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Community Monitoring in the Provision of Basic Services to the Poor in Urban West Bengal

PRABHAT DATTA AND PAYEL SEN

"Although the freedom and power of individuals vary enormously, all can do something"

- Robert Chambers

COMMUNITY PLAYED a key role as an instrument of providing basic services to the people in the early period of human history when there was direct democracy. The King was there but he was subject to the will of the people. During the days of the city- states *(polis)* as they existed in ancient Greece and Rome, democracy in its pristine and direct form was found to be in operation for quite sometime. An interesting and meaningful event may be recalled to get an idea of the pristine democracy. Herald from Thebes asked on arrival to whom he should deliver the message he was carrying from the King Creon. To this Thesus, the King of Athens replied:

The state is not Subject to one man's will, but is a free city. The king is here the people, who by yearly office Govern in turn. We give no special power to wealth; The poor man's voice commands equal opportunity. [1]

Referring to India, one of India's Nobel laureates Rabindranath Tagore once wrote that in the ancient India community was the springboard of social development and social welfare. It used to pay respect to the respected, prescribe punishment for the offenders, construct temples for the devotees, providing drinking water to the thirsty, arrange food for those who were hungry and the like. This was how the country belonged to the people and the king was just part of it like the crown on the head. The advent of the Western rule gave this tradition a strong blow. The social self rule *(samajik swaraj)* which was widespread in the villages came under the domination of the ruler. And since the time this right of the ruler was established water in the water bodies started drying up, the banyan trees began to grow on the damaged temples and desolate guest houses. There was none to prevent people from filing false suits in the law courts. The

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country had gone to dogs due to a number of factors such as disease, sufferings, lack of knowledge. [2]

Looking globally the period that followed the Greek City states saw gradual ascendancy of representative democracies in Europe and America and with it, direct community engagement with the functioning of government became impossible. Paradoxically, in the so called powerful democracies of the world the role of the community was merely reduced to participating in the democratic processes and offering passive consent to policy decisions. In the smaller countries like Switzerland, they had devised constitutionally contrived mechanisms like referendum, initiative and recall for making the government accountable to the community in between periodic elections. However, what added fuel to the fire was the beginning of the era of social welfare state which eroded the creative agency of the community

Community participation and networking in the developing countries has gained considerable currency in recent years due to the evident failure on the part of the development bureaucracy to live up to the expectations. It is being gradually realised that active community participation is a key to building an empowered community. Merely knowing that one can participate promotes dignity and self-sufficiency within the individual. Second, it taps the energies and resources of individual citizens within the community. Finally, citizen participation provides a source of special insight, information, knowledge, and experience, which contributes to the soundness of community solutions.

In the 90s of the last century, the new wave of community resurrection swept the developing nations. This led to three different kinds of situations, namely legislative or administrative strengthening of the community's relationship with state, community network for better and effective implementation of the pro-poor programmes and community's own spontaneous initiative to monitor and evaluate the state –sponsored development programmes.

Nature of Urban Community

Urban community does not comprise a homogenous whole. Every city or town has a shared history and a cultural ethos stemming from the diversity of its different constituents. This is particularly true of the Indian community living in which is largely shaped by distinct primordial loyalties, economic disparities and gender identities each

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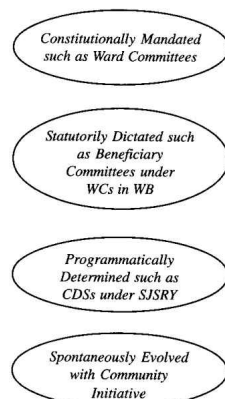
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of which is accepted, recognised and valued within the democratic political set up. In actuality every community is a fragmented one beneath which there exists a complex web of a multiple sub-communities founded either socially, economically, culturally or politically each criss-crossing the other to an extent that it tends to blur or even at times, erase the demarcating line of communal identity. This holds more true in an urban setting where the culture of anonymity pervades almost every other kind of identity or bonding.

Modes of Community Participation

A close look at the empirical situation in urban India indicates that there could be four different modes of community participation which are graphically depicted below. Three of them may be regarded as state- initiated modes while the fourth one emerges out of spontaneous community initiative often accepted and made use of by the state.

Constitutionally Mandated such as Ward Committees

Statutorily Dictated such as Beneficiary Committees under WCs in WB

Programmatically Determined such as CDSs under SJSRY

Spontaneously Evolved with Community Initiative

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Emergence and Development of Community Networking in Urban India

Historically speaking, urban India started experimenting with community participation as early as in the 1950s.[3] In the face of inequitable distribution of the fruits of development resulting in wide disparities, the involvement of communities in the implementation of pro- poor programmes began to be widely acknowledged as an effective weapon of poverty reduction. As such, in 1958 the scheme known as the Urban Community Development (UCD) was launched with assistance from the Ford Foundation, the purpose being to improve the quality of life of the poor in urban areas with the active involvement of the community.

The twin ideas of community building and people's participation received a new impetus with the Seventh Five year plan which laid stress on improving the living conditions of the slum dwellers. Then came the Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP) in 1985 which was a step ahead in the direction. The programme for the first time emphasised the idea of participation of the poor in the amelioration of their poverty. The programme aimed at improving and upgrading the quality of life of the urban poor, especially women and children by providing them better access to the basic services. The ULBs were given the overall responsibility for implementation of the programme.

Community Networking in the SJSRY Programme

The Swarna Jayanti Sahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) launched in the 50th year of India's independence in all urban local bodies (ULBs), was the first to seriously consider how to involve the community. The ULBs are the designated nodal agencies for implementing the programme through a three-tiered community structures comprising women members belonging to below-the-poverty line families. The guidelines envisage that families residing in a specific locality and living below-the-poverty line will form a committee called the Neighbourhood Group (NHG) and select their own representative who is known as the Resident Community Volunteer (RCV). All the RCVs from different localities will form a ward-level body called Neighbourhood Committee (NHC) with four office bearers, namely, chairman, vice-chairman, secretary and treasurer. At the town level there is a body called Community Development Society (CDS), which will also have councillors of the Ward. The CDS being the federation of the community-based organisations is the focal point for purposes of identification of beneficiaries, screening of applications, monitoring

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of recovery of loan, identification of viable projects. It may also set itself up as the Thrift and Credit Society. The NHGs will report to the NHC and the NHC to the CDS. The association of women with the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes is expected to bring about desired results in two ways. It will empower women and engender development by enabling them to play the role of planners and achievers within their own surroundings.

The Growing Significance of Community in Urban Renewal

The new initiative of urban renewal through Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) introduced in 2005 has attached a lot of importance to community participation for the implementation of all urban renewal programmes in India. For accessing the benefits of the programme under JNNURM, each of the cities is required to prepare City Development Plan (CDP) for which community consultation has been made mandatory. The guidelines provide for the formation of the National Technical Advisory Group and the State Level Technical Advisory Groups to advise national and state level steering committees and urban local bodies on enlisting community participation, securing transparency and accountability, ways and means of involving citizens in service delivery and governance. The other important terms of reference of these Groups include: helping setting up of voluntary technical corps in each mission city, mobilising civil society support and enlisting citizens' involvement through ward committees, area sabhas and voluntary technical corps.

In this article an attempt is being made to highlight how the community has been involved in urban slums in West Bengal for the monitoring of the Department for International Development (DFID), Government of United Kingdom supported programme known as the Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor (KUSP). It is based on a field work conducted in 10 urban local bodies in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area, namely, Bally, Barrackpore, Baranagar, Bhtpara, Chakda, Halishahar, Kalyani, Kamarhati, Raharhat-Gopalpur and Titagarh. A brief profile of the ULBs is given below :

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I

BALLY MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F/1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
Howrah	1885	11.81	29	229	261575	70073	26.79	82.94	746	3

II

BARANAGAR MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq. km)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F/1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
North 24 Pgs	1869	7.12	33	13	250615	55987	22.34	89.51	888	2

III

BHATPARA MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F/1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
North 24 Pgs	1899	31.84	35	34	441956	107581	24.34	79.63	819	6

IV

BARRACKPORE MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F/1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
North 24 Pgs	1916	11.65	24	37	144331	4459	3.09	87.51	892	2

V

CHAKDAHA MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F/1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
Nadia	1886	15.36	20	52	86965	31,070	35.73	87.35	972	2

VI

HALISAHAR MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F/1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
North 24 Pgs	1903	8.29	23	32	12,34479	18,733	15.03	83.91	854	2

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VII

KALYANI MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F / 1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
Nadia	1995	29.14	19	16	81,984	39,429	48.09	78.31	954	2

VIII

KAMARHATI MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F / 1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
North 24 Pgs	1899	10.90	35	8	31,4334	3,607	1.16	84.20	864	4

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IX

RAJARHAT- GOPALPUR MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F / 1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
North 24 Pgs	1994	28	27	13	271781	24817	9.13	85.00	938	2

X

TITAGARH MUNICIPALITY

District	Year of formation	Area covered (in sq.km.)	Total no. of wards	Total no. of slum pockets	Population	Total slum population	Percentage of Slum population to total population	Literacy rate	Sex ratio (F / 1000 M)	Total no. of CDS
North 24 Pgs	1895	3.24	23	23	12,41198	98,062	78.96	73.75	758	2

Programme Details: Background and Objectives

Driven by the successes of the DFID funded Calcutta Slum Improvement Projects (SIPs) of the 1990s being implemented in the territorial jurisdiction of the Kolkata Municipal area the Government of West Bengal and the DFID agreed to collaborate on devising the Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor (KUSP) programme launched in

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March 2004 for the Kolkata Metroplitan Area which spreads over 1785.04 square kilometers and covers 41 urban local bodies including three municipal corporations and 33 per cent slum population.

Area	Population	Density	Administrative Jurisdiction	Slum Population
1785.04 sq.km	14.68 million (2001 Provisional)	8223 sq.km	41 ULBs including 3 Municipal Corporations	About 33%

KUSP: its innovative features

KUSP takes a three- pronged approach towards urban poverty reduction through (*i*) strengthening policy and institutional structures in the urban sector towards promoting inclusive planning and poor-focused governance and accountability systems, (*ii*) creating and strengthening community organisations and based on their inputs, providing basic services (piped water, sanitation, sewerage, street lights, access roads), and (*iii*) supporting local economic development by capacitating municipal governments and undertaking local livelihood- based demonstration projects involving the poor (especially women).

The programme is oriented towards making the ULBs performance- based by encouraging ULBs to consider innovative ways to enhance their financial sustainability and to improve their service delivery capabilities. The programme intends to promote the use of public- private partnerships as (PPPs) a mechanism for improving service delivery by making an exhaustive use of private sector expertise and resources. Another distinguishing component of the programme is the establishment of an Incentive Fund that aims at creating a competitive milieu within the ULBs by financially rewarding them on the basis of their performance. The programme provides for what is called the Innovative Challenge Fund which would be given to the non-government organisations (NGOs) for the improvement of their quality of life.

Implementation strategy

KUSP is being implemented through a Change Management Unit (CMU) which has been created as a registered society to work under the overall administrative guidance and supervision of the Municipal Affairs Department, Government of West Bengal for a period of four years. The CMU is expected to play two-fold role while working with

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the support agencies such as Directorate of ULBs, Municipal Engineering Directorate, Institute of Local Government and Urban Studies and the concerned ULBs: *as programme manager* and *as facilitator of change*. The programme stipulates active involvement of the community in the creation and provision of basic services to the poor for which it seeks to utilise the existing community structures in the slums known as the CDS and create new community structures to be known as the Slums Works Management Committee (SWMC) for the maintenance of assets to be created out of the programme.

KUSP programme thus recognises the potential role that civil society groups in building infrastructures and maintaining them. It is supposed to enable civil society organisations to take up pioneering initiatives for the poor and access funds for implementing innovative pilot projects on health, education, livelihood generation, vulnerability and social security especially for in the ULBs under the programme.

CDS as Community Contractors

Under the Kolkata Basic Services for the Poor (KUSP) the CDSs have been assigned the role of contractors for doing small work in their areas. They have been given financial support for undertaking many innovative activities under the Innovative Challenge Fund which also is a part of the KUSP programme. From our field studies it is clear that all the slum dwellers are not aware of the functioning of the CDSs. A close analysis of the mode of involvement under the KUSP programme indicates that broadly speaking, the involvement of the respondents in the CDS is confined to routine work such as attending meetings. There is a significant variation in respect of the involvement of the respondents in the construction work under the KUSP. The idea of giving small contracts to CDS emerged out of the thought that apart from direct employment and proper wage without the mediation of contractors it will generate greater sense of ownership. But this has not happened. On the contrary the CDSs employed sub -contractors to get the work done. Our field findings observe that the work was assigned to the CDSs without giving them proper training. And this job calls for investment of money and technical skill house the primary objective remains to be achieved.

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Whether consulted in matters relating to the creation of infrastructure

Names of ULB	KUSP slums		
	Yes	No	Total
Bally	5	20	25
percentage	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Baranagar	11	13	24
percentage	45.8%	54.2%	100.0%
Barrackpore	9	15	24
percentage	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
Bhat Para	13	8	21
percentage	61.9%	38.1%	100.0%
Chakdaha	0	25	25
percentage	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Halisahar	15	10	25
percentage	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Kalyani	17	2	19
percentage	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%
Kamarhati	14	7	21
percentage	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Rajarhat Gopalpur	6	16	22
percentage	27.3%	72.7%	100.0%
Titagarh	11	12	23
percentage	47.8%	52.2%	100.0%
Total	101	128	229
percentage	44.1%	55.9%	100.0%

It is unfortunate that the stakeholders namely, the slum dwellers have generally not been taken into confidence during the construction of the infrastructures under the KUSP programme. The figures in the table above point to an alarming fact that more than half of the respondents have not been consulted about the infrastructures to be created in their slums. The not- so- happy responses with respect to

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the infrastructures in the earlier tables may be understood with reference to the lack of consultation. While making visits to slums we have also gathered that the advice received in many cases was not acted upon. In some places the slum dwellers were asked to make monetary contributions for the purpose of, say, erecting lamp posts by the side of the drains.

In the process of consultation before the commencement of the work males have been given preference over females in matters relating to construction work in the slums. It implies that despite the existence of the CDSs which has been entrusted with the job of contractors in the slums, the voice of the males count more than that of the females. Thus the old tradition persists and men continue to remain the key players. It further implies that the KUSP management has entrusted the job of construction work to the CDSs in slums without caring to change the prevailing popular psyche and ethos.

Significantly, our in- depth interaction with the slum dwellers in their own habitat reveal that in many cases consultation turned out to be intimation or passing of information rather than eliciting their reactions and responses. Had there been any consultation prior to or at the stage of construction of infrastructures it was confined to the members of the CDS and the Ward Committees and not the much desired horizontal consultation amongst the stakeholders.

Role of CDS in the Preparation of the Draft Development Plan (DDP)

One of the important objectives of the KUSP programme is to facilitate preparation of development plan with the active involvement of the community. This work was undertaken with a lot of fanfare. In West Bengal the ward committee at the level of the ward is statutorily required to prepare draft plan and in this body there is representation of the CDS. [4] The WC is a constitutional body. All the ULBs have prepared DDPs as we have gathered from the office of the CMU. A close and careful reading of the plans beautifully drafted does not show real footprint of the community. The professional skill is there everywhere in the document. But what about the will of the community ?

Our empirical investigations reveal that quite a large number of the respondents have not heard about DDP, not to speak of their participation in the processes. Our interactions with the municipal functionaries indicate that they have failed to make the members of

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the CDS realise the need for their participation. Their immediate gain in community contracting kept them more absorbed. Secondly, the KUSP officials engaged in organising training for the DDP did not take special care for the CDS. The emphasis on technical dimension of planning diluted the social significance of planning. One may conclude that the DDPs prepared by the ULBs under the KUSP programme could not successfully incorporate the voices of the poor. This factor is very important because lack of involvement in planning will not ensure participation of the poor in the processes of implementation. It is significant to note that in some ULBs the CDS raised their voices to include their agenda in the DDP but the document does not include them. It implies that the draft document has not been placed before the community for their endorsement.

Draft Development Plan

The DDP exercise which was undertaken with a lot of fanfare has failed to evoke the initiative of the citizens in general and the slum dwellers in particular. Although some of our respondents have reported to have been able to get their voices reflected in the plan document, most of the real target groups have remained excluded. What is more significant to mention is the lack of knowledge on the part of the CDS members about the processes of DDP preparation in their slums.

We have been able to access the voluminous and glossy DDP documents of all the ULBs covered under this study. It seems that the documents have been prepared in many cases by the professionals as a result of which the documents look impressive and elegant and contain rich material of the concerned ULBs. Undoubtedly, the documents are of great use to researchers and students of local government but one can question in the light of our field experience the documents in terms of their usefulness from the perspective of the stakeholders. A close reading of the documents indicate that the general needs of the citizens have found place but the specific needs of the disadvantaged under different settings keeping in mind their distinct cultural and community make-up, do not seem to have been captured or have received required attention.

The programme design and the contents including the expected outcomes and deliverables as part of the programme package seem to assume that the community is bound together by an emotional thread of fellow-feeling and is driven by the spirit of voluntarism. Our frequent interaction with the slum dwellers and clinical investigations

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into the slums make us believe that the old values are fast eroding. A strong sense of individualism and personal well-being if required at the cost of others, seems to emerge as a dominant factor in their ways of life. We have been repeatedly told that it is impractical and often dangerous to have two kinds of slums having identical character receiving differential treatment. The BWMC members have repeatedly emphasised that they have not been able to convince the residents of their slums about the need for their making financial contribution with a view to maintaining their assets because the non-KUSP slum dwellers are not required to make such contribution. The dangerous consequences of this kind of divide seem to have been sensed by the BWMC members. The neo-liberal policies of the Indian state and the expanding spread of market values in the society are hitting hard on the traditional community spirit which was supposed to fuel the engine of the KUSP in the slums. All these raise critical questions with regard to the sustainability of the ambitious KUSP programme after the withdrawal of funding and administrative supervision, both horizontal and vertical.

Bustee Works Management Committees(BWMC)

The BWMC consisting of five members, who must be residents of the concerned slum, is a slum level broad-based democratic committee. It is an administrative contrivance in the hands of the community for keeping watch over the maintenance of individual and community infrastructures in the slums through active participation of the beneficiaries. The members are elected in a meeting organised by the ULB and the CDS provided 40 per cent of them present are residents of the slum concerned. One RCV and one member of the NHG are also members of this committee. There could be permanent invitees from the CDS, NHCs and WCs. Apart from them, there are also three office bearers, namely, the chairperson, the secretary and the cashier. There is a provision for replacement of members in case any one of them leaves the *bustee* or resigns or expresses inability to carry on the work as a member.

The BWMC is constituted for a period of two years. The functions of the BWMC include *inter alia* collection of specific percentage of the share of contribution from the beneficiaries for the construction of personal or community latrines. It is also responsible for collection of monthly contribution from the beneficiaries for the maintenance of different kinds of infrastructural works completed out of the KUSP funds in the *bustee*. The Committee is required to organise meetings of the *bustee* dwellers at an interval of six months to keep them abreast of

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the income and expenditures of the committees and matters pertaining to maintenance of the assets and infrastructures in the slum areas. It has been clearly stated in the guidelines that the local councillor, the engineer of the ULB concerned, the Town Project Officer (TPO), Advisor (Poverty and Livelihood) and members of the CDS would be present in this meeting. It is also the duty of the BWMC to work in close unison with the CDSs. The RCV will act as a link between CDS and BWMC. In case there is any difference between them the ULB would intervene and the decision of the ULB would be binding on them. Each of the BWMCs has to open an account with any nationalised bank and such account would be operated jointly by the chairperson and the Secretary or the cashier

We have collected data from the respondents about their awareness on the existence of BWMCs in their slums. It is found that the BWMCs have been constituted in almost all the ULBs. Our intensive interaction with them have, however, revealed that the BWMCs have been constituted in most of the cases without open interaction with the slum dwellers. Strikingly enough, many of them are not even the members of the BWMCs but they have reported their awareness. It implies that the idea of BWMCs has not received wide publicity in the slums despite being constituted in open meetings.

It is significant to observe that there are quite a few female representatives in the BWMCs. It means that more than a half of the women members have been associated with the processes of maintenance of the assets created. Women as home- makers are likely to be more effective and sincere in carrying out this responsibility.

We have gathered responses on whether the members take part in the maintenance of the infrastructures. The reactions of the respondents speak of the deplorable situation on the ground. Only 27 per cent of them are engaged in the maintenance of the infrastructures as is shown in the table below. Significantly a good number of those who have said to have participated in the task are women and it comprises nearly 70 per cent.

It raises a bigger question: what is the usefulness of knowing about the rules and regulations if they are not put to any effective use?

It is indeed heartening to note that nearly cent percent of the respondents across the ULBs consider the infrastructures created to be of use. Significantly, this is true even in ULBs where respondents were reported to be openly skeptical about their qualitative worth. This may be due to the fact that the infrastructures were either

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Whether participated in the maintenance of infrastructures in slums under KUSP

Names of ULB	Yes	No	Total
Bally	6(24.0)	19 (75.0)	50(100.0%)
Baranagar	3(12.0%)	22(88.0%)	50(100.0%)
Barrackpore	5(20..0%)	20(80.0%)	50(100.0%)
Bhat Para	8 (32.0%)	17(68.0%)	50(100.0%)
Chakdaha	3(12.0%)	22(88.0%)	50(100.0%)
Halisahar	9(36.0%)	16(.64%)	50(100.0%)
Kalyani	11(44.0%)	14 (56.0%)	50(100.0%)
Kamarhati	8(32.0%)	17(68.0%)	50(100.0%)
Rajarhat Gopalpur	8(32.0%)	17(68.0%)	50(100.0%)
Titagarh	7(28.0%)	18(72.0%)	50(100.0%)
Total	6827.2%	18272.8%	250 (100.0%)

inadequately present or absent in the slums under survey. Therefore, even little addition irrespective of the quality is considered useful by them.

It is worth mentioning in this regard that while making visits to the slums and interacting especially with the some of the young dwellers it transpired that they have serious grievances against some of the infrastructures created. For instance, in course of our visits to a few slums we had seen that the guard walls of the drains constructed under the KUSP programme are so raised that there remains chances of young children falling in. Even the slum dwellers feel scared to walk past the drains in late evenings lest they fall off. Added to it is the non- existence of proper street lights in the slums which add to the inconvenience and restricts mobility in the dark.

We interacted intensively with the Chairman and the members of the Chairman –in-Council of Halisahar municipality where the performance of the KUSP pergramme has been found to be better although there has been development of infrastructure in the form of roads, toilets and drains out of the KUSP funds; the progress, according to him, is far from satisfactory. In this connection he referred to instances of stiff local resistance from the slum dwellers to use the newly constructed toilets owing to their cultural inhibitions along with

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the failure of the BWMC members to act as active agents of cultural change. He also pointed out the failure of the BWMCs to motivate people to contribute towards the maintenance of infrastructure in terms of the guidelines of the KUSP. In his opinion while the beneficiaries over the decades have developed a feeling that it is solely the duty of the government to create and maintain infrastructure in the slums, the BWMC, which was expected to generate this new consciousness in tune with the changed policy of the government too proved to be a failure. One of the elderly members of the Chairperson-in-Council intervened to say that besides their lack of proper education and training, the members of the BWMC or for that matter the CDS also, do not feel sufficiently motivated to work well as they receive no financial incentives for their role performance. The chairman added that a wrong notion is doing the rounds in the slums that the only objective of the BWMC is to raise money in the form of contribution from the beneficiaries. This widespread feeling has dangerous implications for the attainment of the KUSP objectives.

The ULB CDS Linkage

It is found from the responses of the persons interviewed that the selection of beneficiaries is generally done in consultation with them which means that there is an effective interaction between the ULBs and the CDSs which are expected to represent the beneficiaries. Interestingly, this process of consultation is found to be active in all slums irrespective of whether they come under the purview of KUSP or not. Clearly, KUSP programme has not been able to make any basic difference in this regard. As in most other cases the worst performing municipality continues to be Bally. Although Barrackpore's track record is generally commendable, it lags behind others in respect of ensuring consultation during selection of beneficiaries. Although Kalyani has fared well in many other respects, it fails to present a bright picture in this regard. Presumably, it is because of weak horizontal linkage between the CDS and the slum population despite a strong vertical linkage between the ULBs and the CDSs.

Upward- Looking CDS

The CDSs as the overarching organisation of the poor hold an important place in the KUSP programme. But they have not found to be proactive in the ULBs where the success of the programme is not upto the mark. Their links with the slum dwellers have been found to be weak and their approach towards them 'casual'. Although the records indicate that the meetings are being held regularly, such

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meetings often fail to produce the desired results. While moving around in the slums with some of the members of the CDSs we had gathered the impression that a distance has developed between them and the people in the slums they represent and work for. We have also noticed on the part of the slum dwellers in course of such visits a tendency to avoid interacting with the members of the CDSs.

The government of West Bengal has granted statutory status to the CDS with a view to strengthening them. This enhancement of status through legal empowerment of the CDS has created a problem in the sense that the existing members are leaving no stone unturned not only to cling on to their present status but also if possible, to pass it on to their kins. It is said that where there is power there is politics. The empowerment of CDS has given birth to two kinds of situations, one, politicians are taking interest in them because they can be utilised for the mobilisation of the slum dwellers as and when required. Second, the increasing use of CDS as instrument of implementation of all development programmes in the slums has enhanced the significance of CDS and has transformed it into a source of power and distribution of patronage. It is creating a divide in the slums- a section of slum dwellers who form a part of the CDS and a section who do not get included. There has developed among the CDS members what can be called a 'creamy layer' who not only usurp power but also manage to grab a big slice of the benefits.

Our critical probe and focused interactions tend to indicate that some of the members of the CDS are becoming ambitious which, in this context is like two sides of the coin. So far as the positive side of it is concerned, it may be safely contended that this sort of ambition in the sense of climbing up the ladder will go a long way in mainstreaming and empowering them but it has a negative connotation as well as evident from what is actually happening on the ground. It is creating a chasm between those who run the CDS and those whom they are supposed to cater to. The CDSs have also failed to sensitise the slum dwellers about the citizen's charter which has been prepared in all the ULBs under study. The lack of awareness on part of the poor slum dwellers about their rights as envisaged in the charter defeats the very purpose of creating such charters.

Weak CDS- BWMC interface

As discussed above BWMC is an institutional contrivance under the KUSP programme, the basic objective being the protection and maintenance of the assets created under the programme.

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Unfortunately, although this committee has been constituted in all the ULBs under study, the experience of their working has not been very happy. In terms of the guidelines of the composition of BWMC, CDS has a vital role to play in the sense that such locality- specific committees are to be constituted by mobilising the large mass of the slum population residing in the area. Our study, however, reveals that in many cases BWMCs have been formed without wider involvement and participation of the slum dwellers. Thus the slum dwellers remain insulated from the twin processes of its formation and functioning. This being the case, the already formed BWMCs actually have little or no acceptance in the eyes of the larger community.

While interacting with the members of the BWMC in some ULBs we have gathered that the members themselves are also not fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. The CDSs being the only organisation of the slum dwellers in the slums and agents of implementation of slum development programmes cannot shirk their responsibilities. A body like BWMC cannot be expected to work well unless and until they work in close collaboration with the CDS. Our interactions with the members of the CDS and BWMC together in one ULB had revealed that the non- CDS male members of the BWMC predominate the discussions thus marginalising the CDS in this case. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure that CDS members who have high stakes in the slums and are expected to play a very prominent role in all development programmes have to be educated and empowered in such a manner as to enable them to make their voices heard. In the KUSP slums there is provision for collection of contribution from the beneficiaries for the maintenance of infrastructures but there is no such provision under the SJSRY programme. It is widening already existing disparities in slums affecting the community spirit which is required for the successful implementation of the community development programmes. This kind of division in slums may also hamper proper management and preservation of community assets. What is a *sine qua non* in this regard is the generation and development of a sense of ownership of newly created community assets. Had the CDS and the BWMCs worked together, this kind of work would have been easier.

It seems very relevant to mention here that there is need for taking much greater care and caution while creating a network of multi- level administrative arrangements (such as the CDS and BWMCs) to deal with the implementation of different developmental programmes as they often widen the gap between the municipal authorities on one hand and the ordinary slum dwellers, on the other. It seems imperative to establish a more direct linkage between them by holding meetings

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more frequently and at regular intervals. The administrative arrangements created for the implementation of the different programmes weaken the role of the Ward Councillors and the linkage between the ULBs and the citizens and thus the significance of the political element in municipal governance gets eroded. This does not mean that there is no need for developing participatory mechanisms which have to be created and developed without undermining the role of the elected leaders

Politico- Administrative lags

It is now a widely accepted fact that there is a need for a regular and continuous surveillance on the processes and stages of implementation of all developmental programmes. More so in case of the developing countries to ensure that the fruits of development are reaped by the target groups. In a democratic system supervision and monitoring may be exercised either by the politicians, the administrators or by the people themselves. However, we have noticed a steady decline of surveillance both by the politicians and the administrators.

Our findings are reflective of some of the glaring and inherent weaknesses of the top- down supervision from both the concerned municipality and the KUSP management. Apparently, the Urban Poverty Cell in the ULBs seems to have failed to live up to the occasion. Our interactions with the concerned officials reveal that they are still guided by the traditional consideration of paying more attention to the infrastructures rather than to enlightening and empowering the poor as envisaged in the KUSP programme. It is true that this is a difficult job and takes time to accomplish. It calls for a change in the mindset and attitude of those who are at the helm of affairs and strikingly this change is yet to begin.

It is significant to note that while the poor in the slums have started realising the significance of education, sanitation, health, etc for the improvement of their quality of life, the key actors still seem to be slow in realising and responding to their needs. This is indeed a matter of great concern necessitating serious politico- administrative interventions at all levels.

Our empirical findings clearly indicate that there is a need for proactive top- down support and surveillance to make CDS more active and effective as is evident from the experience in Kalyani. The CDS members we had interacted with in Kalyani were found to be

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emotionally charged and capable of playing their roles. The best performance of Kalyani out of all the ULBs we have surveyed, cannot but be attributed *inter alia* to the role of the CDSs. Kalyani municipality has been able to provide in the municipal office itself a separate space for the CDS which has both objective and subjective implications. Objectively speaking, it helps them work with the ULB which has been found to be useful as it provides them with an opportunity for interacting with the municipal functionaries in their own office for aid and advice. Subjectively speaking, it helps them developing a sense of being a part of the municipal system as sought to be ensured through the granting of statutory recognition. They were found to be proud of their being able to sit in a space where the municipal office is housed.

Innovative Challenge Fund (ICF)

ICF holds an important place in the KUSP agenda. This fund is meant for supporting community based organisations in undertaking innovative and pioneering initiatives to help achieve the objectives of the KUSP. It is a two dimensional initiative; while one relates to supporting preparation of projects and capacity building of agencies to be engaged in implementation of the project, the other supports their actual implementation. Quite a few projects have since been sanctioned in favour of the CDS and the NGOs. The categories of population covered under the projects in the ULBs under study include under privileged women, fishermen, brickfield community, school children, adolescent group, potters, and intravenous drug users. Most of the projects granted to the surveyed ULBs seem to be focusing on traditional items like vermy composting, spice grinding, making puffed rice (*muri*), providing non- formal education, socio- legal counseling, generating health and legal awareness, tailoring and so on. Although these issues demand serious attention, yet the projects are devoid of genuinely innovative content.

There is a feeling shared with us by the political functionaries in some of the ULBs that the real roots of the problem of ICF lie in the lack of innovative handling of the projects at the management level. The ICF management team which interacts with the CDS and the NGOs at the stage of the preparation of the projects has not been able to evince innovative skills. The selection of agencies for the management of the Fund should have been done more prudently. We feel that there should have been a committee consisting of eminent experts to be drawn from the academia as well as from the non- academic circles for the selection of these agencies because the agencies with lack of new ideas cannot be expected to help generate innovative schemes. It is also necessary

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to bring together the expertise of the different sections of the community for which the KUSP management may think in terms of associating experts from the universities, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Civil Society Organisations and business groups as and when required on payment of honorarium in lieu of their intellectual service offered.

Incidentally, the project selection committee constituted by the KUSP management comprises members who belong both to the government as well as to the academia. The records of members present in the meeting show that members from the academic community hardly attend the meetings indicating their lack of interest which badly affects the optimal usage of the said Fund.

We have interacted with some of the functionaries of the CDSs and NGOs who have accessed the ICF. Our conversations with them revealed that there is lack of effective day- to- day monitoring and guidance after the launching of the projects.

Infrastructural Gaps

It cannot be denied that a lot of infrastructure has been created in the slums under the KUSP programme for creating better living conditions of the dwellers. Our survey has however, indicated that the beneficiaries have not always been consulted either before the construction of the infrastructure or when the work was going on. This has led to adverse reactions in some slums and the slum dwellers do not seem to develop ownership of the assets which is likely to pose a problem for the maintenance of the assets. The attempt to raise some contribution from the beneficiaries for the maintenance of the infrastructure has not worked because there is no such provision in the slum development programmes under SJSRY. The BWMCs which were expected to set the tone and play an important role, are not in place in most of the ULBs and wherever they are in place, they have miserably failed to live up to the expectations We have also come across situations where the slum dwellers were asked to make financial contribution for the creation of infrastructures in the way the residents wanted. It has caused adverse reactions and raised many questions in the minds of the slum dwellers

Concluding Observations

The findings of the study reveal that there is need for a well-structured mechanism to be created by the government coupled with definite guidelines for consultation between the KUSP management

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and the ULBs. Similarly there is need for a structure of that kind at the level of the ULB for monitoring and supervising the implementation of the KUSP programme. Besides, official members such mechanism should consist of representatives of the CDSs, BWMCs and experts from outside the government. The CDSs need to be given extensive training keeping in mind their role , capacity and requirements of the market. It will be easier for the ULBs to keep watch on the working of the CDS if some small space is provided to them in the office premise of the municipal buildings as has been done in Kalyani. It needs to be considered if some mobility support can be given to the members of the CDSs for developing more effective and living linkage between the slum dwellers and the CDSs. The networking of the CDS at the state level under the initiative of the State Urban Development Agency (SUDA) may help them learn from others and strengthen them. There should be an annual meeting of the network members. There should be an arrangement for field visits of the CDS. There is need for developing some CDSs as ideal ones the members of which can be utilised as Resource Persons for training. The government should come out with definite guidelines about the contents of the citizens' charters to maintain uniformity and such charters need to be given wide publicity for which the services of the WCS and CDSs may be utilised. To achieve desired results there should be provision and mechanism for redressal of grievances as a part of the citizens' charter. The local cable channel can be used for more effective two-way interaction between the ULBs and the citizens. The idea and practice of e-governance which is still to gather required momentum in most of the ULBs under this study can be very effective in this regard. For truly professional management of the ICF there is need for regular evaluation of the projects and such evaluation reports should be examined by the Project Selection Committee (PAC) for their future guidance. The committee should be empowered to evaluate and monitor the projects sanctioned under ICF.

It is transparent from the texture and tenor of the programme that it was expected to bring about two- fold changes, one of which has objective dimension in the sense of outcomes being tangible and measurable and the other has subjective and cognitive dimensions which though no less important than the first one, can hardly be physically measured with the help of specific parameters. To be more specific the objective assets like infrastructures created under the KUSP programme are both visible and measurable but the degree of awareness generated and capacity built can only be felt and experienced. Empowerment in the sense of the voiceless being able to

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make them heard is definitely visible in the slums. But how far it has led to their translation into reality still remains unanswered. Another pertinent question is which section of the slum dwellers has been able to influence the processes of implementation of the programmes and policies. The field data and the impressions gathered by us while conducting FGDs (focus group discussions) indicate that the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable are still to be mainstreamed and included. This is really the basic paradox of all poverty alleviation programmes. It was supposed that this problem can be effectively resolved if the poor are organised and involved in the implementation of the programmes meant for them. But it is not vindicated by the findings of this study. The unhappy experience about the functioning of the BWMCs also proves that it is a structural problem and mere administrative tinkering even in the form of administrative innovations is not likely to yield desired results.

Footnotes

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