



Supporting a Community-Driven Sanitation Policy in India

Despite its rapid economic growth since the 1990s, poverty in India's cities is alarmingly high and continues to rise. A majority of the urban poor live in deplorable conditions, mainly slums characterised by lack of access to basic services such as water, sanitation, roads and health care.

Official estimates suggest that out of 55 million households in urban India, 12.04 million households – a majority of them poor – do not have access to toilet facilities.

Approximately the same number (12.47 million households) lack drainage. Where community and shared toilet facilities are available, poor maintenance often makes them non-functional.

In 2001, the Government of India launched a national community sanitation programme called *Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan* in slums across the country. Due to high slum density, community toilets were proposed as a sustainable and cost-effective option as compared to individual or family latrines. The programme emphasised community involvement in the design, construction and maintenance of facilities rather than leaving it to municipal authorities.

When this project was conceived, the idea of public participation in sanitation provision was a relatively new concept in India. While the national, state and city governments provided financial support to construct toilets, the Cities Alliance's help was sought to develop a range of activities to demonstrate new ways of working with the poor.

“The policy attempts to address the many institutional issues, the plight of the urban poor, especially the manual scavengers, the lack of awareness on sanitation, integrated planning, and the lack of technical knowhow and capacity which causes most of our infrastructure facilities to not operate efficiently.”

M. Ramachandran, Former Secretary, Ministry of Urban Development

Project: Scaling Up the Provision of Universal Minimum Sanitation to Slums in Cities

Partners: Cities Alliance, Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP), the World Bank, Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC)

Duration: 2003 – 2007

Financing: USD 455,753

A Community-Driven Approach to Sanitation

Over the next four years, Cities Alliance members and partners carried out detailed studies on existing approaches to slum and community sanitation. The results were disseminated among city managers, non-government organisations (NGOs), elected representatives and other stakeholders. The lessons learned from the experience were incorporated in sanitation strategies at all levels.

Training modules were developed and pilot demonstrations of community toilets undertaken in three cities – Tirupur, Vijaywada and Vishakhapatnam – to help local governments design and implement community sanitation plans in a participatory manner.

Throughout, there was a constant emphasis on community participation. In partnership with SPARC, inter-city exchange programmes were organised for poor communities. Delegations were sent to develop and expand community federations. A cadre of federation members was also trained in toilet construction.

India Adopts a New Sanitation Policy

The project helped raise the profile of sanitation in India to the highest level. In 2006, India's Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) formed a national task force on urban sanitation, comprising representatives from the central, state and city governments as well as NGOs and relevant city institutions.



A new toilet block constructed in Karjat near Mumbai after an old toilet block was demolished. Photo: SPARC

In 2009, based on the task force’s recommendations, the national government announced a *National Urban Sanitation Policy (NUSP)* – India’s first comprehensive urban sanitation policy that promises universal access with a special focus on people living in underserved areas. The Policy provides a framework for all Indian States to approach urban sanitation in an integrated manner. It is now mandatory for the central government to support states and cities in developing their own sanitation strategies and plans. An Advisory Group reviews policy implementation and progress at all levels.

The Policy takes a holistic approach to sanitation and is integrated with other urban projects as part of the government’s overall poverty alleviation agenda. To illustrate, the Ministry of Housing and Poverty Alleviation has developed a national strategy which emphasises sanitation services to the poor as part of its overall mission to provide basic services to the poor.

The Policy’s emphasis on a community-driven approach to sanitation provision is another visible departure from the government’s previous top-down approach to service delivery. The NUSP recognises that building toilets is not the solution to the challenges of providing sanitation in slums if local communities are not actively involved.

Lessons Learned from the Success Story

The sanitation policy project in India did a lot more than provide toilets to the urban poor in India; it created new

type of arrangements to deliver pro-poor subsidies. The policy-making process holds some useful lessons. An active learning agenda was promoted to expose cities in policy development. A platform was created for cross-learning through workshops, consultations, and exposure through study tours. Such exposures and exchanges – with hands-on training – are important vehicles to create demand, especially for dealing with sanitation.

Creating public awareness and evidence based studies and analysis for advocacy are also crucial for seeking public support and participation in preparation of strategies and plans. The demonstration pilots also show signals of community engagement but rigorous follow ups sustain the momentum. The city exchanges emerged as a powerful instrument to influence policies and approach to delivery of universal sanitation for poor communities.

For high level policy makers and partners, exposure to international experiences on drafting national policy, its core principles, chief components and the trigger for a national policy was vital. Indian policy makers were exposed to the process of policy formulation from the Philippines and Australia, while other country experiences were shared at national workshops and task force meetings. This contributed to the decision of formulating a national policy in India.

The success of the NUSP, demonstrates that national level prioritisation of policies is the key to help states and cities take appropriate action. Each year, the MoUD releases its ranking of cities which creates a baseline to measure progress in city sanitation. The best performers are rewarded, which potentially serves to encourage cities to perform better. Such formal incentive structures tend to encourage cities and states to develop and implement strategies and action plans.

The sanitation policy project contributes to the objectives of the Cities Alliance by:

- Introducing a new national integrated policy that prioritises the provision of basic services to the urban poor
- Focusing on community participation
- Leveraging significant budget allocation