highly insanitary waste-water drain abutting their settlement. The new Decentralised Waste Water Treatment (DEWAT) system treats sewage in a bio-remedial, gravity-based, energy-free manner and recycles it for agriculture and housing construction.

Having a cleaner settlement has led homeowners to upgrade their houses and prompted several new initiatives. The district administration will pay for toilets for those houses that still lack them. It has also agreed to provide better basic services, including upgrading drains, paving roads and installing street lights. And the city is expanding the sewer and water network.

The DEWAT has become an icon as well as a viable strategy for inclusive development. The state's tourism department is planning to invest \$4.3 million to build three DEWATs to improve the much larger Taj East Drain, while ensuring toilets for nearly 4,000 nearby houses and intercepting and diverting their sewage. A doorstep waste collection system is also being implemented.

The community-driven approach to Agra's slum upgrading has helped city officials to engage positively with slum dwellers. For example, city engineers went on site visits and participated in community discussions. This has led to more localised—and more effective—solutions that take into account such factors as a slum's geography, trunk infrastructure, and household vulnerabilities. There have also been broader benefits: Outreach to slum households is now recognised as integral to the city's development and is allotted adequate state resources (US\$14.1 million has been set aside to expand to slums). Urban bodies have also begun involving community groups in planning, in recognition of their important role in sustainable change. Moreover, Agra is taking the lead in spreading these approaches to other states.

Meera's Story

"Having a home toilet was considered a luxury that only the wealthy could afford," says Meera Devi, who lives with her husband and three children in a one-room, mud-brick house in Kuchpura. Until a few years ago, Meera would rise before dawn each day and walk half a mile to a vegetable patch. Looking out for leering men and piles of feces, she would find a spot to crouch and defecate.

Today she only needs to walk a few steps to her own latrine, the first of its kind in Kuchpura. She acquired it with a loan from USAID's Crosscutting Agra Project (which laid the foundation for the Cities Alliance work in Agra) and repaid it with income from a new job promoting hygiene and sanitation to other residents. "After seeing my toilet, all others in my street wanted a home toilet too," she says. "The place is beginning to look so much cleaner."

The effects are much more than cosmetic. "Having a toilet has changed everyone's lives," she says, "but especially for women. Now they have more time to get their children ready for school or do more work or just rest longer." And Meera no longer worries about her eldest daughter suffering the same indignities and infections she herself endured due to the lack of a toilet. "All three of my children are studying. My eldest daughter is taking computer, accounting, and English classes and says she will become better than me."

