

Implementation of Basic Services Programme: A Case Study of Andhra Pradesh

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SINCE INDEPENDENCE the Government of India has been intervening positively in redesigning of the socio-economic processes to accomplish the national goals. Many policies and programmes were initiated to protect the interests of the weaker sections, particularly the poor. In order to improve the quality of life of the poor, Indian Government has initiated a number of welfare schemes. These programmes and schemes have achieved different degrees of success in realising the policy goals. Though formulated with laudable objectives, many of these schemes suffered from poor implementation. A study of their implementation would make it clear that apart from effective planning, sustainability of any policy depends on many factors, such as financial viability, effective administrative network, motivation of the public officials involved and above all a positive response from the community, especially from the intended beneficiaries. The sustainability of urban poverty alleviation programmes is not an exception to this general pattern.

INDIAN URBAN SCENARIO

Urbanisation has been taking place at a very rapid pace in India, owing to a multitude of factors, such as industrialisation, development of trade, centralisation of administration and growing educational and employment opportunities. Among different sections of people who migrate to towns and cities, a sizeable section belongs to the lower rungs of socio-economic order. According to the official estimates, only one-fifth of the urban population lived below the poverty line in 1987-88.¹ The Expert Committee constituted by the Planning Commission, however, placed the figure at as high as 40 per cent of the urban population in 1987-88.² Many among them are migrants from the villages, who have come in search of greener pastures of urban life. Being poor, they try to find some space in already existing slums or create new ones by settling down in unoccupied lands.

¹Quoted in Om Prakash Mathur, *The State of India's Urban Poverty*, A Study Report by National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, New Delhi, 1993, p.125.

²Government of India, *Prime Minister's Integrated Urban Poverty Eradication Programme Guidelines*, New Delhi, 1993, p.1.

The slums so formed, are normally characterised by inadequate or total absence of basic amenities. The government itself admits that 90 per cent of the people living in the slums depend on public taps or bore wells for water supply and almost half of them live in *kutchra* or semi-*pucca* dwellings. In the slums, only 15 per cent have private toilets and 21 per cent have access to the community toilets. As many as 61 per cent of the slum dwellers use open spaces for personal sanitation.³ Most inhabitants are illiterates and almost two-third of the working population living in the slums are semi-skilled. Owing to congestion and pollution, the slum community, especially the women and the children, are exposed to various kinds of health hazards. Although, all people living in the slums suffer from different handicaps, the women and children suffer more than others. Apart from being the victims of exploitation at work, these women have to confront various other problems peculiar to the slum environment, viz., inadequate water supply, sanitation and poor health facilities. Such slums without adequate living environment become the breeding grounds for social tensions.

Realising the magnitude of problems affecting the slum communities, the Government of India initiated several programmes to improve the living conditions of the slum communities. Mention may be made here of Urban Community Development Programme (UCD), Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums (EIUS), Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT), Nehru Rozgar Yozana (NRY), Low-Cost Sanitation (LCS), Self-Employment Programme for Urban Poor (SEPUP), Minimum Needs Programme (MNP), Urban Basic Services Programme (UBS) and Urban Basic Services for Poor Programme (UBSP).

BASIC SERVICES PROGRAMME : DISTINCT FEATURES

The UBS programme, initiated during the Eighth Plan period with the assistance of UNICEF, is a unique urban poverty alleviation scheme. It is a multi-dimensional and community-oriented scheme involving Central and state governments, local bodies, UNICEF and the community. The programme is based on seven guiding principles, namely, child and woman focus, community involvement, cost-effectiveness, convergence, full coverage, continuity and commitment of actors. In place of the conventional sectoral approach, UBS speaks of coordinating and converging the efforts of various development departments, agencies and organisations for meeting the challenge of urban poverty. The project envisages cost-effective and appropriate locally available technologies.

The UBS programme aims at improving and upgrading the quality of life of urban poor, especially the women and the children who are the most vulnerable sections among them. Basically, UBS is a need-based strategy centred on consultation and partnership between urban poor and the local bodies for meeting the common needs, like education, health-care, water supply, sanitation, waste

³For more details see, Government of India, *Report of the Task Force on Housing and Urban Development*, 1983; and *The Report of the National Commission on Urbanisation*, 1988.

disposal, supplementary nutrition, income generation, etc. Starting from the stage of identifying the needs of the neighbourhood to the stage of implementing the planned programmes, the UBS lays stress on community participation and community management. It expects the neighbourhood communities to take active part in decision-making. The communities should take the responsibility to implement the programme activities, and bear a part of the project costs through community contributions. These principles are expected to be realised through neighbourhood committees (NHCs), constituted by the slum communities either through elections or through consensus.

The UBS programme, initially conceived as a plan project, was implemented in 168 towns in 37 districts in the country. Realising the potentialities of the UBS approach, the National Commission on Urbanisation (NCU) recommended universalisation of the UBS programme. Accordingly, in the light of experiences gained in implementing the UBS programme, the Ministry of Urban Affairs and Employment revised the scheme as 'Urban Basic Services for the Poor' (UBSP) programme. The new scheme, included as a part of the Eighth Plan, covers 11.25 lakh urban poor or 2.25 lakh urban poor families in 296 towns in India.

UBS AND UBSP STRATEGIES IN ANDHRA PRADESH

The urban basic services programmes (UBS and UBSP) have provided many benefits to the neighbourhood communities. These programmes are now being implemented in 15 states. Of all the states, the basic services programme has acquired certain distinct status in Andhra Pradesh. It was the first state in India which took the decision to constitute the NHCs with women members. It is claimed that Andhra Pradesh ensured a high level of community participation in the programme implementation. Moreover, it is the first state in the country that took the initiatives to municipalise and universalise the basic services programme. In view of these distinctions, a study of the experiences of UBS and UBSP programmes in the state would be of some relevance to the policy-makers and planners, urban managers as well as all those involved in implementing the urban poverty alleviation programmes in the country.

In Andhra Pradesh 17.8 million, constituting about 27 per cent of the total population, live in the urban areas. Of them 30 per cent live below the poverty line. A majority of them, who live in the slums, do not have access to the basic services. According to official estimates, only 52 per cent of the urban population has access to safe drinking water and a mere 11 per cent to sanitation facilities.⁴ Rapid urbanisation is likely to accentuate the problem of scarcity of the basic services for urban poor in the years to come. Hence, the Government of Andhra Pradesh took keen interest in implementing the basic services programme for urban poor.

In Andhra Pradesh the UBS programme was initiated in 16 towns in 1986. In the Eighth Plan, 10 towns were selected for implementing the revised UBSP

⁴NIUA, *India's Urban Profile*, New Delhi, National Institute of Urban Affairs, 1991.

programme. In addition to them, UNICEF has been funding the demonstration projects in three towns. As such, the basic services programme is being implemented in 29 towns, spread over nine districts. These projects together cover around nine lakh people living in the slums. As many as 696 NHCs are constituted and nearly 6,800 RCVs are working at the grassroots. Apart from creating community assets in the form of community halls, community TVs, bore wells, drains, sewing centres, *balwadis*, etc., the projects could provide different services to the slum communities through the NHCs.⁵ A description of the specific strategies adopted in the state to implement the basic services programmes is presented in the following sections.

Neighbourhood Approach

The basic services programme is based on the principle of bottom-up planning. Different services under the projects are expected to be channelised through the NHCs constituted with the women members of the slum communities. As per the official guidelines, each slum is divided into small neighbourhood groups of about 30 to 40 households. Each neighbourhood group is represented by an RCV chosen by the members of the group. All such RCVs of the slum constitute an NHC. One among them is elected or identified through consensus as the convenor. In Andhra Pradesh, the project staff tried different methods to constitute the NHCs. At first they familiarised themselves with local conditions, and then established contacts with active members in the slums. Through them, the project functionaries approached the slum and explained to them about the programme and benefits that it would bring to their neighbourhoods. In some towns, the ward councillors and the local organisations were involved in the constitution of the NHCs.

The RCVs along with other literate members of the community conduct the base-line survey and identify the basic felt-needs. In the committee meetings they discuss the problems of the locality, and after taking into consideration the availability of resources they prioritise the needs. Keeping in view the resources as well as the immediate felt-needs, the NHC prepares Action Plan, also called "Mini Plan", for the neighbourhood. Integrating all such mini plans, the project staff prepare a draft Action Plan for the town as a whole. This plan is submitted to the district coordinator, state government and UNICEF. Once approved, in consultation with the project functionaries, the NHCs take the responsibility of executing the plans by ensuring active participation of the neighbourhood communities in all activities.

Recruitment of Development Personnel

The neighbourhood strategy works if only the slum communities are properly oriented and trained towards the programme goals. Conventional bureaucracy cannot effectively perform these tasks, as it cannot see things beyond rules and regulations. The successful implementation of the programmes, therefore, requires

⁵D. Ravindra Prasad and H. Srikanth, *UBSP in Andhra Pradesh: A Study of Community Response to the Programme Implementation*, RCUES, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1994. (Mimeograph)

development oriented administrative personnel who can motivate, guide and inspire the slum communities to participate in planning and implementation of the development plans. For this purpose, the state government recruited community Organisers (COs) in UBS towns and their counterparts, assistant project officers (APOs) in the UBSP towns. Though nomenclature is different, their functions, roles and responsibilities are the same. They were recruited through interviews by the District Selection Boards consisting of district collector, joint collector, assistant district coordinators (ADCs), and headquarters' municipal commissioners. A degree in social work or home science was prescribed as the minimum educational qualification for the post of COs / APOs. In some districts, candidates with Social Science background were also recruited as the COs/APOs. It is interesting to note that nearly 40 per cent of the project staff (COs/APOs) are women and one-half of them are post-graduates. Almost all of them were below twenty-five years of age at the time of recruitment. Immediately, after their recruitment, they were given induction training by the Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies, Osmania University (RCUES), Hyderabad. In the Regional Centre apart from getting familiarised with the aims, goals, objectives and strategies of the basic services programme, they received orientation in different subjects, such as community health, adult literacy, *balwadis*, leadership skills, etc. Being young, educated and dynamic, the project staff could be tuned to work in a non-bureaucratic way. Their initiative, motivation and commitment, coupled with regular orientation and training played a significant role in implementing the basic services programme effectively in Andhra Pradesh.

Involvement of Municipalities

In view of multiple activities that they shoulder, the basic services programme could not be entrusted to any single department like education or health. At the same time, it is not possible to create a separate administrative machinery for the implementation of the programme owing to financial and administrative constraints. The programme implementation, therefore, was entrusted to the municipalities which perform similar functions in the towns. Accordingly, the UBS/UBSP units were started in the municipal offices, and municipal commissioners were given the overall responsibility of implementing the programme in the towns. He is to guide and supervise the progress of the project implementation. In those towns where there are no project officers (POs) and deputy project officers (DPOs), the municipal commissioners act as POs also. The municipal chairman is designated as the chairman of the Town Level Management Committee (TLMC), which monitors the progress of the projects periodically. The COs, DPOs and POs have to work under the overall charge of the commissioners and the chairmen, and take necessary instructions and guidance from them. In order to make the municipalities active partners in the UBS programme, the state government made it obligatory on the part of the municipalities to bear 20 per cent of the project costs. This stipulation, however, was absent during the UBSP phase.

Convergence

Convergence is one of the cardinal principles of the basic services programme.

The funds allocated are so limited that projects cannot provide all basic services to the community with these funds alone. It neither has an independent administrative machinery, nor sufficient trained personnel to undertake all activities. Yet the UBSP aims to provide basic services to the slum communities through convergence of material, financial and human resources of different governmental and non-governmental bodies. The projects seek to converge different welfare schemes for urban poor and ensure maximum benefits to the slum communities. The sustainability of the programme, to a considerable extent, depends on the initiative and capabilities of the UBSP functionaries to forge convergence at different levels. The project staff take the lead at town level, and the Joint Collectors and ADCs play key-roles in ensuring convergence at district level. In Andhra Pradesh, apart from associating with NRY, EIUS, ICDS programmes, efforts are being made to cover the services of different institutions, like Non-conventional Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh (NEDCAP), District Public Relations Officer (DPRO), District Medical and Health Officer (DM&HO), etc.

Involvement of UNICEF and RCUES

UNICEF has been a prime-mover of the UBS philosophy in India. When the UBS programme was initiated during the Eighth Plan, UNICEF contributed 40 per cent of the programme expenditure for the initial five years. Over and above this commitment, UNICEF extended support to capacity building and communication efforts. It provided vehicles, publicity materials, TVs, and medicines essential for the projects. Recognising the significance of human resource development, UNICEF provided necessary resources to impart training to the project functionaries. The Government of India and UNICEF identified a few training institutions, and strengthened them by providing material and staff support. In Andhra Pradesh, the RCUES conducted many training programmes, both for the project staff and the grassroot level workers. The government and UNICEF officials and the RCUES staff used to visit the project towns, and guided the implementation of the programme. During the initial years, when the basic services strategy was yet to take roots in Andhra Pradesh, active association and involvement of UNICEF and the RCUES provided the much needed support and inspiration to the staff and to the community workers.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

The strategies adopted in Andhra Pradesh for implementing the basic services programme are indeed creative, and by and large they proved to be effective strategy for urban poverty alleviation. The implementation of the project is, however, not always smooth. It was beset with many obstacles at every juncture. If the project has to sustain, then one should not ignore the problems encountered in planning and implementing the programme. It was, therefore, essential to examine the problems, like neighbourhood politics, obstacles to municipalisation, financial constraints, problems of convergence, etc., affecting the project implementation and sustainability.

Problems at Neighbourhood Level

The extent of services that the neighbourhoods receive under the basic services programme, to a considerable extent, depends on the response of the slum communities towards the programme. The project staff and other functionaries might try to make every slum an ideal neighbourhood, but their attempts may not bear fruit if the NHCs fail to support their efforts. The NHCs have their own dynamics and their functioning depends on different factors, such as personal abilities of the convenors, dynamism of the RCVs, relations between the convenors and the RCVs, awareness and social commitment of the slum communities, and on the nature of interactions between the NHCs and the neighbourhood community as a whole. Factors like personal rivalries, struggle for power, mutual suspicion, jealousy, etc., are potent enough to weaken the ideal neighbourhoods also. The neighbourhoods which have effective leadership, social cohesion, local support and a sense of social responsibility, can evolve as ideal neighbourhoods capable of implementing the programme most effectively. But in those neighbourhoods, where the committee members are either weak or corrupt; the community is divided on parochial lines; and the conscious community support to the NHCs is absent, there the NHCs fail to discharge their functions.⁶

Personnel Problems

The project staff, during the first few years, worked hard without bothering much about their salary and service conditions. Though they were all graduates and post-graduates, the COs in the UBS towns were paid at par with the LDCs in the municipalities. There were no rules guiding their service matters, relating leave, allowances, etc. Yet, job security being their utmost concern, the COs did not get worried about these problems. But after the state government assured them that the staff would be absorbed by the municipalities in the event of scrapping the UBS programme in the state, the COs began to think about service conditions and future prospects. They started feeling that their educational qualifications have not been taken into consideration while fixing the scales of pay. They began to compare themselves with Urban Community Development (UCD) staff engaged in similar kinds of functions in the corporation cities. Added to this, promotion of a few COs as DPOs and POs, pending framing of service rules led to heart burning. Some COs even went to the court protesting against the promotion policy of the state government.

With an intention to get their problems solved, the COs formed a 'UBS Employees Welfare Association' in 1990. The association represented their grievances to the government, and requested it to formulate service rules and create promotional channels for the project staff. The association, however, failed to articulate clearly the aspirations of its members owing to factionalism within. Because of the absence of effective representative body, some COs started using unofficial channels to get personal benefits at the cost of others. On its part, the

⁶D. Ravindra Prasad and H. Srikanth, *Poverty Alleviation Through Participation*, RCUES, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1993. (Mimeograph).

