

## PRO-POOR SERVICE DELIVERY INITIATIVES BY BANGALORE MAHANAGARA PALIKE

Bangalore, India's 'Silicon Valley' and prominent techno-knowledge center, is one of Asia's fastest growing metropolises. Ironically, nearly one million of Bangalore's urban poor live in slums. About one-third of these slum-dwellers fall below the poverty line, with a monthly household income of less than Rs.2,500 (US\$55). Further, the literacy rate among the urban poor is below the overall rate at city level and the female literacy rate is lower than the male. The local self-government institutions responsible for the municipal services in the Bangalore Urban Agglomeration (BUA) comprise the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BMP), seven City Municipal Councils (CMCs) and one Town Municipal Council (TMC).

There are an estimated 253,600 urban poor households within the BMP area. The short-term approach of BMP towards urban poverty alleviation has been undergoing a change with the adoption of Benchmarking and Continuous Improvement programme called NIRANTARA, which in the local language, means 'continuous improvement'. The programme is mainly intended to systematize and institutionalize aspects of service delivery improvement through community involvement and customer feedback.

Two committees were set up under the NIRANTARA programme called NIRANTARA Steering Committee (NSC) and NIRANTARA Working Committee (NWC) with representation from NGOs and CBOs to be the voice of the community. Australian Continuous Improvement Group (ACIG) in association with STEM, Bangalore trained the BMP officials who are members of NWC in the benchmarking and continuous improvement techniques before undertaking the projects and services for improvement. The training curriculum included: (a) Identifying service priorities for improvement in consultation with community; (b) process mapping; (c) situational analysis; (d) benchmarking techniques – by comparing and learning through sharing of information; (e) coming up with new solutions; (f) implementing these solutions and bringing about a change; and (g) making sure the improvement continues by effective monitoring and customer feedback system

Ten services were prioritized by NSC and NWC for detailed project study and preparation of implementation reports with technical details and cost estimates. After several rounds of deliberations, short-listing and revision, the NIRANTARA Working Committee (NWC) of the BMP has finally chosen two services for improvement on a priority basis. These are: (a) footpaths and (b) community toilets.

Even the footpaths that existed at the time of the introduction of NIRANTARA were in a deplorable and hazardous condition. A survey conducted by a team of NWC revealed that 80 percent of footpath users are urban poor. After analyzing the existing service level and suggestions made by the public, the team recommended different types and dimensions of footpaths based on usage and location. BMP has earmarked Rs.227 million (US\$ 5 million) for this work in its budget 2003-2004. Users' feedback shows that the level of satisfaction *vis-à-vis* footpaths has now increased to 63 percent from the earlier nine percent. Improvements on footpaths have weaned pedestrians, especially the more safety-conscious women, away from dodging them. Now, their usage has gone up to 93 percent. BMP has now committed itself to improving footpaths all over the city in a phased manner.

NWC conducted a similar study, involving beneficiaries, on the state of community / public toilets and made an on-the-spot study of existing toilets, both "Pay and Use" and "Free Use". The survey provided the best practices prevailing among the communities and their preferences. The BMP has allocated Rs.800 million (US\$17.8 million), in its budget for 2003-04, for construction of "Pay and Use" toilets. A large number of corporate bodies have come forward to finance public toilets in collaboration with BMP. User feedback received shows that above 90 percent of residents in the vicinity of the community toilets now use the facility.

Though 25 percent of city's population live below the poverty line, BMP is yet to evolve a long term plan and systematic approach to identify urban poor. Slum survey reveals women and adolescent girls are identified as target groups to be economically empowered. Each year, BMP trains around 4000 adolescent girls / women in tailoring. At the end of the training, successful candidates receive certificates, which make them professionally and commercially acceptable in the market. Every successful trainee is provided a sewing machine to enable her to start working and earning. Nearly three-fourths of such women secure placement in the private sector garment factories. The feedback from beneficiaries indicates that more than 60 percent of trained women are employed full time. More than 30 percent are partially engaged. The social stature of these women, within and outside their families, too has now improved in keeping with their newly acquired economic status.

The above BMP initiatives are marked by four distinguishing features: (i) an analytical & need-based approach; (ii) people-centric governance; (iii) influence on urban poor; and (iv) institutionalization of the NIRANTARA initiatives. These moves by the BMP to seek customer feedback on its services generate responsiveness in administration and bring in directional changes towards people-friendly governance. The present case study offers the following lessons: (i) BMP needs to have an "Urban Poor Action Plan & Budget" as a separate entity under its annual planning and budget programmes; (ii) lack of continuity at the helm, adversely affects the sustenance of BMP's programmes and their institutionalization; (iii) there is a need to fix service delivery performance standards and judge senior managers in terms of service performance; (iv) there is a need to set up a permanent secretariat for NIRANTARA; and (v) the successful implementation of the BMP's improvement programs greatly depends on consultation with the community and partnership with NGOs, voluntary organizations and corporate bodies.

The future initiatives of the BMP are broadly: (i) sustaining the momentum created by NIRANTARA; (ii) enhancing facilities for community consultation, involvement and beneficiary feedback; (iii) creating a platform for BMP officials, NGOs & professionals to jointly select, prioritize and analyze projects for enhancing municipal services delivery; (iv) developing a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS); and (v) preparing Annual Action Plans from PRS linked to budgets; (vi) establishing information kiosks for transparency and accountability in the governance system ; and (vii) training more BMP officers in management techniques involving Bench Marking & Continuous Improvement so that, besides improving service delivery within BMP, they will also extend their expertise to other municipalities in the BUA.

There is a scope for replication of these initiatives, by other ULBs. Cities elsewhere could draw upon some of the approaches evolved under NIRANTARA to improve the delivery of their civic services. These include: (a) adoption of the NIRANTARA Management Model involving working & steering committees; (b) capacity building of ULBs, especially in

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benchmarking and continuous improvement, by external agencies; (c) shift in approach of ULBs from traditional planning to a process involving people, corporate bodies, NGOs, voluntary institutions and residents' associations; (d) provision of separate budget and funding for urban poverty alleviation programmes; (e) eliciting citizens' feedback, through annual report cards on services; and (f) empowerment of women & adolescent girls through demand-responsive vocational training.