

The project

HOW WE GOT INVOLVED

Collectives of Pune slum dwellers, together with Shelter Associates, have been pushing for permissions to construct toilets in slums for several years. In August 1999, the team was back at the PMC again, this time negotiating with new Municipal Commissioner Ratnakar Gaikwad for toilets in Chandramanagar and in the fringe village of Dhayari. Both of these are undeclared settlements, desperately in need of basic facilities.



Ambedkar Nagar in Dhayari fringe village: We have constructed a toilet block here as part of the PMC drive.

At about this time, **Commissioner Gaikwad was setting in motion a historic major city-wide toilet building project** and was keen for SA to get involved. The Commissioner suggested that we get going first on this municipal project, and then later to negotiate for the other settlements - and in fact permission was given for the Ambedkar Nagar toilet block later in the municipal project.

We recognised the urgent need for better sanitation in slums right across Pune, and felt **it was essential for us to participate in a major urban development project which focuses on the poor.** Moreover, taking part in the project would be an opportunity to get community participation on the agenda.

BACKGROUND

Previously, the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) had always employed regular building contractors to construct toilet blocks, but these were costly and the system just wasn't working. Picture the typical old toilet block in a Pune slum: dilapidated, filthy, stinking, The general degradation had spread to the surrounding areas.

Thousands of stalls are just unusable, and there's certainly no such thing as a block that's a pleasure to use. The PMC was responsible for maintaining the blocks, but this just hasn't been happening: PMC employees don't turn up to clean the blocks. And the blocks were falling apart. These old blocks are all based on the aqua-privy system, which, to put it bluntly, just doesn't work. While everyone knew that the aqua-privies weren't working, the PMC continued to build them until very recently.

It was high time things changed. Things had reached the point where even the PMC realised and admitted that the situation was bad.



Something drastic was needed. Gaikwad had worked with NGOs on toilets in Mumbai, and decided to try out the same

approach in Pune. While other cities have tried working with NGOs on different development projects, albeit with mixed success, this was a new approach in Pune.

For the PMC, NGOs are a better bet than regular profit-hunting contractors: they're cheaper for starters, motivated to improve sanitation conditions, and prepared to take on the



maintenance of the blocks after construction is complete. Eight NGOs are working on this project.

Bringing in NGOs was pragmatic for the PMC. It's cheaper, and it shifts the responsibility of maintenance away from the PMC to the NGOs or local communities. The PMC transferred a responsibility which they don't have the capacity to handle at present.

The project

DILEMMAS AND ISSUES

We weren't kidding ourselves: this clearly wasn't a community-led project. It's PMC-initiated and NGO-centred. Ideally, the PMC would work directly with communities, the local women and men who are going to use the toilets. After all, they're the people who really know what kind of facilities they need and how they can manage them. But the officials weren't going to recognise community organisations as partners at this stage. It was already new in Pune for the PMC to be working with NGOs on a project like this.

The PMC had decided on a very fast pace for this project, aiming to see all 200 new blocks completed within 8 months. Community-led projects go slowly, for good reasons, but the PMC wasn't going to have the patience, and they're setting the terms this time. And more importantly, when an old block is being rebuilt, that means there's one block less during the construction period. For people who don't have enough toilets anyway, that's a major inconvenience – so it's a question of sensitivity for construction to go as fast as possible.

So we were faced with a dilemma, since our priority is to work on community-led initiatives. But on the other hand, **it was a significant step forward that the municipality was embarking on a major urban development programme which focuses on improving conditions for the urban poor.** It was important for us to jump in and support this, and involve slum communities as far as possible in the process. On the whole, communities weren't going to the PMC to ask for toilets, so where was the PMC going to find community organisations that were prepared to work on toilet-building? **The project was here with or without us**, and was a big opportunity to work on community-building with the toilets as a focus.

It's going to take some time before the PMC works with community groups in the way it is now working with professionals. In the meantime, there is an important intermediary role which NGOs can play. This project seemed like a good opportunity to start building these blocks.

The SA team decided that the **PMC project could be a starting point for involving more and more poor people in community-managed sanitation projects.** In the process communities would be able to demonstrate their own role and capacities to the PMC, paving the way for future community-initiated and managed projects.

It has been an opportunity to work in new slums, with the local women and men, on improving sanitation conditions, which in turn upgrades the local environment. We have been able to bring people together to discuss issues about their settlements, and to generate interest in starting up new collectives.

The toilet designs have built on previous community experiences in other cities. Local women and men are playing a major role in contributing design ideas and managing the maintenance: it's ideal for users to maintain their toilets, since they are the only ones who can work out a system which works for them.

The Commissioner has shown a lot of interest in bringing in local communities, even suggesting to other participating NGOs that, they should get communities involved.

So SA was able to add a further key clause to the contract with the PMC, which states that toilets could be maintained by involving the local slum community. Although a caretaker's room has been incorporated into each block, in slums where local people are prepared to maintain the block without living in the room, it can be used as a community space for activities decided by the community.

The PMC still sees the NGOs as its main partners, but the project has been demonstrating that the communities are managing the maintenance and so are also responsible for the success of this project. The project has also provided a big opportunity to start mobilising communities in different slums.

The project

ACTOR	OFFICIAL CONTRACTUAL ROLE:	ACTUAL ROLE INCLUDES:
PMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> project initiated by the Municipal Commissioner pays the costs of demolition and construction provides free water and electricity connections for the construction period and future maintenance and repairs hands over possession of each site to the NGO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> holds weekly meetings for all NGOs and PMC Slum Department officials, chaired by the Municipal Commissioner, to co-ordinate the project, and keep the PMC officials, and the NGOs, on the spot assures that the whole slum department is working on this project: checking on the construction quality and pace, checking accounts, etc.
SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demolishes the old blocks where applicable designs and constructs the new blocks within the budget and timeframe set out by the PMC takes on responsibility for the maintenance over a 30 year period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emphasises to the PMC the need for the communities to play a key role. presents designs/layouts to local women and men for discussion and modifies designs in discussion with local people informs the PMC about the communities' needs and consequent designs changes supports the local people in setting up and continuing a maintenance system documents the process
Baandhani collectives from other Pune slums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>not included in the contracts</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hold meetings with local people to explain the nature of the project, that it is a PMC project and that the NGOs are not making money out of it, and answer other questions about the project hold meetings where local people can discuss toilet and sanitation issues together with SA, shows a proposed design to the women and men for them to contribute ideas explain the way the women's collectives work and supports the establishment of new groups
Local women and men in the slums where toilets are being built	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> may manage the maintenance of their toilets may decide on a use for the caretaker's room as a community room <i>not otherwise included in the contracts.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contribute design and layout ideas, both at the drawing stage and during construction as they see the structure going up work out a maintenance system implement their maintenance system, which may or may not involve employing a caretaker, according to the system they have organised