

From infrastructure to services: Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor



Introduction:

By 2021 one third of the population in the country will be living in urban areas from the current level of 28% signifying an increase of 147 million urban dwellers (from 286 to 433 million). This trend of urbanization in the country has been characterized by continued concentration of urban population in large and existing cities and spatial variations in urbanization across the states and cities. The net result will be increase in number of million plus cities (from 23 to 40 between 1991 and 2001) as well as concentration of larger proportion of urban population in large cities (50% from current level of 33%).

The burgeoning urban growth has severely stressed access to infrastructure services. There is not only absolute shortage of infrastructure of services in urban areas but access to these services is also subject to inequitable distribution across different income groups. The Steering Committee for Eleventh Plan has observed that the deficiencies in services in urban areas are absorbed by the low-income and poorer sections of the population. Infrastructure inadequacies and inequitable distribution are accompanied by the absence of efficient and effective management, which has led to service leakages and financial losses and have, consequently, had an adverse impact on urban productivity and economic growth. The availability of minimum level of these services is necessary for conducive human settlement and habitat which facilitates improvements in productivity and efficiency which is essential for continued economic growth possible with growing population, urbanization and industrialization.

Urban Poor:

Estimation of urban poor in India have been slum centric. According to 2001 Census 607 urban centers reported a slum population of 25%, an estimate that has been challenged by academicians and civil society organizations since these estimates relate to notified slums only. Despite the definition and estimation of the number of urban poor being available, the problem arises in terms of designing and implementing interventions for this group. This is in terms of identification and locating them within the city. In most cases the slums (notified or un-notified) and squatter settlements are assumed to be inhabited by the urban poor and programmatic interventions are undertaken. Studies have shown that slums in India account for up to 60% of the urban poor. The remaining urban poor are on pavements, streets, in congested and poor tenements outside the slum are etc. In the context of water and sanitation services slums represent areas in the city that are poorly served and maintained.

An important aspect of urban poverty has been that economic prosperity of cities has not led to decrease in incidence of urban poverty. Secondly, welfarist perspectives have dominated provisioning of services to the urban poor (read as living in notified slums) loaded with subsidies and grants. It is the slum pockets within the city that bear the brunt of infrastructure inadequacies in water and sanitation. The governmental perception of slums as entirely comprising of the poor relies on provisioning through subsidies and grants. The willingness to pay and the ability to pay for services has generally not been addressed for slums. Attempts to enhance the productive capital base of the urban poor through livelihood enhancement and their empowerment by building them as consumers instead as user of services have not been incorporated in policies or programmes.

WATSAN services and the poor:

The 74th constitutional amendment has enjoined that WATSAN services will be one of 18 functions that will be devolved to urban local bodies. However, the process of decentralization has been slow as a result the responsibility for planning and implementation of WATSAN projects is with state governments and the O&M responsibility has been passed on to urban local bodies (ULBs). The financial position and capacities of ULBs to manage these systems being weak these bodies have left it to state governments to carry out O&M functions in most cases. Low capacities, inadequate staff, weak financial position have led to a situation of low accountability and low to poor level of services in larger urban India.

The policy environment for urban WATSAN comprise of National Water Policy and a National Housing and Habitat Policy. A draft National Slum policy too has been circulated but it has yet to be finalized

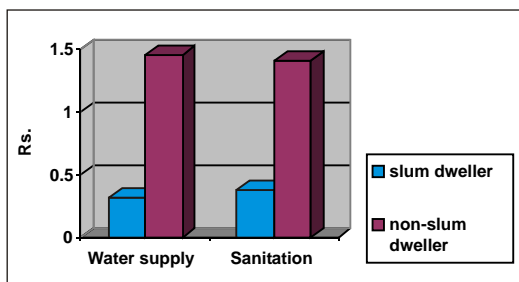
and seek approval. State governments on their part have formulated similar policies at their own level which are mostly in draft form. In the absence of a policy on urbanization each of these policies have a partial focus depending on the focus of the sponsoring ministry. The policies do not take city level needs of the urban population not do they take in to account the institutional needs of the agencies involved or on setting up norms for service delivery. In addition to a comprehensive policy on urbanization another policy gap exists in terms of policy on service delivery. The latter would essentially focus on the needs of the service provider and the consumer and define policy imperatives in terms of service provision (e.g. hours of water supply, quality satisfaction etc) and articulate the relationship between service provider and the citizen.

Public Expenditure on infrastructure and provisioning of services:

A study in Ahmedabad slums showed that inspite of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) allocating significant proportion of its revenue and capital expenditures on basic infrastructure such as water supply and sanitation, the proportion that reaches the slum dwellers on per capita basis was quite low (See the graph below). This is because either the slum is not plugged into the infrastructure network or if it is then the quality of service is very poor. This calls for improved governance and also improved willingness of the local authorities to reach the slum localities. This requires special efforts and increased willingness among the ULBs to reach out to the slum dwellers.

Per Capita Public Expenditure on Water Supply and Sanitation (Rs.)

Source: Based on Mahadevia and Brar (forthcoming, 2008)



Poor outdated technologies, lack of infrastructure like sewer and bulk water supply networks, absence of a systematic solid waste collection, storm water drainage, lack of tenurial security, coupled with an institutional commitment to serving the poor has further marginalized the urban poor. Presence of an infrastructure does not necessarily mean delivery of services. In a recent survey done by WaterAid, it was evident that though 80% of the population in Indore city reported house hold piped water supply infrastructure, an equal number was dependent on

common infrastructure like public stand posts and rather irregular supply through tankers.

Institutional Issues:

Water Supply and Sanitation falls within the functional domain of state governments and they are expected to lay down policies and establish institutions systems for management and delivery of services. However, there are issues of accountability of the institutions engaged in service delivery, both in terms of making capital expenditures and operating and maintaining the facilities, at the city level and at the slum (or low-income community) level and capacity of these service delivery institutions in carrying out development works and operating and maintaining them. Low capacity of the service delivery institution is partly because of lack of finances but it is also partly because of poor management of the institution and very poor work culture and motivation of those in these institutions. In particular, the capacities of the institutions and accountability when it comes to serving the poor are very low. (Mahadevia, 2008)

There are a few outstanding examples, however. In some cases, in particular where there are slum development programmes, the O & M task are performed by the community-based organizations (CBOs), with the support of the NGOs. Successful examples of such local initiatives are the Community Managed Toilets in Trichy and 4 cities of Madhya Pradesh under Slum Environment Sanitation Initiative (SESI), supported by WATERAID, the latter was a joint initiative with UN HABITAT, Community Toilets in Pune, Community Sanitation Programme of SPARC in various cities, Slum Networking Programme (SNP) of Mahila Housing Trust (MHT).

Conclusion:

Urban India, at present, is strategically poised to discuss debate and develop policy frameworks, articulate paradigms for programme development, define institutional imperatives for service delivery, revenue collection and equity. These discourses have to essentially focus on the needs of the urban poor within the context of urban development and urban growth in the country. More specifically the debate needs to manifest itself to seek answers to:

- (a) Do sub-sector policies (habitat policy, slum policy) will be able to deal with the issue of Water and Sanitation in the absence of a sectoral policy on Urbanization and Alleviation of Urban Poverty? Are the current policies able to deal effectively with emerging issues of depleting water resources, water quality, water security as well as issues related to affordability and quality of service provision as against to infrastructure creation that is reflected in coverage?
- (b) What are the constraints of the current paradigm of equating Urban Poverty with Slum Dwellers? Can the programme for providing services in water and sanitation to the urban poor be addressed without addressing the basic cause of urban poverty?
- (c) Is decentralization, to Urban Local Bodies, the institutional response for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of water and sanitation services or do we need to think of parastatals and develop their roles and responsibilities with respect to services in water and sanitation? How do we account for the fact that the movement from 'user' to 'consumer' will not affect the rights of the urban poor to access these services?
- (d) Do we see the role and significance of a Special Purpose Vehicle for provision of basic services to the urban poor?
- (e) How do we develop programmes in water and sanitation that are reform oriented, cost effective, financially and environmentally sustainable and provide space to the citizens to participate in the decision making processes? What strategies for capacity development need to be instituted to make such programmes relevant and functional?
- (f) Explore the potential of partnerships between different institutions, with regards to provision of water supply, toilet construction and maintenance, provision of sewerage lines, provision of storm water drains and solid waste management. What could be the potential role of NGOs, UN Agencies, institutions like HUDCO, Communities, private sector for provisioning of basic services.

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