SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CITIES

POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN INDIAN CITIES: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PLANNING

In the mid-2000s, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) moved away from in-situ slum upgrading under its Slum Networking Project (SNP) to two inter-related interventions: large-scale slum displacement for urban beautification / infrastructure projects and construction of public housing under Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP) to resettle the displaced households.* The BSUP sites, constructed under the Government of India’s Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM), comprise of four-storey buildings with infrastructures for running water, a toilet and bath, drainage, and electricity in each house, and electricity in the building corridors. At the site-level, there are paved streets, common open spaces, street lights, drainage, and physical structures for social amenities like anganwadis (government-sponsored child-care and maternal-care centres for children in the 0-6 age-group) and health-centres.

For many of the displaced, this would seem to be an improvement on the provision of infrastructure in their previous homes and neighbourhoods. However, a study of three BSUP sites at VATWA (Kusha Bha Thakre Nagar or KBT Nagar, Vasant Cipendra Gadkar Nagar or VGG Nagar, and Sadbhavna Nagar) comprising of almost 5,000 flats (approx. one-fourth of the total BSUP housing) shows that the services that these infrastructures are meant to provide have not adequately materialized. This has created deprivations of access to basic services and amenities as well as infrastructural conflicts. Urban planning and governance have contributed to this situation both directly and indirectly.

* Many of the displaced have also been resettled on poorly serviced vacant lands on the city periphery without any promise of long-term tenure.

AHMEDABAD POLICY BRIEF 2

VATWA RESETTLEMENT SITES
Basic Services and Amenities: Deprivations and Infrastructural Conflicts

"Poverty, Inequality and Violence in Indian Cities: Towards Inclusive Policies and Planning," a three-year research project (2013-16) undertaken by Centre for Urban Equity (CUE), CEPT University in Ahmedabad and Guwahati, and Institute for Human Development in Delhi and Patna, is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada and Department of International Development (DFID), UK, under the global programme Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC). The research analyzes the pathways through which exclusionary urban planning and governance leads to different types of violence on the poor and by the poor in Indian cities.

The CUE research takes an expansive approach to violence, examining structural or indirect violence (material deprivation, inequality, exclusion), direct violence (direct infliction of physical or psychological harm), overt conflict and its links to violence and different types of crime. We note that not all types of violence are considered as crime (for example, violence by the state), and not all types of crime are considered as violence (for example, theft).

In Ahmedabad, the largest city of Gujarat state, the research focuses on two poor localities: Bombay Hotel, an informal commercial subdivision located on the city’s southern periphery and inhabited by Muslims, and the public housing sites at VATWA on the city’s south-eastern periphery used for resettling slum dwellers displaced by urban projects.

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DEPRIVATIONS IN BASIC SERVICES AND AMENITIES

Water
Residents experience various types of water-related deprivations. Till early-2015, each BSUP site was provided with water from a bore-well located at the site. The hardness of this groundwater made it non-potable, leading to health issues among many residents. Many residents refered to getting kidney stones and having to incur high expenses for medical treatment. They also contrasted the poor quality of water at the BSUP sites with the good-quality municipal water they used to get in their previous localities. Although municipal water is being provided since early-2015 at the BSUP sites, many residents still complain about its lack of potability (see Box 1).

Other water problems have emerged over time. Many residents get inadequate amount of running water on a daily basis, and many intermittently go without running water for up to several days at a time. This situation is caused by two main reasons, building-level water leakages and intermittent damage to the bore-well / UGWT motors. Both emerge out of the planning and governance of the water infrastructure (see Box 1).

Many residents have been getting inadequate amount of running water on a daily basis, and many intermittently go without running water for up to several days at a time.

The deprivations have led to various coping strategies. This includes fetching water, especially drinking water, from elsewhere (Vatva railway station, a tap behind a nearby shop, municipal taps provided at Sadbhavna Nagar, nearby residential areas, etc). When the UGWT motor is damaged, water operators ask AMC to send water tankers, sometimes using political contacts to pressure AMC to respond. Some water operators allow the UGWT overflow and residents gather around it to collect water, bathe and do their washing. Some residents commented on the unsanitary conditions created by this practice of the water operators. Residents also try to store water.

This alternate water access is, however, at the cost of time, labour and stress, which deepens structural violence. Often children are sent to fetch water. Inadequate running water also creates challenges for ensuring sanitation in the home. Residents pointed out that while a toilet was provided in each flat, the water situation made it difficult to use it and keep it clean.

Box 1: Water Infrastructures
Each BSUP site has a number of underground water tanks (UGWTs). Each UGWT has a water operator who switches on an electric motor that pumps water from the UGWT to the overhead water tanks (OWTs) of a group of buildings. Until 2015, the UGWTs were provided with water from bore-wells located at each site. Since then, AMC has been providing the UGWTs with water from a newly constructed underground storage tank that is filled from one of its water treatment plants. This has alleviated the hard water / drinking water problem to an extent.

Meanwhile, the problem of inadequate running water on a daily basis persists. One reason is that the mineral deposits from the hard water has created blockages in the narrow building-level water pipes, further narrowing their diameter and affecting water pressure. Another reason is that many of the building-level pipes and valves are damaged due to their poor quality, causing enormous leakages. The OWTs do not therefore retain water, resulting in running water for only a few hours. Leakages also affect water pressure, and many get inadequate water even during these few hours.

The electric motors of the UGWT get damaged due to reasons such as the motor’s capacity in relation to the number of buildings it has to supply, the effect of the mineral deposits from the hard water on the motor’s functioning, and carelessness of the water operator (for e.g., keeping the motor running after water in the UGWT falls below the requisite level). The motor also shuts down when the electric wiring or switch is damaged. The frequency of damages vary; sometimes they occur monthly, sometimes once in several months. Motor repairs can take two to several days (even up to 15 days at times). Until mid-2014, the AMC repaired damaged motors (on being informed by the water operator) and the quickness of repairs depended on AMC’s response. Since then, residents have to fund motor repairs, thus the duration of repairs depends on their financial ability.

The AMC has demarcated the responsibilities for maintenance of water infrastructures thus: it will maintain underground water pipes, while residents will maintain over-the-ground water pipes and valves and, since mid-2014, the UGWT motors. However, as discussed in this Policy Brief, it has been challenging for residents to undertake these responsibilities, a point that AMC’s planning for water at the sites failed to take into account.
Residents gather at the underground water tank (UGWT) for washing during an instance of motor damage in KBT Nagar

**Domestic Electricity**
Many residents (mainly in VGG Nagar and Saddhavna Nagar) have been getting high electricity bills from the private company that supplies electricity in Ahmedabad. This has led many to turn to illegal electricity in their home. The building corridor lights are not working in most buildings because residents are unwilling and/or unable to contribute towards the common electricity bills.

**Street Lighting**
The provision of street lights is inadequate in some parts of the resettlement sites, especially in the common plots. Even where adequately provided, they function only intermittently. In some parts of the sites, residents pointed out that streetlight poles were provided from the beginning but the lights did not work for many months.

**Sanitation**
Many of the common plots are strewn with garbage. The quality of solid waste management services provided through the AMC is inconsistent. It is also uneven within some of the resettlement sites. The leakages and overflows from the water and drainage pipes of the buildings further add to the unsanitary conditions in the streets and common plots.

**Social Amenities**
Only two of the nine physical structures built for social amenities at the three Vatwa sites are being used for their purpose. The rest are vacant and vandalized. While AMC has built a massive municipal school adjacent to these sites, according to the residents its quality of education is not comparable to the municipal schools in the central areas of the city. There are also no public hospitals nearby.
INFRASTRUCTURAL CONFLICTS

There are a range of overt infrastructural conflicts which include verbal and physical conflicts between residents and AMC, between residents and water operators, amongst water operators, and amongst residents, over accessing adequate water; verbal conflicts over contributing money for maintenance and repairs of water and drainage infrastructures and building corridor lights; and verbal conflicts over garbage disposal. Conflicts emerge due to deprivations, for example, inadequate quantity of water creates conflicts. Conflicts also contribute to creating deprivations, for example, conflicts over paying for maintenance lead to unrepaired water and drainage pipes and thus inadequate water and poor sanitation.

Conflicts over Access to Adequate Water

The situation of inadequate running water on a daily basis due to leakages (see Box 1) has resulted in residents, especially from VGG Nagar, mobilizing and approaching the AMC to repair / replace the pipes. In some instances, a resident has approached the AMC with a letter signed by many others, while in other cases, groups of residents (often women) have collectively approached the AMC. Many have approached AMC multiple times, at its different offices (the temporary AMC office at the BSUP sites, the riverfront project office, the main AMC office, the zonal office, the Vatwa municipal ward office) in their attempt to get a positive response. The AMC’s response is that residents are responsible for these repairs. Women residents recalled that AMC staff had sometimes behaved badly with them. In some instances, these mobilizations have also turned violent.

"The (municipal) officer spoke inappropriately to the women. He said that you were given houses here, you did not deserve this. Earlier you used to fill water from the river, so here also fill water like that. So some women reacted and broke things in the office."

One resident in KBT Nagar explained that AMC never addresses any issue until they are approached four times, and therefore it makes financial sense to simply spend money on pipe repairs rather than spending on transport to the AMC and losing one’s wages for the days they visit the AMC. The lack of more instances of mobilization and overt conflict (which sometimes turned physically violent) should be therefore interpreted cautiously and, in this case, is a sign of silently putting up with deepening structural violence.

Residents from VGG Nagar and also Sadbhavna Nagar have approached AMC many a time when their motor is damaged (see Box 1) to pressure the authority to repair it quickly. Such mobilizations have involved approaching AMC multiple times, sometimes turning violent, with some residents breaking furniture and computers in the Vatwa ward office. Some felt that this violence was necessary because without it, the AMC responded slowly which would leave them without running water for days on end. The mobilizations and overt conflict on these two issues (of pipe repairs and motor repairs) are linked to residents’ affordability to pay for such repairs. For many residents, affordability is deeply impacted by the constrained mobility and stressed livelihoods caused by resettlement (Box 2).

The situation of inadequate running water has also led to verbal fights between residents and water operators. While the operator’s management of the UGWTF does play a role in providing adequate water, in many cases, inadequate water is due to leakages and blockages which are beyond the operator’s control, and which are caused by the system put in place by the AMC for water provision at the BSUP sites (see Box 1). Not all residents understand this and some hold the operator responsible for their water deprivation. Some refuse to pay the operator who collects Rs.20-30 per month per household, leading to verbal conflicts. One operator in KBT Nagar explained that verbal bickering with residents is common. In Sadbhavna Nagar, verbal fights regularly occur with two of the water operators. In one incident, a water operator was injured when a crowd of residents pushed him. Another operator, tired of the daily verbal fights with residents, handed over the operation to another resident.

Box 2: Resettlement, Constrained Mobility and Stressed Livelihoods (also see Policy Brief 1)
The distant location of resettlement sites like Vatwa entails high transport expenses to reach existing workplaces, leading many to drop out of work or work irregularly. Others continue work by incurring high transport expenses, thus seeing a significant reduction in their effective income. Still others have shifted to other work (e.g. home-based work) but have seen a drop in their earnings. Work available nearby is not seen as a viable option by most residents. High transport costs must also be incurred to access public healthcare, better schools and the public distribution system. Resettlement also entails higher and new expenditures for basic services and maintenance of infrastructure, however, the stressed livelihoods and increased socio-economic vulnerabilities caused by this has created an inability and unwillingness among many households to pay contributions towards maintenance and repairs.
Leakages and a pipe burst on the terrace of one of the buildings in Sadbhavna Nagar – this drains out the water from the overhead water tank due to which the building’s residents cannot get 24-hour running water supply
(this condition of water pipes is commonly seen on the terraces of many of the buildings)

There have also been verbal fights between two water operators at Sadbhavna Nagar. At each site, all the UGWTS get water from a single source and a number of valves regulate the water flows into the UGWTS. In Sadbhavna Nagar, one valve’s opening and closing affected water flow into two different UGWTS in contrary ways, increasing water flow into one UGWT and reducing water flow into the other. The operators of these two UGWTS often clashed with each other as each acted in his own UGWT’s interest, probably to also avoid conflicts about inadequate water with the residents they had to supply water to. In one instance, the verbal conflict escalated and turned into threats, in which some goons were also roped in.

The fact that the operators were from different religious backgrounds provided further fuel to the conflict. Fortunately, no one got hurt. These conflicts between operators occur due to the inadequacies around water at the sites and the fact that there is no governance structure (formal or informal) that can facilitate cooperation around water at the site-level.

Residents also have verbal and sometimes physical fights with each other at the municipal taps in Sadbhavna Nagar, at taps in nearby housing societies and at the municipal water tankers when they turn to these sources regularly / intermittently due to problems with running / potable water in their homes.

Significantly, the taps in Sadbhavna Nagar were installed through political patronage, however, they are inadequate. Further, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders installed them only near the buildings inhabited by Hindus.

**Conflicts over financial contributions for repairs and maintenance**

Repairs of leaking water and drainage pipes in the buildings and cleaning of these pipes has been a challenge in most buildings. Most of the building pipes are not shared by all 32 flats; some are shared by eight flats, some by four, etc. There are instances of leaders /residents successfully collecting contributions for repairs in some buildings. There are instances where all households have contributed Rs.800-1200 each, over a period of 6-8 months, and then all the water pipes have been replaced in the building, and now residents enjoy 24-hour water supply. However, in many cases, there are tensions and verbal conflicts over contributions.

In one instance in VGG Nagar, eight households were affected by a leakage but one of them was out of town during the repairs and refused to pay their share upon their return despite fights. The resident who had taken
the initiative to get the repair done had to bear the financial burden of this. In another VGG Nagar building with leaking water pipes, some residents argued that all 32 households should contribute money while other residents argued that the leaking pipes were shared by only eight families. In the words of one of the residents of this building: “For any work that we try to do, first there is always a fight.” In KBT Nagar, a male resident mentioned that tensions always occurred when money had to be collected for pipe repairs.

There were also instances in VGG Nagar and Sadbhavna Nagar where contributions had been successfully collected from each household and some water pipes and valves replaced, but this had not resolved the problem and residents were still not getting 24-hour water supply. In one building, this had led to tensions as some residents accused the two women who had collected the money of wasting their money and even pocketing some of it. The two women explained that residents were now reluctant to give more money and had told them that if the problem is not solved, they would demand their money back.

With AMC withdrawing from repairing motors in mid-2014, tensions also occurred between operators and residents when the former tried to collect money from the latter to repair the damaged motor. In one instance, some residents accused the operator of taking higher contributions than necessary for funding motor repairs, while other residents insisted that he was being unfairly accused.

Tensions are common when money has to be collected for repairs of water pipes or motors and payment of the corridor light bills. Sometimes this also leads to conflicts, and often the pipes remain uncorrected and the corridor lights stop working.

This situation has been created partly by the stressed livelihoods of many residents and partly by the social disruptions created by the resettlement process.

These conflicts over collecting contributions are partly linked to the stressed livelihoods of many residents (Box 2) and partly to the lack of trust amongst residents created by the social disruptions caused by resettlement (see Box 3). This lack of trust is most evident around contributing towards the common light bills (Rs.20-30 per household per month). Few residents are willing to undertake the collection of the contributions as they anticipate that this would not be easy. In some buildings, residents paid the bills initially, but then the difficulty of collecting money gradually led to the non-payment of the bills. Conflicts were part of these difficulties. In one building in KBT Nagar, a resident explained that they paid the common light bill for two years but finally gave up because some would ask him to come the next day, some would complain about giving money, and some would fight. In another building, a resident explained that some residents pay a higher share of the bill amount to keep the common lights working in the building corridors since other residents do not trust him enough to give him money. He was of the opinion that if they had been living amongst people they knew, these contributions would have been easier to collect. This also shows that the absence of conflict is often at the expense of non-functioning infrastructures or some residents taking on a larger financial burden to keep them functioning.
Conflicts over garbage disposal
There are also tensions and verbal conflicts between residents over the disposal of garbage. In the words of one resident of KBT Nagar: “If someone throws garbage in the common plot and someone tells them not to do so, then they fight and use bad language.” These conflicts emerge out of different levels of commitment to civic sanitation, but are also fuelled by the social disruptions that make dialogue, cooperation and collective action difficult (see Box 3).

Unsanitary conditions in the common plots

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Universal provision of adequate potable water, preferably at the individual house level.
- The smooth functioning of water provisioning systems depend on a range of factors: biophysical (e.g. the quality of water; for instance, mineral deposits from hard water can create blockages, lead to deterioration of pipes, etc), technical (e.g. pipe diameters, quality of pipes and valves, physical layout of pipes and valves, motor capacity, etc), social and economic (e.g. the financial capacity to maintain infrastructures), institutional and political (e.g. the appropriate formal and informal governance structures and mechanisms through which infrastructures can be effectively and accountably operated and maintained), etc. These different factors should be taken into consideration during the design and planning of water provisioning systems in urban poor localities. Provision of water is unlikely to be successful if only an engineering approach is taken.
- Housing for the urban poor continues to be seen by governments in terms of only physical construction of buildings and infrastructures. There is a need to move towards seeing housing as creating habitats that offer opportunities and enhance capabilities. This would also re-orient housing interventions to pay attention to providing adequate and accessible basic services, infrastructures and amenities.

- If resettlement is unavoidable, the resettlement approach and process should give attention to protecting and enhancing livelihoods as well as preventing social disruptions and protecting / nurturing collective bonds as these conditions are essential for collective/community governance of services to succeed.
- Community governance of services in urban poor localities, either resettlement sites or otherwise, requires that government authorities realistically assess the economic capacities of the residents and thus plan for short-term and long-term governance of infrastructures and services accordingly.

Immediate steps to address deprivations and conflicts at the Vatva resettlement sites:
- The NGOs who were given the work of forming the resident associations at the sites have found this challenging in the absence of the AMC taking up its responsibilities in a systematic and responsive manner. The AMC should take an active role in the formation of functioning resident associations and nurturing them over the next few years. This would have to be done parallel to addressing residents’ concerns around basic services and infrastructures through a series of meetings by AMC at the sites.
- The water issues that residents are facing are complex, however, dialogue by AMC with the residents through a series of meetings might be able to decrease water deprivations and conflicts emerging from this.
- Ensure adequate number of street lights (especially in common plots lacking adequate light poles) and ensure their proper functioning.
- Start anganwadis and health centres in the structures built for these but which are currently lying vacant and vandalized.

Research Methods

- Locality mapping and community profiling
- Ethnography + ad-hoc conversations
- 11 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- 7 unstructured group discussions (GDs)
- 35 individual interviews (leaders, water operators, etc)
- Total 51 men and 53 women participated in the FGDs, GDs and interviews.
- Interviews with political leaders & municipal officials