

Slum upgrading and women's empowerment: The experience in Titagarh, West Bengal

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Titagarh's slum upgrading experience demonstrates that social pressure and lobbying, particularly by women's groups, can be very effective in controlling rents, even when there is no legal contract between tenants and landlords. To inculcate a sense of ownership amongst the community, organisations were created to supervise the construction processes and the post-operation and maintenance of the assets created under the programme. Both tenants and landlords were represented in these community organisations. The paper raises two issues pertaining to the design of slum upgrading programmes. The first is that the designers of such programmes have not recognised that while a large number of the poor live in rental housing, there are also many suppliers of housing (i.e. landlords) among the poor. The programme designers perceived these poor communities as homogeneous groups, which meant that the community structures were created under the false perception that the 'community' had a common interest. Secondly, it explores the contribution that a community and women's groups in particular, can make towards retaining these assets so that they remain accessible to everyone, irrespective of whether they are tenants or landlords, and ensuring the post- operation and maintenance of these assets. However, in spite of the shortcomings in the design, the group formed in 21 Ward, under the programme, is still going strong and is now actively involved in the credit society which was initiated during the programme. The resulting financial empowerment goes a long way towards consolidating their position within their own families. This initiative has therefore lessened the burden on the municipality and will increase the lifespan of the services which will directly benefit the community. And this programme has shown how important it is to involve the community in implementing such projects.

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INTRODUCTION

On summer afternoons a sense of laziness pervades Titagarh till the whistle for the evening shift at the mills sounds at four o'clock. The main thoroughfare, Barrackpur Trunk Road (B.T. Road) is lined with *lungi*-clad men sleeping on 'charpoys' who have just returned from their shift at the jute mills. A cloud of dust hangs over B. T. Road every time a truck passes. Relief from the sweltering heat has been created by the extending canopies from branches of trees, or whatever is available. The *rickshwallas* have taken refuge on the passenger seats, and even an offer of a higher fare, does not motivate them to carry passengers at this hour. But inside the *badi*¹, at block number 21, in Muchipada, the women have braved the heat and have gathered in the courtyard instead of settling down to their routine siesta.

This is a recent pleasure because it was only with the implementation of the Calcutta Slum Improvement Programme phase 1C, that their courtyard was paved, gully traps installed to drain surface water, a toilet block built and water stand pipes provided inside the *badi*. The courtyard has now become a place for women to gather, rather than to avoid. They often gather to discuss contentious issues such as when the landlord of the *badi* put a lock on the door of the newly built toilet. The landlord's argument was that 'the tenants do not know how to use the toilet in a civilised way' and hence decided to deny them access. But the women's group believed that as the municipality had invested money in building the toilet, it was for everyone's use, particularly as they were involved in its construction. Geeta Debi, a self-declared leader of the group, has been negotiating with the municipality to get the women's group an identity card that will legalise their rights to intervene in the resolution of common issues for their *badi*. But the municipal officials have been evading her request, and hence the issue is still not resolved, even a year after the completion of the project.

The slum upgrading programme in Titagarh, an industrial town in West Bengal, an initiative of the state government, was implemented during 1998-2001. This programme has shown how important it is to involve the community in implementing such projects. A component of the West Bengal Government's Calcutta Slum Improvement Programme (CSIP) 1C,

¹ *Badi* is a Bengali word that literally means house. In this context it is used to mean a cluster. In a *badi* several rooms each occupied by one family are organised around a central courtyard. The activities of a family spill over to this common courtyard.

this project covered seven wards in Titagarh and two wards in Barrackpore, involved 35, 000 people and was funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), Government of United Kingdom. This project was designed to provide learning lessons for the Kolkata Urban Service Programme, a large-scale, long-term programme that DFID has planned to undertake in the coming years.

To inculcate a sense of ownership amongst the community, organisations were created to supervise the construction processes and the post-operation and maintenance of the assets created under the programme. Both tenants and landlords were represented in these community organisations. Obviously their interests were conflicting, so doubts were raised about the sustainability of these community structures after the withdrawal of funds.

This paper raises two issues pertaining to the design of slum upgrading programmes. The first is that the designers of such programmes have not recognised that while a large number of the poor live in rental housing, there are also many suppliers of housing (i.e. landlords) among the poor. This neglect has meant that programme designers have ignored the complex relations that exist between tenants and landlords, and so did not identify the interests of both groups. Instead the programme designers perceived these poor communities as homogeneous groups, which meant that the community structures were created under the false perception that the 'community' had a common interest. This misconception led to confrontations between landlords and tenants, such as the dispute over access to the toilet block in Machipada.

The second issue was the fear expressed by the programme designers that the poorest of the poor (most of whom are tenants) would be displaced when the slum housing was upgraded, because they would no longer be able to afford to live in the area. The objective of this paper is therefore to explore the contribution that a community, and women's groups in particular, can make towards retaining these assets so that they remain accessible to everyone, irrespective of whether they are tenants or landlords, and ensuring the post- operation and maintenance of these assets. The idea of secure tenure for the community and how this relates to the sustainability of the slum upgrading programmes will also be discussed.

Contrary to fears expressed before the programme was implemented, there has been no drastic displacement of tenants, even two years

after the completion of the project.² The reason probably lies in the fact that the tenant lobby, mostly represented by the women who were sensitised and organised during the implementation of the programme, have been successful in acting as a pressure group. Increases in rents in some areas have only come about after landlords and tenants have agreed on mutually acceptable rises. Expressed concerns that the community structures created during the programme would collapse after funding was withdrawn have also not come true: these groups have continued to exist and play a significant role in resolving community conflicts, particularly those that related to the upgrading programme.

The experience of the slum upgrading programme in Titagarh demonstrates that social pressure is a significant tool in resolving issues/conflicts within a community, often more effectively than the *de jure* route. Women's groups play a critical role in creating such social pressures. However, the Titagarh experience does leave a major unresolved concern: when you ask the users to take responsibility for the post-operation and maintenance of such projects, how do you ensure the sustainability of the project? If tenants do not have any *de jure* rights to the assets, to what extent will they be motivated to participate in such programmes? Furthermore, the economy of Titagarh has been largely dependent on jute mills, which are struggling to be viable in this time of economic liberalisation that now prevails in India. Many mills have closed down and this has had a negative impact on the economic well-being of the town. In general, the poor have a low paying capacity, so even if the landlords want to escalate rents, they are not successful because the tattered economic condition of the town has actually imposed a *de facto* rent ceiling. Also, as landlords refuse to pay any taxes to the municipal government because renting is not profitable for them, they shy away from taking any responsibility to maintain their assets. This in turn makes housing less appealing to prospective tenants. This deadlock between municipal governments and landlords raises the issue of secure tenure which will be discussed below.

THE RATIONALE FOR SLUM UPGRADING INTERVENTIONS

In India today there are 35 cities a population over a million. It is estimated that out of a total urban population of 285 million, nearly 82 million, or 30

² This conclusion is based on the interview of a small size population conducted by the author.

per cent, are poor; who largely live in low-income settlements³ which can be anything from regularised slums to squatter settlements or pavement dwellers. In Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Kanpur, one-third to one-half of the population lives in slums.⁴ Municipal governments, who have the legal responsibility of providing and maintaining urban basic services, have failed to keep pace with the growing demand. The result is that all Indian cities, and slums specifically, lack adequate basic services such as garbage disposal systems, the provision of sanitation and water supply, basic health care and adequate housing. The plight of the urban poor gets highlighted because it is constantly contrasted against the backdrop of the affluence of cities.

The failure of municipal governments to provide adequate services has been blamed on the lack of adequate financial resources and absence of appropriate technologies. It is also compounded by the fact that the majority of low income informal settlements in cities do not have any legal status. This means that municipal authorities do not have a legal responsibility to provide these settlements with basic services. Instead, the poor have to buy water from private sellers, which often costs more than what middle class residents pay for municipal services.⁵

As the provision of adequate housing is not a Constitutional responsibility of the state, it is obliged to maintain public health and law and order that has been used as the underlying rationale for implementation of slum upgrading programmes. In 1958 the outbreak of cholera in Kolkata was one of the reasons that compelled the West Bengal state government to intervene to improve the living conditions in the *bustees*.⁶ The other reason

3 Low-income informal settlements are settlements that have ambiguous tenure rights to absolutely no tenure rights. They are deprived of partial or total access to urban basic services. In common usage, informal low-income settlements include pavement dwellers or squatter settlements (where there is no legal title). However, in this study the term is used to indicate only those settlements that have some sort of legal title.

4 Housing and Urban Development Corporation and UN Habitat (2001), *The State of Indian Cities*, UNCHS HUDCO, New Delhi, p. 37.

5 A study conducted by Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) on shack dwellers in Mumbai, L. Riley, and S. Burra (1999), DPU, UCL, London, Working Paper no. 97 establish that the urban poor pay much more than formal citizens for basic services as they have to access these illegally through middlemen yet the services they receive are not regular and most often are not good quality.

6 *Bustees* accommodate a large proportion of the urban poor in Kolkata and are unique to this city. Although in their physical characteristics they are like any other informal settlement, they are legal rental properties and fall within the legal and tax framework, C. Pugh (1990), *Housing and Urbanisation: A Study of India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, London.

was to reduce social disparities within a slum, and between slums and the larger city. Dilapidated physical environments and the lack of basic services not only threaten public health through the outbreak of diseases, but such conditions also contribute to the creation of serious social concerns such as criminality. Haphazard and very dense development has turned these areas into ghettos, isolating the residents from the city fabric. The fragmentation is both physical and socio-economic, resulting in the creation of a divide between the rich and the poor, which often causes social tensions. To maintain law and order, the city administration is therefore forced to intervene.

Another rationale for intervention is to regularise these settlements by conferring security of tenure as advocated by the United Nations Commission for Human Settlements' Global Campaign on Secure Tenure. The rationale for this campaign is that if occupants are given secure tenure, they will be encouraged to upgrade their property and maintain the basic services extended by the relevant authorities. Once secure tenure is granted, municipal governments then expect to increase revenue collection which otherwise remains largely uncollected when properties are not recognised under law. The logic of the Global Campaign on Secure Tenure is based on the fact that a community has a certain paying capacity; they are already paying private suppliers for these basic services, such as water. By upgrading basic services and giving low-income settlements legal status, the municipality will be able to collect additional revenue through taxes.⁷

Slum upgrading programmes are also supported by the Cities Alliance (launched in 1999), which is a global alliance of cities and their development partners that seeks to improve the living conditions of the urban poor, particularly through the implementation of slum upgrading programmes. The Cities Alliance received its 'initial support from the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UN-Habitat), the political heads of the four leading global associations of local authorities and ten governments – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the UK and the US'. They were joined by the Asian Development Bank in 2002.⁸ In December 1999, Nelson Mandela launched the 'Cities Without Slums Action Plan', a product of the Cities Alliance programme. This plan was endorsed by 150 heads of state and government at the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit, and has set an agenda

7 United Nations Commission for Human Settlements <www.unchs.org/campaigns/tenure>

8 Cities Alliance <www.citiesalliance.org/citiesalliancehomepage.nsf> [20 January 2003]

and clear targets for improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. The focus has been put on 'upgrading the most squalid and unhealthy urban slums and squatter settlements in the world'⁹.

HOUSING IN LOW-INCOME SETTLEMENTS

By the 1970s it had become apparent that conventional housing policies were inadequate to address the housing and urban basic service needs of the developing world because the number of people living in slums was steadily increasing. The World Bank, a major influence on the housing policies of the developing world, began advocating self-help housing. Housing policies in India therefore became 'self-ownership' driven¹⁰ during the 1970s and 80s. These policies assumed that the urban poor would build the houses in which they lived. In fact, research has shown that a large percentage of urban poor who are living in low-income settlements access housing through rental markets and sub-markets, and moreover, significant numbers become landlords, or suppliers of housing. This aspect of housing in low-income settlements was largely ignored¹¹ till the 1980s when further research studies succeeded in bringing it into mainstream discussions on housing policy.¹² Some of these studies by researchers such as Alan Gilbert, A. Varley, S. Kumar and M. Edwards¹³ have highlighted the power relation that exists between landlords and tenants, and this information about rental housing among the urban poor has contributed significantly to an understanding of how it can affect the outcomes of slum upgrading projects.

9 Cities Alliance www.citiesalliance.org/citiesalliancehomepage.nsf [20 January 2003]

10 R. Burgess (1992), 'Helping some to help themselves: Third World housing policies and development strategies' in K. Mathey (1992) (ed), *Beyond Self-Help Housing*, Mansell Publishing House, U.K.; S. Kumar (1992), *Subsistence Landlords and Petty Capitalists: A Theoretical Frame Work for Analysis of the Production and Exchange of Low Income Rental Housing in the Third World Cities*, Development Planning Unit Working Paper number 58, London, United Kingdom, pp. 75-91; and C. Rakodi (1995), 'Rental Tenure in the Cities of Developing Countries', in *Urban Studies*, Vol.32, Nos. 4-5, 1995.

11 K. Wadhva (1996), *An Urbanising World: Global Report on Human Settlements*, p. 205, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

12 Kumar (1992), *Subsistence Landlords*.

13 Alan Gilbert, O. Camacho, R. Coulomb and R. Necochea (1993), *In Search of Home: Rental and Shared Housing in Latin America*, London, UCL Press; Alan Gilbert and A. Varley (1991), *Landlord and Tenant: Housing the Poor in Urban Mexico*, London, Routledge; S. Kumar (1992), *Subsistence Landlords* and M. Edwards (1990), 'Rental Housing and the Urban Poor: Africa and Latin America Compared', in P. Amis, *Housing Africa's Urban Poor*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

This expanding knowledge about rental housing challenged two major assumptions of housing policies. Firstly, that in low-income settlements people live in self-owned houses, which they build themselves.¹⁴ Secondly, that the tenure and property rights in low-income settlements are the same as that for formal settlements, irrespective of whether the tenure is legal or illegal.¹⁵ The urban poor quite often live in rental accommodation by choice, which means they do not always build houses for self-use.¹⁶ This highlights the heterogeneous nature of the urban poor and means that security of tenure in low-income settlements is a complex issue as it is ambiguous in terms of legality. Such issues of security of tenure are still to be addressed in a fair manner when implementing upgrading programmes.

THE COMMUNITY AS A POTENTIAL 'AGENCY' TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

To address the issue of power relations within urban communities at either the micro or macro level in a city it is important to understand who and how these power relations can be challenged. Anthony Giddens argues that:

We are never as isolated or as autonomous as we sometimes think we are. Firstly our sense of ourselves is inherently constructed through interaction with other people and the natural world. We are born into social relations and we live them during our lives. Through these relations we are linked to particular histories and geographies which constrain our material and conceptual resources and experiences. In this sense, our efforts in working out our individual identities and social relations are 'structured' by what has gone before. We are embedded within these structures. These 'pasts' are not benign collections of 'assets' which we inherit to different degrees. They are active forces, filled with implicit and explicit principles about how things be done and who should get what.¹⁷

14 J.F.C. Turner and R. Fichter (eds) (1972), *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process* Macmillan, New York, J.F.C. Turner (1998), 'Introductory Perspective' in B. Turner (1988), *Building Community, A Third World Case Book*, London.

15 G. Payne (2000), 'Urban land and tenure options: Titles or rights?' Paper presented at the World Bank Urban Forum, Westfields Marriot, Virginia, USA, p. 10.

16 R. Ramirez, J. Fiori, H. Harms and K. Mathey (1992), 'The commodification of self-help housing and state intervention: Household experiences in the barrios of Caracas in Mathey' (1992), *Beyond Self-Help Housing*, pp. 95- 144.

17 Giddens is quoted in P.Healey (1997), *Collaborative Planning, Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*, McMillian Press Ltd, Houndmills, p. 45.

Building on this theory of structuration, Giddens says that the 'recursive relation between the structures and the agency is one of its key principal.'¹⁸ Such 'structure' and 'agency' can be seen to exist within in a city and in low-income settlements, and it is critical to understand these 'structures' and 'agencies' to bring about any changes in them.

If the prevalence of rental housing is acknowledged in the low-income settlements, then the perception of the 'structure' in the urban poor community is obviously different from the one that is perceived without rental housing. Therefore to bring about changes in the 'structure' in low-income settlements, it is important to understand the nature of the power relations that exist within them. Often it is found that the groups with the right political alliances, or connection with the authorities, have an advantageous position to access the supply of basic services. However, if the other sections of the community can be mobilised they can be successful in bringing changes to these 'structures' within low-income settlements. In slum upgrading interventions, the community, even if it is fragmented, can emerge as a potential 'agency' that can challenge 'structures' in the low-income settlements (or cities at the macro level), provided there is exchange of ideas and opportunities to address conflicting issues.

EVOLUTION OF SLUM UPGRADING PROGRAMMES IN KOLKATA

In Kolkata, slum upgrading programmes were implemented in 1973 under the Calcutta Urban Development Project (CUDP) with financial support from the World Bank. These programmes have evolved with time. Initially they were state-driven, technology-centric efforts with minimal involvement of the community. This was reflected in the evaluation studies conducted after the Calcutta Slum Improvement Programme (CSIP) 1a and 1b was completed in 1998 which showed that the project had not produced very encouraging results.¹⁹ The most common problem found was that the post operation and maintenance of the assets created under the programme, was very poor. The outcome was basically a reflection that the programme had failed to instil any sense of ownership among the targeted group of users. Instead, these people had moved on to make way for a more privileged section of the society as property prices escalated.

18 Healey (1997), *Collaborative Planning*. p. 46.

19 O. P. Mathur 2002, *India: Evaluating Bank Assistance for Urban Development, A Country Assistance Evaluation*, The World Bank Operations Evaluation Department, The World Bank, Washington, D.C.

The lesson that has been learnt from these past mistakes is that, unless the community for whom the services are designed, participate in the programme from the beginning, it is difficult to make these programmes successful. In its recent form as CSIP 1c, implemented with financial assistance from DFID, the community played a pivotal role. Community structures were organised so as enable the proper representation of all sections/groups in the programme. Micro planning exercises were conducted to gain a better comprehension of the needs of the community, and training was provided so that community members would be able to manage the post-operation and maintenance of these assets without having to rely on municipal authorities.

TITAGARH EXPERIENCE

Titagarh is an industrial town situated about twenty kilometres north of the centre of the city of Kolkata and is well-connected with the city through suburban railways. It is part of the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration (KUA), and once was the location for one of the largest paper mills in Asia and several jute mills, which dotted the banks of the Hoogly River. Today, most of the mills are facing economic crisis and closing down and this economic decline of the town is very evident in the poor physical infrastructure.

When the jute and other allied industries were established in the 1900s, places such as Titagarh, Barrackpore, Khardah flourished. Like any other industrial town, Titagarh attracted labourers from of all parts of Bengal and adjoining states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. This created a distinctly cosmopolitan character which remains till today. These labourers were predominantly single adult men who were organised by a *sardar*, or a leader, from their respective villages who brought them to Titagarh. They came to work in the mills because of the poor economic conditions and lack of employment in their own villages. Any money they had remaining after covering their basic expenses was invested back in their own village, and this trend still continues today for many migrant workers.

These labourers were accommodated in make-shift shelters on land that belonged to either the jute mill owners or feudal lords.²⁰ The literature documenting their lives reveals that even during such a prosperous time,

20 Arjan de Haan (1994), *Unsettled Settlers Migrant Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Calcutta*, Hilversum, Verlore, pp. 73-76.

they were living in very poor conditions. The labourers suffered from the hardships of long working hours, no access to basic amenities and living in shelters that were inappropriate. Today in Titagarh, with only two nationalised mills functioning (of the original seven jute mills) on an irregular basis, the inhabitants have lost their main source of employment. The result is that most people are either self-employed or work in the surviving mills on an ad hoc basis. Once a prosperous industrial town, 80 per cent of the population now live in *bustees*, according to Census 2001. The marked economic decline of Titagarh is very evident in the degraded infrastructure. Choked drains, ill-maintained public urinals and heaps of garbage make the entire place very unhealthy. Titagarh now only attracts the attention of the outside world because of the leper rehabilitation camp run by the Sisters of Charity.

The low-income settlements, or the slums, in Titagarh are mainly located on private lands or those owned by the jute mills. The original housing built for the labourers was constructed with makeshift materials and had, at best, inadequate provision for sanitation. Shared sanitation facilities though were provided for the labourers at the jute mills. Over time, these houses have been upgraded and wherever possible, people have tried their best to make them more habitable. The most common typology of housing is the *badi*, which is a cluster of dwelling units, approximately 15-20 units organised around a central open courtyard. The dwelling units are usually comprised of one room which is used for all the household functions. Most of the household functions though usually spill over into the courtyard. Water is fetched from taps in the main streets which are provided either by the municipality or by the jute mills. Most *badis* do not have any access to sanitation facilities except for a few cases where they have been provided by a landlord. Most of the units have brick masonry walls with tile roofing; wattle and daub construction and mud flooring. Units adjoin each other without any space in between which produces a total lack of cross ventilation and very poor lighting.

Another distinct characteristic of Titagarh is that most people live in rental accommodation. As most of the labourers who came in the first part of the 20th century to work in the mills were single men, they shared rooms in dormitories. This created a very unbalanced sex-ratio in Titagarh, which is only now slowly changing as more people are opting to live here with their families. Still this unbalanced male-female ratio, when combined with a very poor literacy rate, has made the area notorious for its anti-social activities.

In the *badis* the proportion of landlords and tenants is naturally very unbalanced. Unlike the popular perception of landlords as the exploitative class, it is common to find landlords, as well as their tenants, living together within *badis*. This reflects the poor economic conditions of the area. Also, as tenants shy away from investing money in the maintenance or upgrading of the property that they are renting, the housing stock has become very dilapidated. One of the reasons this has occurred is perhaps because of the deadlock situation that has arisen between the landlord and the tenants. Landlords generally do not see any commercial sense in upgrading their properties when the capacity of their tenants to pay any subsequent rent increases is very low. Unlike the *bustees* in Kolkata where the Thika Tenancy Act²¹ is applicable, these *badis* do not have any ambiguity in terms of ownership. These are private properties and landlords are supposed to pay property taxes to the municipality. But almost all the landlords have defaulted on their taxes because their rental properties do not generate enough revenue. This has substantially affected the tax collection of the municipal government in Titagarh, with the result that only limited urban services are provided to these areas.

KOLKATA SLUM IMPROVEMENT PROJECT CSIP 1C

Implementation of the Kolkata Slum Improvement Programme CSIP Phase 1a and Phase 1b was concluded in 1998. The project was intended to benefit an estimated slum population of 2.88 lakhs in 15 wards of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. The project was implemented at a cost of Rs. 46.30 crores (i.e. 463 million rupees), and was extended to the slums in the municipalities of Titagarh and Barrackpore from the balance of

21 In Kolkata, *bustees* dominate the housing of the urban poor. The property rights of these settlements have deep historic roots and are complex. The ownership and use of land and buildings are split three ways. The ownership of the land is separate from the ownership of the hutments. The feudal landlords leased out land to the Thika tenants (the middleman), who then constructed hutments on this land which were then rented out to another set of occupants. After India's independence, the feudal system was abolished and the state became the owner of the land. Over a period of time, with the increase in land prices, the third-tier tenants faced eviction threats from the intermediate tenants. To combat this, the Kolkata Thika Tenancy Act was enacted in the year 1949 to protect the interests of tenants at the lowest level. This Act still continues in a modified form. Though the Thika Tenancy Act was formulated with good intentions, it has had a negative impact on the property market as it implied rent freezing which has distorted the rental market. A deadlock now exists because, with landlords are unwilling to invest money in their properties as it is not commercially viable, while tenants don't want to invest in someone else's property. This conflict has resulted in poor maintenance of these settlements.

funds outstanding. CSIP 1c was designed to serve as a bridging project for supporting the development of a possible Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor Programme (KUSP) that DFID has proposed to undertake in the near future.

The main goal of CSIP 1c was to enhance the well-being of slum dwellers through sustained improvements in their environmental conditions and to increase their access to social and economic opportunities. The municipality did involve the community directly in the implementation process, but these new community structures were not given any legal recognition. The declared objectives of CSIP 1c were:

- a) to reduce exposure to health hazards for the slum dwellers;
- b) improve environmental conditions in the identified slums through infrastructure development;
- c) improve health awareness and hygiene behaviour among slum dwellers; maximise potential health and other benefits through convergence;
- d) involve the slum community in planning, implementation, monitoring and operation and maintenance activities;
- e) develop/strengthen community organisations/structures for participation in development process;
- f) develop self-sustaining programmes among the community;
- g) encourage gender-sensitisation activities;
- h) substantially reduce morbidity and mortality from faecal-oral and other environment related diseases; and
- i) promote capacity building of municipalities in line with the 74th Constitutional Amendment.

CSIP 1c was implemented at two levels. The first intervention into the project area was to upgrade the physical infrastructure which included paving the access paths to the cluster, extending water pipes inside the *badi* (previously they were limited to the primary roads), extending sanitation facilities and gully traps to drain storm water from each *badi* and providing street lights. Apart from these very tangible physical infrastructure improvements, interventions were also made to mobilise women to form small-scale credit societies. They were given training in how to make and use smokeless *chulhas*, and were introduced to the idea of garbage management. These interventions succeeded in empowering the women involved by the

end of the programme. Groups of women were also involved in awareness generating workshops such as street theatres and other such interactive activities. As these women belong to a very conservative society, the workshops made a big difference in their lives, because for the first time, they felt empowered to voice their opinions and had a chance to interact with municipal officials. This was not only a first time experience for the community members, but also for the municipality officials. One of the significant achievements made under the programme is that the gap between the municipality officials and the community has to some extent been reduced. Credit for this achievement should be given to the multidisciplinary group of the Titagarh municipality

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

A feature of CSIP 1c was the creation of a multidisciplinary team of social scientists, junior engineers and other consultants who brought a wide variety of expertise to this project. Using this expertise, and their different backgrounds, the multidisciplinary team members were able to address the developmental issue in a more holistic way – one of the aspects that had been ignored in previous slum upgrading programmes. In phases 1a and 1b, one of the main criticisms was that the programme was technologically orientated. Priority was given to the technical details at the expense of issues such as how the post-operation and maintenance was to be managed, and whether this would be acceptable to the community. To remove this drawback, the multidisciplinary group (from the very inception of the project) was in touch with the community, who were directly informed about the project and the interventions that are going to be made in their area. Community members were mobilised to be active participants in the programme and to take care of the future operation and maintenance of the new assets.

One of the major exercises that needed to be done at the start of the project was the identification of areas that could be used for the new toilet blocks, and where gully traps would be located.. This was a major challenge because in such a high density settlement open areas for the construction of toilets were difficult to identify. Another consideration in the choice of locations was that they had to be accessible for all community members. These decisions were made by conducting micro planning exercises which were learning experiences for both the municipality officials and the community.

MOBILISING POLITICAL WILL

By design there is a tendency to approach slum upgrading programmes apolitically but the building of new infrastructure, or obtaining access to basic services, is very much a political issue. The Titagarh experience demonstrates that the community can play a major role in mobilising political will, because an empowered community has more negotiating power and can act as an 'agency' to bring about changes in the 'structure'. A fragmented and ignorant community is open to exploitation by politicians who bargain the provision of these services against votes, even though the community is entitled to them. It is possible to change this structure only when the community is empowered and becomes more conscious of what they are capable of doing or achieving.

Slum upgrading programmes therefore can be instrumental in bringing about a change in the structure of relations within a community, and between that community and the larger city. The Titagarh case is an excellent example because an empowered community was able to create enough social pressure within their community to stop landlords from irrationally increasing rents particularly in the absence of any written contracts. As most of the slum upgrading programmes tend to be implemented in an apolitical manner, these issues of social, economic and political relations within the targeted communities are not formally addressed. The challenge therefore is how to make it the norm that such issues are addressed within the formal design of future slum upgrading programmes.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN POST-OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Geeta's house barely measures ten square feet. She lives there with her daughter, husband and her old ailing mother. Her accommodation is rented, and she has been paying rent for the last forty years. Like many other women in her locality, she used to be a silent spectator of what happened around her. Her locality, like many others, lacked toilets and a drainage system till the municipality intervened and provided these amenities through CSIP 1c. Reflecting on the impact of the programme, Geeta observed that

'It is not only the infrastructure upgrading that has brought changes in my life. For the first time municipality officers have visited our house, they address me with respect, I feel there is so much I can do and contribute in making my locality better. For the first time I felt included in the activities of the municipality. To tell you the truth, before [the programme] I had never

ever crossed the gate of the municipality. It is not that there was any restriction but somehow there was an unwritten norm. Now I go there quite often to meet many officers to bring to their notice our problems.’²²

This inclusive feeling has created an immense impact on the post-operation and maintenance of the toilets. The residents now work as the ‘watch dogs’. They take care of the immediate small maintenance jobs by collecting small contributions from among themselves.

WOMEN AS THE NEGOTIATORS

Conforming to the global discourse that focuses on gender balance, in this programme women were prioritised as a target group. In the design of the programme it was acknowledged that as women face greater difficulties every day due to the absence of basic services, it is they who value these services the most. Therefore women needed to be directly involved in the initial stages of the programme to ensure their participation in the post-operation and maintenance of the assets. The Titagarh experience demonstrates very explicitly how women, who previously would not even talk to men who are not their family members in public or participate in any public activity, can be directly involved in the negotiations with municipal officials.

The women’s group in 21 Ward came together at the start of the programme and began sharing their problems. This gave them the strength and confidence needed to put their points of view across in public. For example, when one of the single male occupants of the *badi* wanted to put in a door facing the main road, the women protested. The layout of the *badi* is such that all the dwelling units open into the internal courtyard, providing privacy from the main road. The women felt that such a door would reduce their security and allow unknown people to have access to their internal courtyard. Initially they tried to negotiate with the occupant, but when he remained adamant, they approached the landlord arguing he should look after the convenience of the majority rather than one occupant. The women also built support for their stance by lobbying the municipal officer, political representatives and discussing the issue publicly. The majority of the neighbourhood residents, especially those living with their families, came to support the women.

CONCLUSION

Titagarh's slum upgrading experience demonstrates that social pressure and lobbying, particularly by women's groups, can be very effective in controlling rents, even when there is no legal contract between tenants and landlords. It has also restricted the ability of the landlords to expropriate the newly built assets, because of the presence of active local groups which are mainly comprised of women. This is the outcome of implementing a slum upgrading programme in a truly participatory manner which enabled information to flow from the municipality to the tenants. The subsequent empowerment of the tenants, particularly the women, has enabled them prevent irrational increases in rents, even two years after the implementation of the programme. However, it is important to reiterate that these successes should not undermine the need for secure tenure and the role of laws and regulations. If land prices in the area were to rise, it is difficult to say how much power these women's groups would have to negotiate with landlords. Perhaps in such circumstances the eviction of tenants could only be stopped through the *de jure* route.

One of the criticisms that the Titagarh experience received was that these new community structures would not be sustainable in the long run, because they are financially supported by the municipality. The group formed in 21 Ward is still going strong and is now actively involved in the credit society which was initiated during the programme. The resulting financial empowerment goes a long way towards consolidating their position within their own families. These women's groups have also been taking care of the post-operation and maintenance of the assets because they have developed a sense of ownership about these new assets. These women have also learnt how to lobby municipal officers (who usually command respect in the local area) and political representatives to make their concerns public. This initiative has therefore reduced the burden on the municipality and will increase the lifespan of the services which will directly benefit the community. □