VIOLENCE GENDER & WASH

A PRACTITIONER'S TOOLKIT

Making water, sanitation and hygiene safer through improved programming and services

Toolset 3-D

Community-managed latrine blocks

TS3-D-3 – Community-designed and managed latrine blocks and women's savings co-operatives in urban areas: Pune, India
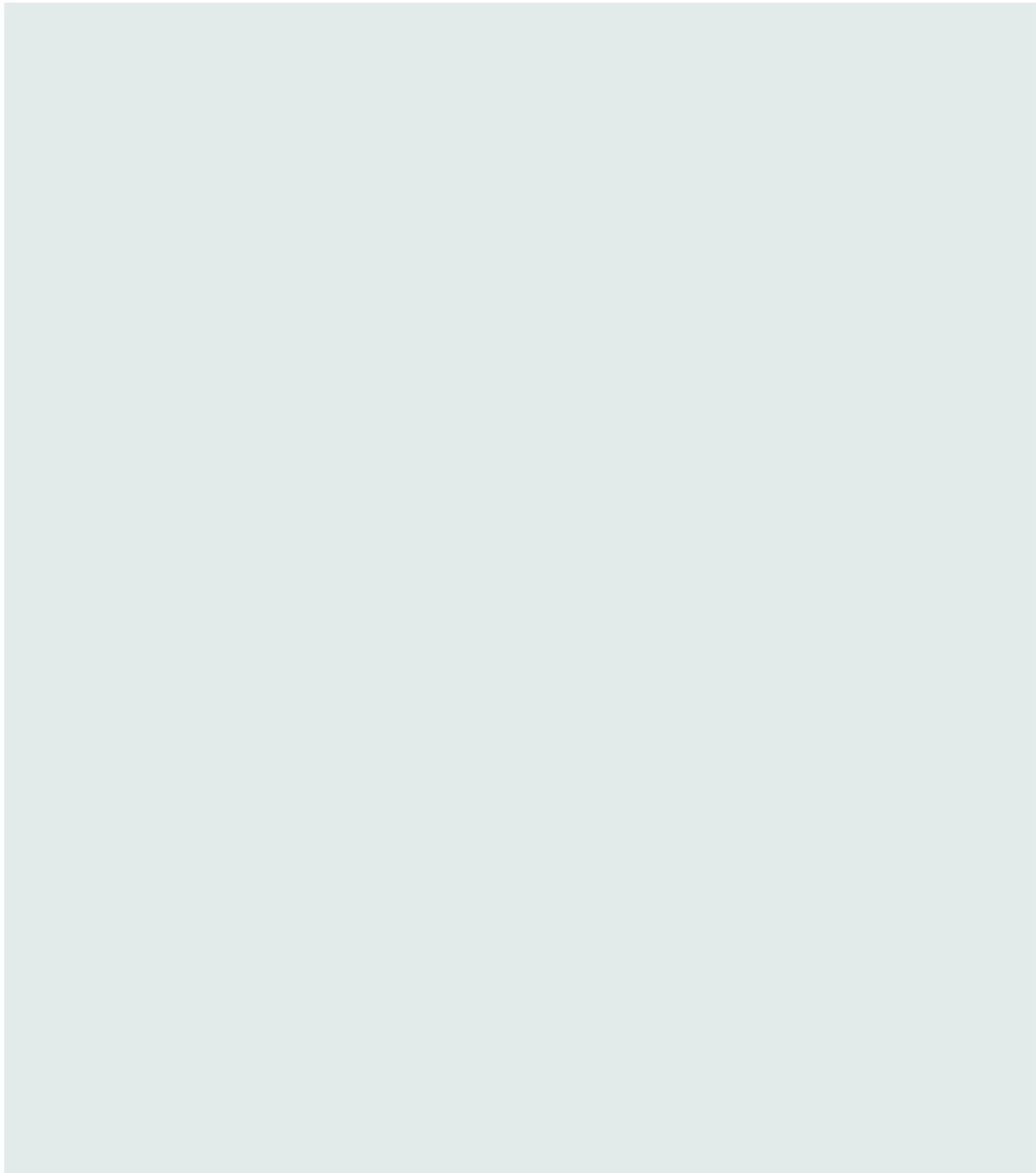
Context	Some communities of the urban poor have formed partnerships with non-government organisations and government agencies to develop alternative approaches to providing sanitation.
	During the late 1980s and early 1990s, slum- and pavement-dweller organisations and federations in India designed, built and managed some public toilet blocks. These were usually preceded by a community-managed slum survey to document inadequacies in provision. At first, local authorities ignored or discouraged these efforts. However, in 1999 the municipal commissioner in Pune (a city with more than 2 million inhabitants) invited NGOs and community organisations to bid for contracts for public toilet construction and maintenance. This led to a very large-scale community toilet block construction programme – which in turn encouraged government support for a comparable large-scale programme in Mumbai, when local government staff saw how much better the community-designed, -built and -managed toilets worked than the contractor-built public toilets they had built previously.
	Although this example was not documented from the perspective of violence related to WASH, it does provide a useful example of the involvement of women from marginalised groups (slum dwellers and pavement dwellers) in savings co-operatives having a role in managing communal sanitation facilities. This model therefore provides an opportunity for the women to input directly into design and management strategies, which can help to reduce risks to violence when accessing sanitation and hygiene facilities. It also offers opportunities for women to be able to speak to other women about vulnerabilities to violence and to develop strategies and to advocate for change through channels established as part of the process of establishing and managing the toilet blocks. This may involve women advocating as a separate group or working together with their male peers. The links with savings schemes also offer opportunities to contribute to the economic empowerment of women, which in turn can help to reduce their vulnerabilities to violence.
Implementing organisations	The National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) and its member federations, Mahila Milan (meaning 'women together' – savings co-operatives formed by women slum and pavement dwellers) and the support NGO, the Society for the Provision of Area Resource Centres (SPARC).
	This alliance focuses on issues of land security, resettlement and the entitlement of the urban poor to basic urban services. SPARC, an Indian NGO, supported the establishment of Mahila Milan, which comprises collectives of women who live on pavements and in slums. These collectives are organised around savings and loan activities that enable women to learn how to manage money and develop trust in themselves and in the process. But perhaps more significantly, *"…to develop the experience and skills to reflect together on their situation, they need a safe, local space where they can gather. Being marginalized means being cut off from networks and spaces of information"* (Patel and Bartlett, 2009). The NSDF was formed in the 1970s by mainly male community leaders in order to fight evictions in their own settlements,

and it quickly spread to more than 30 cities in India. Within the alliance, SPARC's role is one of intermediary between the state and communities of the urban poor. After the initial development of a strategy, it is the leaders of the federation who then explore the process and train community members. SPARC's role is then one of providing support, documentation, quality control, review and scaling-up.

Description of good practices	The partners noted above have been responsible for around 500 community-designed and managed toilet blocks, which serve hundreds of thousands of households in Pune and Mumbai.

The alliance believes in accommodation, negotiation and applying long-term pressure, rather than being project or conflict oriented. This is reflected in the processes whereby members of the alliance decide where, how and when community toilet blocks are built. This 'politics of patience' or slow learning and cumulative social change varies from one community to another and from city to city, as knowledge and experiences are shared between communities. Such a process of designing, building and managing toilet blocks not only improves the health and welfare of community members, but also improves their skills and self-confidence. The outcome of such a strategy is that the alliance has built relationships with the various levels of state bureaucracies, municipal corporations, the central government and several of its authorities, and with the private sector by not aligning itself with a particular political party.

Today, the alliance works in more than 70 cities across India; its guiding principle is that the poor are the experts on how to develop strategies to cope with poverty, and that these learning processes are shared with other groups in Mumbai, other cities throughout India and in other countries, through Shack/Slum Dwellers International. The alliance has a focus on building community toilet blocks because *"…toilets unite communities and give them the confidence to undertake something which they need and which they can actually do"* (Patel and Bartlett, 2009). The initial experiences in building and maintaining such community toilet blocks took place between 1988 and 1996 in Mumbai, Kanpur, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Lucknow.

Results

In this instance, the innovation was in the use of community design, implementation and management to produce a better-quality public toilet block that cost no more than the ineffective, poorly designed public toilet blocks previously built by contractors. The design included many innovations that gave women more privacy, made queues work better, ensured a constant supply of water for washing and made better provision for children. Community-management ensured that the facilities could be maintained through user charges.

Community organisations formed by the urban poor are trying out similar community-managed toilet blocks in Kenya, Uganda, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Sri Lanka.

Challenges

The challenge of community participation in the construction and management of toilet blocks is that of scaling-up across whole cities.

Lessons

These community toilet blocks are interesting in that they promote a 'solution' that has generally been ignored by international agencies, whose focus has been either on water alone or, if support is provided for sanitation, for facilities for each household.

Community toilets are not an ideal solution. Virtually all households would prefer good provision for sanitation within their homes. However, they represent a pragmatic, locally driven approach that greatly improves provision for large numbers of the poorest households, drawing on existing resources. Many of these toilet blocks are also in slums that are so overcrowded that there is little or no space to install private toilets within each housing unit.

References/Links

The above information has been taken from:

- Satterthwaite, D., G. McGranahan and D. Mitlin (2005) *Community-driven Development for Water and Sanitation in Urban Areas.* London, UK, and Geneva, Switzerland: Human Settlements Programme and Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council.

- Chaplin, S.E. (2011) Indian cities, sanitation and the state: the politics of the failure to provide. *Environment and Urbanization* 23(1), 57–70.

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