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Initiatives in Participatory Governance: Recent experiments in Mumbai



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This paper discusses some of the recent e xperiments in participatory governance being carried out in the megacity context of Mumbai. The examples of Local Area Citizens' Groups, Area Sabha and Area Committee are examples in the long trajectory of citizens' participation in local governance under the rubric of participation/ partnership that began in the 1990s as a result of changes in governance and emphasis on greater involvement of citizens and their associations. Government programmes like the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) stress on governance reforms like the Community Participation Law in a big way. In this backdrop citizens and their associations of various hues are busy experimenting various models of participation. A deeper probe however reflects that most of these initiatives are experiments of middle class elite citizens that exclude the poor and bypass constitutionally given spaces for participation like Ward Committees and also elected representatives. Notwithstanding this, the paper concludes with the help of the initiatives in Mumbai that such experiments expand political space and carry the promise of bringing better governance in the future.

Key words: Mumbai, JNNURM, Participation, Political space, Middle class, Contemporary Urban India

Introduction

This paper examines recent experiments in participatory governance like Local Area Citizens Group (LACG), Area Sabha and Area Committee in the mega city context of Mumbai. These are examples in the long trajectory of citizens' participation in local governance under the rubric of participation/ partnership that began in the 1990s as a result of changes in governance and emphasis on greater involvement of citizens and their associations. These changes are characterised by gradual offloading of essential municipal services, privatisation of municipal services, introduction of user charges, greater involvement of non-state actors like community based organisations and local contractors. The post 1990s particularly witnessed a profusion of middle class activism across urban centres in

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India corroborated by several studies - Delhi (Lama Rewal, 2007, Harriss, 2005), Hyderabad (Kennedy, 2008), Chennai (Baud and Dhanalakshmi, 2007, Nair, 2005, Harriss, 2007, Coelho and Venkat, 2009), and Bangalore (Ghosh, 2005, Nair, 2005, Kamath and Vijayabaskar, 2009, Baindur and Kamath, 2009, Ranganathan et al, 2009, and Vijayalakshmi, 2004).

In fact the growing visibility of such activism across urban centres of India is not a marginal trend. For instance Coelho and Venkat (2009) in their account of Chennai found that more than half the Resident Welfare Associations intheir sample "were founded over 20 years ago and 10 had been in existence for over 40 years. While most had grown in size, corresponding to population growth in the neighbourhood, 19 had stayed the same size, and two had actually diminished" (ibid: 361).

Partnerships and participation, usually come to mean one and the same thing as far as these experiments are concerned, especially those undertaken under the Community Participation Law or the Nagar Raj Bill. This law makes such participation mandatory for state government departments and municipal authorities to secure grants from the central government under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission(JNNURM), a seven year ambitious programme of urban governance and reforms, infrastructure up gradation and basic services to the urban poor. Section 1 discusses the various experiments of LACGs, Area Sabha and Area Committee that are being carried out in Mumbai by citizens' associations and Non-Government organisations(NGOs). It also examines how each of these experiments competes with each other rendering the space for participation fuzzier and fragmented than ever. Section 2 discusses the implications of the participatory experiments. In particular it discusses the issue of inclusion and who actually participate in these experiments. It also discusses how some of the experiments bypass constitutional spaces for participation like Wards Committee and elected representatives. The section on conclusion argues that despite being exclusionary, these partnerships in several instances have attempted to address larger issues of environment and governance, widely disseminated their ideas, reports and analyses through articulate use of new technologies of communication, optimally using their informal ties with higher officials in the municipal authority to 'get things done', and innovating new ways of interfacing with the local government, valorise participation and help expand 'political society' in Mumbai in ways that represent a typical development of the post 1990s.

Section 1 Local Area Citizens' Groups, Area sabha and Area Committee

The Local Area Citizens' Group (LACG) model of Civil Society Organisation (CSO) partnership was formulated in 2006 to provide an institutional basis for a formal structure of citizen participation. A LACG is a group of owners or occupiers of residential, commercial and/or institutional premises of a defined geographical area, who come together and are recognized as formal partners by the municipal authority of Mumbai, to enable better delivery of civic services and provision of civic infrastructure in that area. A LACG area is expected to be one where people have common civic concerns, or which has common characteristics, or shares a well-defined geographical space. For administrative purposes, the administrative ward was proposed to be demarcated into defined local areas to serve as base units

for LACGs. The demarcation of a LACG was based on both the population density and geographical expanse of the area with the objective of enabling coverage of the entire area of the city in manageable units. Hence, the city was proposed to be divided into approximately 2000 LACG units, with each LACG unit covering 5000 to 10000 persons (assuming the population of Mumbai is 1,500,000). The geographical area of each LACG would be suggested by the Ward Officer of the concerned Ward in consultation with active local citizen groups in the area. The boundaries of an LACG may be altered based on the expressed demands of the owners/occupiers of that area. The boundaries may also be altered at any stage on account of any administrative expediency by the municipal authority.

The LACG model proposed to overcome the inadequacies of the Advanced Locality Management (ALM) model by addressing local problems usually left unattended by ALMs. For instance any road that forms the common boundary between two or more LACGs could be considered to be under each of the LACGs concerned, and the LACGs would work jointly on all civic issues pertaining to such roads/boundaries. Further, for any extended physical feature such as long, arterial roads that span several Wards and include many LACGs, the concerned LACGs would be required to work jointly on issues connected with that road. Moreover, LACG social workers would get suitably empowered with photo-identity cards and an honorarium. Unlike ALM members they could prevent offenders, encroachments and could better co-ordinate with Nodal Officers of the municipal corporation for immediate redressal of local problems through use of improved communications like emails. The need for a new institutional partnership was justified between citizen groups, CSOs and the municipal authority of Mumbai in place of the existing ALM model because ALMs cover very small areas - some buildings, a housing complex, or a lane. To cover the entire city would require two lakh ALMs or so, and it would be administratively impossible to deal with such numbers. The need for a larger-sized citizen unit was realized resultantly. This resulted in the Local Area Citizens Group concept which drafted the Charter for the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai(MCGM) - Local Area Citizen Group(LACG) Partnership 2006 with effect from 1 April 2006.

Through such a partnership, local problems could be identified and resolved quickly, and optimal solutions could be found for various civic-related matters in that area consistent with overall policies, plans, procedures and projects for the entire city. LACGs could also play a crucial role in the integration of community-based disaster preparedness and mitigation plans prepared by the municipal authority, and in the strengthening of local capacities and institutions to lessen the impact of disasters. The LACG model would undertake the following additional activities: Undertake joint survey of their area regarding all civic matters.

Provide feedback on municipal authority's overall plan for the area in the following ways:

- Provide ideas and proposals for beautification and greening
- Cleanliness / Solid Waste Management
- Assist the municipal authority in undertaking special drives (cleanliness, polio eradication,

etc)
- Environment - report noise and air pollution, as well as visual pollution such as unauthorized advertisements, poster and political banners.
- Traffic and Roads – giving suggestions regarding parking, signals, dividers, road repairs, footpath repairs, street lights, repair of underground pipes / cables of utilities
- Hawkers - footpath traffic, littering, waste, encroachment, noise, etc. nuisance from shopkeepers or commercial organisations
- Report and prevent encroachments on footpaths and public spaces – hawkers, vagrants, miscreants, nearby slum dwellers
- Utilities – excavation of roads and footpaths for management of water, electricity, etc. and immediate clearance of debris from the sites.
- Prevent and be a watchdog against unauthorized and illegal construction, stray dogs, cattle, etc.
- Disaster Management- receive warnings, report situations and provide feedback and information dissemination. Act as contact points to citizens for information, guidance, feedback to and fro on municipal authority related matters.
- Monitor and report as per standard formats (permitting municipal authority to publicise their telephone numbers and email ids.) Using email to send reports and receive communication from the municipal authority daily.
- The LACG would help citizens to co-ordinate and co-operate with the municipal authority and, in future, with other local authorities, to ensure speedy redressal of various pressing civic issues, through which any eventuality and disaster management is possible by the citizens themselves, while municipal authority do not absolve themselves from their basic responsibilities of providing civic amenities

LACG social workers would get suitably empowered in the following ways:

- Get photo-identity cards.
- They could prevent offenders.
- They could prevent encroachments

- They could co-ordinate with Nodal Officers for immediate redressal of local civic related problems.
- They also get an honorarium, on certain specified activities conducted which was not being paid to ALMs.

Some NGO activists argued that that the LACG model diluted the mandate of local self-governance as it proposed no role for the elected councillors. They further argued that it was not desirable to marginalise councillors who are answerable and accountable to his/her voters. This would be completely contrary to the letter and spirit of the 74th Constitutional Amendment on local self-governance. Second, the objective of the LACG appears to be a partnership (not local self governance) between the municipal authority of Mumbai and registered groups like Resident Welfare Associations, Community Based Organizations, association of shopkeepers, association of hawkers, cooperative societies. LACG in this format emphasized that citizens must come together as a registered group to participate in governance. This, some they critiqued, will straight away divide the society on the basis of their special interests. The requirement to be a registered cooperative society also involves costs, taxation issues and internal governance issues.

Therefore some citizens associations like the Juhu Citizens' welfare Group and Non government Organisations (NGOs) like the Loksatta supported the Area Sabha model. The Area Sabha model is more akin with the political process as it intends to bring about governance reforms through legislation. Area Sabhas have a broader objective than LACGs, while being a smaller unit than the latter. While an LACG is more concerned with ensuring the improvement of their area and municipal services, voting, political activism, poverty alleviation and social equality are not on its agenda as is for an Area Sabha.

The Ministry of Urban Development at the Centre through the JNNURM, has directed state governments across urban India to enact a Community Participation Law as a mandatory reform in urban governance. The Ministry has also drafted a model law as a guideline. The model Community Participation Law introduces the concept of Area Sabha, defined as "the body of all persons registered in the electoral rolls pertaining to every polling booth in the area in a municipality" (Ministry of Urban Development, GoI in YUVA, 2010, p 16).

"Area Sabha is a micro unit which consists of the electoral part (residential/ commercial buildings, chawls and slums) of the electoral roll which consists of 1200 enlisted voters. These voters elect the Area Sabha representatives and 35 of such representatives form a ward committee under the chairmanship of the municipal councilor of that ward. Election of the Area sabha representatives can take place along with the municipal elections. This way the councilor becomes accountable to the people of the area. These 35 representatives form a permanent body called the Area Sabha Samiti which will hold monthly meetings where all residents of the area can attend, discuss problems, pass resolutions, and decide budget allocation of the area. Thus power vests on the people. Political parties

are insisting on nominating area sabha representatives which we oppose vehemently" (Activist, NGO Loksatta, Mumbai).

Table 1: Comparison between the concept of the Area Sabha and the Local Area Citizen Group in the context of Mumbai city

S.No.	Point for Comparison	Area Sabha	Local Area Citizen Group	Remarks / View of NGO Council
1.	No. of people in one unit	1800	4000-5000	
2.	No. of units in the city	8333	3000	Assuming population of 1,50,00,000
3.	No. of units in each Councillor Ward	36	8-12	Assuming 227 Councillor Wards (population is 45000 or 65000)
4.	Current status	Existing as polling booth	proposed	LACG structure evolved from learning of ALMs
5.	Description of proposed structure	Voting unit within the Councillor Ward	Geographic unit within Councillor Ward	LACG unit to integrate with existing MCGM structures
6.	Objective of proposed structure	Local Self Governance	Unit for formal civil-society-MCGM partnership	
7.	Defining criteria of unit	As per electoral roll - no physical boundary	Geographic area pre-defined by MCGM – Roads and Councillor ward boundaries form the physical boundaries	Several of the activities of the LACG cover physical aspects of the city and its upkeep
8.	Description of components of unit	Voters of a particular locality: residents of societies, slums, etc.	Users of a particular area: owners/ occupiers of residential, commercial, institutional units.	LACG has a more heterogeneous profile – mixed group of users / occupiers of an area come together
9.	Legal status / legitimacy	As per Electoral rolls	A registered society of the owners / occupiers of that area	
10.	Interface with existing structures	1 Councillor Ward : 35 Area Sabhas 1 Admin Ward: 350 MCGM: 8333	1 Councillor Ward : 8-10 LACGs 1 Admin Ward: 100 MCGM: 3000	- Area Sabha calc. assumes 65000 persons in 1 Councillor ward. - Admin ward figures are variable as ward sizes are variable
11.	Process for implementation	Legitimacy by law- changes in the MCGM Act	Through issuance of a Circular and Rules	
12.	Analysis of structure	Proposed third tier of democracy – within existing political structure	Proposed spolitical structure for citizen participation in governance	Both structures can co-exist – Area Sabhas have a broader objective than LACGs, while being a smaller unit than LACGs.

(Source : www.karmayog.com)

The NGO Loksatta has expeditiously experimented with the Area Sabha model in the suburban area of Juhu in Mumbai to create a model of good governance which could then be replicated all over the city. With support of other civil society organisations in the city Loksatta was able to put up a candidate representing CSOs for the municipal elections in 2007 who eventually won.

While it was observed that the Area Sabha would bring in greater decentralisation beyond the ward committee level and empower people to partner directly in urban governance at the micro level; NGOs like YUVA opposed it in its present form. An activist with YUVA pointed out its shortcomings in his narrative:

- First, there is a false argument that the Area Sabha concept is going to bring in deeper democracy than the existing Ward Committee. It talks of peoples' participation in a spurious manner that by involving them in organizing cultural programmes and suggesting repair of street lights etc. This is not what can be considered as power. There are no specific functions meant for citizens. So although we do not disagree with the logic of the Area Sabha, we do not agree with the powers and functions it envisages for the citizens.

- Second, the Area Sabha proposes that all registered citizens will automatically be members giving them a legitimate platform for "local self governance" - poor, middle class or rich. The electoral rolls (Voters of a particular locality: residents of societies, slums, etc) from which members of the Area Sabha are constituted can be easily manipulated. The literal meaning of an Area Sabha is that all voters gather and decisions are taken by the body. This one event is what constitutes an area sabha.

- Third it does not take into consideration those teeming, day time populations for example hawkers, home based business enterprise workers etc who nevertheless have an important stake in the concerned area. Moreover it does not talk of "social areas" like *Momin Pada or Shivaji Nagar* which comprise people from more or less similar socioeconomic and religious backgrounds.

- Fourth, the Area Sabha concept has not included any social justice principles like those of reservations and nomination of candidates from the marginalized sections.

- Finally, at a time when there was no space whatsoever for dialogue, the LACG provided such a space. We think it is more democratic than the area sabha in the sense there is room for debate and arguments between citizens and the government. Moreover the participation of the people under the LACG comprised a diverse mix of academics, experts, professionals this cannot be captured if one solely goes by the voters' list (Interview).

YUVA therefore initiated the Area Committee model which could identify the groups of people excluded in the Area Sabha especially the poor. As explained by a member of YUVA "the area community concept as we conceive it is more representative of people of a specific area and includes even the floating day time populations who do not live in the area but have an important stake in it any way; by spending so many working hours, using infrastructural facilities, creating waste and the like. So this concept includes representatives from hawkers' union, domestic workers association and the like. YUVA is currently experimenting the area community model in *Imanwada in Azmi Nagar* area mainly populated by unregistered and therefore illegal slums in ward 43, P North in Malad, a suburban area in Mumbai. It is also raising concerns about various clauses of the Nagar Raj Bill (now in the process of being redrafted) and those related to the Area Sabha at various platforms like the Urban Development Department in the government circles, academic circles and among civil society" (Interview). "We are currently experimenting the area committee model in Imanwada in Azmi Nagar area mainly populated by unregistered and therefore illegal slums in P North ward in Malad, a suburban area in Mumbai" (activist, of YUVA, a CSO working on citizens' participation).

Section 2 Implications of Participatory Initiatives: Who participates?

Participatory initiatives like the LACG and the Area Sabha predominantly represent middle class activism and formation of civil society among middle class and elite citizens in Mumbai. The use of the terms 'citizen and civil society participation' is more pronounced among middle class, elite citizens as compared to organisations representing the urban poor who use other terms like social movements to describe their activism. The reasons for use of this term, especially among middle class elite citizens, could be because of recent renewed interest in the civil society and the valorization of citizens' participation in governance. The recent initiatives discussed above not only brings out a "compare and contrast" picture that is interesting as it helps one locate the fuzziness of this space but also brings out several other dimensions pertaining to inner conflicts, affiliations, influence and proximity with officials and 'people who matter' and advantages of geographical location and social networks. While middle class CSOs like YUVA work from the perspective of the poor, LACGs and ALMs clearly are informed by the class situations of the elite and middle class citizens that exclude the poor and elected representatives. Bypassing elected representatives and constitutional spaces of participation like Ward Committees, middle class associations create parallel networks of participatory governance. This trend undermines the goals of democratic decentralisation as envisaged in the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992.

Middle class citizens in urban India have, in particular, used participation as new political strategies to make things work in their favour. Whether to reclaim urban spaces or negotiate with the municipal officials to get better services, associations of middle class citizens like the ALMs, LACGs and Area Sabhas have facilitated middle class politics in ways that were unknown earlier. For instance the cleanliness drives of ALMs outrightly ignore the needs of neighbouring slum communities. Removing encroachments including street vendors and slums is high on the priority list of these

associations. Even the NGO Loksatta, which has a large membership base across cities and claims to be the political outcome of the largest civil society movement, has failed to include slum communities and informal sector workers. Its experiment of the area sabha has thus remained restricted to the taxpaying citizens only. "A member explained that slums are not participating in the area sabha because of difficulties stemming from their very existence. Their existence depends on political patronage and hence they are inhibited to join our movement" (Singh and Parthsarathy,2010:103).

This space of participatory governance in contemporary urban India is however fragmented by particular histories, social networks, power equations, advantages of locations of various factions of the middle class. These in turn determine outcomes. Many of their achievements could be attributed to the strong social networks that were already in place through years of civic activism, advantages of geographical location, power equations, and frequent interaction with prominent CSOs in urban governance and lobbying with municipal officials. Thus while associations in Malabar Hills, Marine Drive and Juhu could achieve a lot such was not the case for those located in Vidyavihar West and Ghatkopar. Municipal officials even justified discrimination in their services offered to areas having ALMs/LACGs vis a vis those that did not. Besides, there are significant differences in terms of visions, ideologies, partnership models, affiliations among various types of middle class CSOs addressing urban governance issues in Mumbai. For instance while some ALMs like the United Juhu ALM in Juhu , the Kirol Road and Fatima Church ALM in Vidyavihar West have not moved beyond their cleanliness programmes, ALMs like the Pestom Sagar Citizens' group, the Juhu Residents Welfare group and the Malabar Hills Residents Association have graduated to larger issues like branding of localities as in Malabar Hills, holding festivals as in Chembur and Bandra, forming larger federations, implementing plans and zoning principles and even political mobilization.

Conclusion

Though the participatory initiatives discussed in this paper are exclusionary in many respects, in many instances these have attempted to address larger issues of environment and governance, widely disseminated their ideas, reports and analyses through articulate use of new technologies of communication, optimally using their informal ties with higher officials in the municipal authority to 'get things done', organising meetings, public gatherings and innovating new ways of interfacing with the local government. Ideas of civility, self-discipline, civic sense, maintaining cleanliness which ultimately serves public goals, have been the focus of these initiatives. They have also been able to put the spotlight on issues related to good governance like efficiency in service provision, that affect all sections of society uniformly. Government programmes like the JNNURM stress the importance of urban reforms and the significance of citizens' participation therein. The participatory initiatives currently bring experimented across cities of India also reflect the enthusiasm and valorisation of participation per se, rise of a conscientious citizenry and a shared felt need for better governance. Through articulate use of the media, other forms of communication, social networks and lobbying, citizens' associations have greatly enhanced their role in public life in contemporary urban India.

Newly acquired legal tools like the Right to Information and Public Interest Litigations have greatly empowered such associations to acquire greater accountability from the government. The amount of enthusiasm that CSO activists could create at a national level surrounding the Lokpal Bill is ample proof of the success of citizens' movement and activism in contemporary urban India.

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