

SUVIDHA - URBAN HYGIENE & SANITATION COMMUNITY CENTRE

- **Background**

Around 6.3 million people in Mumbai – 54% of the population – live in one of 2,000 slums. Just under half of Mumbai's slums are non-notified, which means that they do not have access to city services such as connections to water supplies. Without legal connections to water supplies, many residents are forced to illegally tap into city water pipes, which can compromise the safety of the water supply. Many people in Mumbai's slums also face problems in accessing potable water because of contamination, low pressure, irregular supply and high access costs.

A shared water connection is typical; just 5% of households have private water connections. Just one in five has access to a toilet that is not shared with other households. Residents of these slums are essentially deprived of their fundamental human rights to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation.

There is an urgent need for innovative solutions that work at scale to address the challenges of rapid urbanization in India, particularly for the less privileged sections of society. Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) unveiled a first-of-its-kind urban water, hygiene and sanitation community centre in Azad Nagar, Ghatkopar, one of the largest slums in Mumbai. The centre, named Suvidha, is a purpose-built, sustainable community centre which addresses the hygiene needs of low income urban households who face severe challenges due to lack of infrastructure and facilities. The centre provides toilets that flush, handwashing facilities with soap, separate station for washing feet showers, separate children-friendly toilets, safe drinking water state-of-the-art laundry operations at an affordable cost. There is even a water recycling plant where the greywater from laundry and washrooms is processed for use in the toilets.

- **Location, Date**

Azad Nagar, Mumbai, 2016

- **Areas**

Urban

- **Stage/Scale**



Pilot Project: The Suvidha Centre, which is located in one of Mumbai's most challenging slums, is a holistic approach to the issues of poor personal hygiene, lack of laundry facilities, lack of safe drinking water and poor sanitation. The community centre provides WASH services at significantly lower costs than market rates. The Centre also promotes a safe and welcoming environment for everyone.

A secure and safe children's play area has been built on the roof and there are separate entrances for women and girls, which can be accessed at night. The Suvidha Centre has been designed with careful consideration of the environmental impact of water use. The

design is based on a circular economy approach to water using innovative technology to harvest rainwater from the roof and recycle water from showers, handwashing facilities and laundry to provide flushing toilets. The centre was built in 2016 with HUL's partners: The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and Pratha Samajik Sanstha, a community-based organisation.

- **Objective of the assignment**

Suvidha is a unique community initiative that aims to address the key challenge of providing people with easy and affordable access to quality hygiene and sanitation facilities in a sustainable manner.

- **What was done**

This pilot project was set up in 2016 and HUL believes that this is just the start and something of a bold experiment for us as a company. It believes that tackling the WASH challenge will not only save lives but it will also create market opportunities. It is helping the organisation to better understand how to grow their business whilst increasing our positive social impact and reducing their environmental impact.

- **Impact**

Suvidha will cater to over 1,500 people living in the area.

- **Challenges and Issues**

External factors included inclement weather that contributed to delays. Festival seasons meant interruptions to scheduled plans due to fewer working days or the absence of local labour. Working in an area without planned infrastructure like water and electricity was a major challenge. There were many unknowns, from high tension wires that run above slums to poor soil quality near the ocean on reclaimed land.

- **Innovation**

- The project was devised, developed and built in close consultation with the local community. It is a community centre that meets real needs, catering for over 1,500 people. It is a market-based solution that is designed to be affordable and replicable.
- The Suvidha Centre considers the environmental impact of water. Through innovative design, it uses a closed-loop approach to re-use water. Water recycling is an integral part of the design of the Centre, from harvesting rainwater from the roof, through to treating and re-using 'grey' water from showers and laundry to flush the toilets.
- Suvidha (which means 'facility' in Hindi) uses circular economy principles to reduce water use. Fresh water is first used for brushing teeth, bathing, handwashing and laundry. The waste water from these activities becomes the input for flushing toilets. This will help save an estimated ten million litres of water per annum.

- **Lessons learnt**

- **Co-Create to Innovate**

The whole process of developing a new business model had to be as consultative as possible. HUL began with the end users. This was vital to ensure the whole approach was going to be useful. Co-creation with end-users in the community helped make it a success. Having an inclusive process also helped with buy-in from local stakeholders and impacts

a sense of ownership. Ultimately, getting all these insights from a wide range of different stakeholders – including end-users, regulators and other companies – helped come up with a more resilient model.

- **Partner to Realise the Opportunities**

Unilever is not in the construction business, nor are they architects, planning specialists, plumbers or carpenters. But the organisation needed all these skills and more to build the Suvidha Centre. HUL had to ask or help and draw on specialist skills and learnt that identifying specialist subject matter experts who could understand the practical challenges and had experience delivering such projects was essential for progress. Beyond just collaboration, the company needed to enter formal partnerships to make their plans a reality. By partnering with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) they were able to tap into the skills and networks of others. These groups often have a comprehensive understanding of community needs on the ground, and can help companies to navigate cultural sensitivities and political challenges. It's essential to select the right partners based on a set of shared objectives and values.

- **Expect the unexpected**

With any project, there are always surprises. Doing something challenging and different made the surprises bigger. Being flexible and ready to adapt to an unpredictable environment helped them navigate everything that came up. Preparing for unknowns in advance helped them put together teams to overcome the barriers. Above all, the project required patience, perseverance and optimism to make it a reality.

- **Financials**

Not Available

- **Economic sustainability/Revenue Model**

Pay-per-use facilities are normal across India. For example, many households spend 20–30 rupees per day and wait for up to 60 minutes in queues at the pay per use toilets. The Suvidha Center will offer this service for 1–3 rupees per day or less than 150 rupees for a monthly family pass. Children will have free access to the toilets. Laundry facilities and safe drinking water will also be offered at a much lower cost than typical market rates.

- **Implementer Contact Persons**

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- **Sources and References**

- Company Website
- Suvidha Report