Scalable community-led slum upgrading: The Indian Alliance and community toilet blocks in Pune and Mumbai

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A B S T R A C T

It is projected that there will be two billion slum dwellers in 2030. 'Best practice', market-led strategies of slum upgrading are failing to stem the growth of slums. The Indian Alliance has formulated a community-led Federation Model of slum upgrading that has underlain the delivery at scale of community toilet blocks in Pune and Mumbai. Issues pertaining to sanitation are especially pernicious in the high density slums. This paper identifies the circumstances that have made delivery at scale possible with a view to determining whether the Federation Model is scalable in different cities and contexts. It was found that 'overlapping champions' comprising organized communities, NGOs and municipal leaders enhance the ability to scale up in any one location and that without overlapping champions replicability at scale will be diminished.

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1. Introduction

This paper explores a context where opposition to slum upgrading and relocation projects does not take the form of protest, violence and bulldozers. Instead, asserting "the primacy of the poor in driving their own politics, however much others may help them to do so" (Appadurai, 2001: 32), the paper considers the ability of organised communities to shape slum upgrading policies, programs and projects. To this end I assess the Federation Model (Model) of the Indian Alliance (Alliance) that focuses less on knowledge products than processes of community-led knowledge generation, precedent setting and knowledge exchange, and on policy advocacy.

The replicability and scalability of the Model and the role of communities are assessed in its application of the Pune community toilet block (CTB) precedent and its scaling up in Pune, the 2001 Slum Sanitation Program (SSP) in Mumbai and the 2007 Nirmal Mumbai Metropolitan Region Abhiyan (MMR), and the inclusion of this experience in the 2008 National Urban Sanitation Policy (NUSP). The Pune, SSP and MMR stories were selected because they are well-documented, presented by the Alliance as illustrative of scaling up a precedent, and the claimed success of the SSP has been the subject of debate, especially by McFarlane (2008). The Pune precedent, the SSP and the MMR provide a case study for exploring

whether there were specific circumstances that lead to questions about the replicability and scalability of the Model in different contexts.

The Alliance was formed in 1984 and comprises Mahila Milan (Women Together), the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) and the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), together with SPARC Samudaya Nirman Sahayak (Nirman), a non-profit construction and financial arm of SPARC. Subsequently the Alliance played a leading role in the formation of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) in 1996, which was registered in 1999. SDI's secretariat is located in Cape Town. Jockin Arputham, president of the NSDF, is also president of SDI, and Sheela Patel, founding director of SPARC, is chair of the board of SDI. SDI is 'probably the world's biggest and most effective network for south—south exchange among poor people, inspired by the co-operative models and peaceful forms of protest that Jockin pioneered in Mumbai' (Perry, 2014; no page). In effect, an evaluation of the application of the Model in India is also to reflect on the application of the SDI 'methodology' among its 34 affiliate countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Model and the methodology are essentially the same.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I describe my research methodology. Second, I define slums, provide an empirical backdrop for unhygienic sanitation in India and Mumbai, and explain why the focus is on CTBs. Third, I describe and comment on the Model and the approach to scaling up 'precedents'. Fourth, the application of the Model is demonstrated through reference to the

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Pune CTB precedent and continues to the SSP and the MMR and to its inclusion in India's NUSP. Last, the question asked is whether the circumstances under which the precedent emerged and knowledge exchange occurred, and the SSP and MMR projects were framed, are readily replicable. My conclusion suggests that there were particular circumstances that enabled the Pune precedent and scaling up that will constrain not replicability, but replicability at scale in individual cities.

It should be noted what this paper does not do. Presentations on the topic have encountered the expectation that there will be a commentary on SPARC and that the topic will be problematized in the context of neo-liberalism. In the case of SPARC, there have been a number of commentaries (e.g. Appadurai, 2001; Buckley, 2011; McFarlane, 2008, 2004; Mitlin, 2013; Mitlin & Patel, 2004; Ramanath, 2009; Ramanath & Ebrahim, 2010; Roy, 2009), with some repudiating the other (see Buckley (2011) on Roy (2009a)). This paper does not add to this commentary, but does consider McFarlane's criticisms of SPARC's role in the SSP.

In the case of neo-liberalism, it is a defining feature of the Alliance's approach that it chooses to collaborate with government and financial institutions to obtain housing and services. This falls foul of McFarlane's (2004: 907) view that SPARC and, by association, the Alliance 'works with the symptoms of poverty rather than the causes'. Open defecation is a symptom of poverty. A toilet enhances dignity, health and safety and concentrates the location of fecal matter for removal. Neo-liberalism undoubtedly provides the context for all that is to come, but to focus on causes rather than symptoms is to forego the struggle for a toilet. The Alliance addresses inequalities in the market through community organisation, confidence, capacity and relative power. It does not articulate its role as combatting neoliberalism.

2. Research methodology

The research methodology is based on teaching and research, which included semi-structured interviews and ethnographic research in 2012 and 2014.[1] In the case of teaching, in 2007/2008 at Columbia University I taught the policy and governance aspects of slum upgrading, which included classes on India and Mumbai and student research on upgrading in Dharavi. In 2010, at the University of Melbourne, I started a course on Cities Without Slums and slum upgrading in Mumbai and the role of the Indian Alliance were central. Sheela Patel twice contributed to courses. In 2012 I and a colleague took a class of students to Mumbai where, assisted by SPARC and the NSDF, the students were tasked with researching and recommending the planning and design features for scalable slum upgrading based on a case study of Dharavi.[2] This class was, for me, the forerunner to the 2014 research presented in this paper.

In 2014 I was hosted by SPARC and benefitted from ever more focused conversations with Sheela Patel and Sundar Burra.[3] Of considerable significance was my accompanying SPARC staff who were conducting a survey of CTBs and why some were well maintained and others were not. Observing the survey, participating in SPARC staff discussions with members of Mahila Milan, and visiting CTBs and seeking to explain differences in their maintenance

emphasised more than I hitherto had grasped that the basis for this inquiry was to be found in organised communities.

I also conducted interviews in Mumbai and Delhi pertaining to the policy and governance aspects of slum upgrading and the SSP. I met persons who, at various stages in their careers were some mix of consultants, academics, government officials, members of NGOs and employees of bilateral and multilateral development institutions. My preparation for the interviews was based on the policy and governance contexts for slum upgrading. This included:

(a) the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993, the recognition of urban local bodies as a third tier of government and the responsibilities that State governments were urged to devolve to this tier of government;
(b) the Central and State Finance Commissions and the Planning Commission and the recommended roles and funding of urban local bodies (local governments);
(c) the Union and Maharashtra government ministries, parastatals (Mumbai Housing Area Development Authority and the Slum Rehabilitation Authority), and the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation/Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), that are involved directly or indirectly in policy formulation, funding for and implementing slum upgrading;
(d) various urban programs, most notably the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission, which was a source of funding for planning, urban reforms and infrastructure projects;
(e) relevant policies, for example, the NUSP and Rajiv Awas Yojana; and
(f) influential studies, for example, the Report on Indian Urban Infrastructure and Services.

The surprise lay in the preconceptions embedded in focussing on this material. I had, to some degree, mastered top down policy and governance features of slum upgrading, whereas, repeating a point, this paper reveals that understanding Model and scalability begins with community organisation.

3. Slum upgrading and improved sanitation

The paper employs UN HABITAT's definition of slums (2003: 18, emphasis in original). The five criteria employed by UN HABITAT represent the bare minimum, with a priority ranking implicit in the listing of the criteria. The criteria are:

[…] a slum household is defined as a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking *one or more* of the conditions below:

- Access to improved water
- Access to improved sanitation facilities
- Sufficient living area, not overcrowded
- Structural quality/durability of dwellings
- Security of tenure (p. 12).

An important feature of this definition is the emphasis: *one or more*. Slum upgrading occurs even if only one of the criteria is addressed.

The significance of the second criterion, access to "improved sanitation", is shown in Table 1. About 2.58 billion persons, 35.9 percent of the world's population, lack improved sanitation. The statistics are shaped by the lack of access in rural areas; 1.86 billion in rural areas, as opposed to 720 million persons in urban areas, lack access to improved sanitation. In India, with an urban population of 382 million persons, about 49 million persons in cities lack access to improved sanitation.

In the case of Greater Mumbai, 'about 54 percent of its citizens

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[1] In 2014 I conducted 26 semi-structured interviews and other ad hoc interviews. Ethnographic conversations, some translated by SPARC staff, occurred during field trips.
[2] See 'Dharavi: Informal Settlement and Slum Upgrading' that was written by Kim Dovey. http://www.findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/display/publication195326.
[3] This relationship with SPARC no doubt immediately creates the potential for a loss of academic independence, which was agreed to at the outset. In the text that follows it should be evident that my academic independence was not compromised.