

COMMUNITY MANAGED TOILETS, TIRUCHIRAPPALLI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (TMC)

• Background

Open defecation continues to be a major sanitation and health challenge with more than 53 per cent of Indian households resorting to open defecation at the time of Census 2011. The National Urban Sanitation Policy launched in 2008 advocates a multi-pronged approach to effectively tackle and eliminate this scourge in a time-bound manner. This case profiles the efforts of **Tiruchirappalli Municipal Corporation (TMC)** to strengthen O&M sustainability of public toilets by leveraging the capacities of community based organizations.

Major beneficiaries of the community managed toilet systems were the urban poor living in slum pockets with lack of access to individual toilets. At Census 2011, the city had a sizeable slum population of 1.6 lakh that constituted 22% of population living across 286 slum pockets. To address the needs of these slum communities, an area based approach was adopted for provisioning of toilet services.

• Location, Date

Tiruchirappalli also called as Trichy or Tiruchi (2012-13)

• Areas

Urban (Slums)

• Stage/Scale

Project

• Objective of the assignment

The project focused on addressing the O&M challenge with the following objectives laid out by TMC:

- Stop the practice of Open Defecation in the slums
- Motivate the slum dwellers to use the community toilets
- Train the slum dwellers to manage their community toilets
- Improve management of toilets and provide high quality service.
- Provide for cost effective provisioning of services
- Link service delivery with awareness creation, women empowerment and employment generation
- Prohibit inhuman practice of manual scavenging

• What was done

- Strengthening of O&M sustainability of public toilets by leveraging the capacities of community based organizations.
- TMC identifies user groups and demarcates area for usage of each Community Toilet. The business model adopted by TMC seeks to improve service levels while incorporating aspects of gender balance, women empowerment, employment generation, and heightened awareness of sanitation and hygiene among the public. The

idea of Community-managed Toilets sought to address O&M challenges through involvement of Local Self Help Groups (SHGs) in management of toilets. Originally mooted by Gramaalaya, a local NGO, the idea involved combining use of SHGs in maintenance while involving the local community through effective door-to-door awareness campaigns. As the awareness campaigns gathered momentum, many SHGs showed willingness to operate and maintain community toilets as pay-and-use toilets. While the TMC provided land for construction, Gramaalaya with help of WaterAid (an international NGO) undertook construction of toilets in 8 slum areas including a toilet in Karuvapettai exclusively for children. SHGs were involved in O&M of these toilets. When this initial project was successful, TMC decided to undertake a phased transfer of O&M of TMC's toilets to the SHGs. Gramaalaya, SEVAI and SCOPE were the first group of NGOs that assisted SHGs in undertaking the activity. Since then TMC has scaled up support and mobilisation of community for managing all its public toilets.

• Impact

Trichy has a total of 385 toilets with 4,643 seats and 431 bathrooms. Of this, 148 toilets are managed by the SHGs. 61 of these are managed by WAVE federation supported by Gramaalaya, 28 by SCOPE and 54 by the remaining SHGs.

• Challenges and Issues

- **Keeping SHGs involved and engaged:** Keeping the SHGs and Sanitation Health and Education Team (SHE) teams motivated and engaged is a key challenge for sustaining the initiative. As the first line service providers, it is critical that they remain committed to their tasks envisaged. While TMC seeks to achieve financial accountability through proper monitoring and audit of accounts, there have been instances where SHG managed toilets have not been maintained well and this may need to be addressed by proactive monitoring, adequate penal provision and periodic third-party inspection.
- **Continued user engagement and financial sustainability:** Handling the mind-set of the slum population to shift to pay and use toilets from TMC managed free toilets was initially a big challenge. The challenge for the SHGs as well as TMC will be to work with the slum community to continuously make the users aware of the health and hygiene impacts to ensure patronage and avoid communities slipping back into open defecation.
- **Continued focus on O&M:** TMC's plans to improve accountability for O&M through longer-term contracts and regular monitoring are steps in the right direction. TMC should also ensure that these facilities are equipped with provision of round-the-clock water supply and electricity.
- **Financial sustainability of toilets with lesser users:** It is possible that some of the toilets especially in areas with limited number of users; user charges alone may not suffice to meet the costs of operations. A WaterAid study suggests that viability will require patronage by over 500 users. It may therefore be necessary for TMC to review the financial status of these facilities from time to time, to ensure proper upkeep.
- **Accountability and transitioning challenges:** In some cases, the facilities faced protests from sweeper communities (who were responsible for maintenance of toilets and adjoining areas) with SHE teams taking over their role. Considering that the remaining toilets are expected to be handed over to the SHGs, it is important to ensure smooth transitioning arrangements

• Innovation

- From a social empowerment perspective, the Community management toilets owe its success to the role of SHGs. The project has managed to leverage on the support extended by Government of Tamil Nadu to SHGs. It has been able to improve the employment opportunities for the weaker sections especially women, mitigate the socio-cultural barriers to women empowerment, and helped in providing them skills.
- From a sanitation perspective, the community toilets have helped improve health indicators for the city. A study conducted by WaterAid found that the incidence of diseases like diarrhoea among children fell from 73% to 10% and among adults from 10% to 2%. Conversion of dry pit latrines into modern flush toilets and eradication of manual scavenging have been other benefits of the program.
- From a financial standpoint, the project has a higher economic return vis-a-vis the traditional TMC managed toilets driven by the rationalization of expenditure. The proper monitoring of the toilets ensures that the toilets are protected against physical damages which will bring down life cycle cost of the toilets. The fiscal discipline of the service model through rationalization of cost will ensure financial sustainability. It will also drive use of latest technology and proper management.

• Lessons learnt

TMC's painstaking efforts in collaboration with local NGOs are beginning to deliver positive outcomes as the city seeks to achieve ODF status in all its slums by 2015. TMC's focus on leveraging support of Self-Help Groups to build local ownership and involvement of local community in addressing the challenge of universal sanitation coverage is noteworthy and offers many lessons for replication:

- **Involvement of Community (especially women) is very critical to address the scourge of open defecation:** Sanitation improvements in Tiruchirapalli reflect the fact that the key to the success of such initiatives is the involvement of communities, especially women. The organisation of Women's SHGs with access to credit facilities empowered them to manage their own toilet units resulting in improved cleanliness compared to those managed by the municipality.
- **Willingness of communities to pay for better sanitation facilities:** Trichy had taken an approach to adopt user charges in its toilets. As seen from specific experience in few of the toilets, it appears that the SHGs could sustainably manage the toilets with user charges. While this may not be the case in all contexts, as is also pointed in the case in low use locations, it nevertheless reinforces that users do not mind paying when facilities are maintained well. Pro-active role of the ULB: Although the local management was being handled by SHGs who were being supported by NGOs, TMC has progressively played a more pro-active facilitating role towards ensuring systematic and city-wide scale-up. In due course, it may also become necessary for TMC to build rigor in contractual obligations of both the NGOs and SHGs to ensure consistency and standardisation of services.
- **Leveraging scale-up opportunities:** As discussed earlier TMC is already exploring the extension of the SHG approach to some of the other areas of service delivery including maintenance of parks, municipal properties etc. It is also exploring potential for additional revenue generation options including advertising billboards at toilet complexes.

- **Support for skill development:** Trichy's experience shows that presence of active and capable NGOs helps in skilling and providing a bridge between the ULB and community. In this regard, it may be necessary for ULBs to explore potential partnerships for bridging gaps in sanitation.

• Financials

The TMC along with WaterAid funded the program initially with the help of multiple donor agencies like Gramalaya, SEVAI and SCOPE who were the first of the local NGOs to offer aid in construction of community toilets. The aim was to make the project self-sustainable with the help of SHGs in the area.

• Economic sustainability/Revenue Model

- SHE Team fixed the user charges on per-use basis and monthly card basis. Each SHE Team opens a bank account for depositing funds collected from the community toilet. The SHG members working as caretaker are responsible for collecting user charges. The monthly cash collections are deposited by SHE Teams in a common bank account and the financial statements are presented at monthly SHE Team meetings. After deducting expenses, profits are deposited in a common fund, which is used for awareness generation activities, and execution of other works.
- User charges are the source of income from the community toilets. The user charges charged range between INR 1 to INR 2 per use for adults and INR 15 to INR 30 per month per user (in case of monthly card system). The major expenditure heads were towards electricity charges, cleaning materials and salaries. The CMTs are run on reasonable profits. On an average, the profitability is high at 15 per cent of the total income.



• Implementer Contact Persons

- Tiruchirappalli Municipal Corporation (TMC)
<http://www.trichycorporation.gov.in/>
- WaterAid
<http://www.wateraid.org/>

• Sources and References

- National Institute of Urban Services. (2015). Compendium of Good Practices: Urban Water Supply and Sanitation in Indian Cities. n.a.: ICRA Management Consulting Service Limited.