

URBAN BASIC SERVICES SCHEME: A STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE URBAN POOR-AN EVALUATION

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Proliferation of slums and urban poverty are the twin evils afflicting the urban society in India. A number of schemes were devised to alleviate the living conditions of the urban poor, but such efforts could not achieve the desired results because of sectoral approach. In the light of these earlier pit-falls, a comprehensive and integrated scheme, viz., Urban Basic Services, was launched by the Government of India in the seventh plan period, with the involvement of the UNICEF, the Central Government, the state governments and the local bodies. A three-tier planning frame with an array of activities and active community organisation was conceived in the scheme. The scheme depends heavily on voluntary community participation and on the convergence of urban development activities at the town level. The scheme, launched with laudable objectives and promises, could not achieve the anticipated results in the first part of the seventh plan period. The reasons for this are multiple and complex. In this study, an evaluation of the scheme is made, based on certain sample towns in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.

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In developing countries like India, the problems of urban areas are multi-faceted. Rapid urban growth, unrelated to the overall developmental growth, has been the main characteristic of the urbanisation process. However, the pace of urbanisation differs from country to country. What concerns the government is the pattern of the spatial distribution of urban population within the country. The concentration of population and natural resources in a few cities is the main reason for the present state of urban chaos. This has not only resulted in an unbalanced pattern of urbanisation, but has also produced 'back wash' effects, demanding immediate attention. Challenges like water scarcity, pollution, drain of natural resources, health hazards, malnutrition, proliferation of slums, urban poverty, and unemployment plague the present urban system. In the light of these problems, urban policy makers have realised, although late, the importance of evolving a composite national urban policy, involving settlement planning and social and economic development.

Urban development did not receive due attention in the planned developmental process, till the fifth five year plan. Various urban development programmes have been launched since then, viz., Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums (1972), Integrated Urban Development Programme (1974-75), Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (1979), and Low Cost Sanitation. This apart, the Government of India has sponsored urban development schemes in collaboration with international agencies like UNICEF, World Bank and ODA. But these have not been effective mainly because of their sectoral approach. Different agencies have attempted developmental tasks with no forward or backward connections.

Urban Basic Services—A New Approach

During 1981-83, UNICEF launched the UBS under the Master Plan of Operations, in agreement with the Government of India under the principle of the Programme of Cooperation. Under this programme, the UNICEF provided financial assistance to the Urban Local Bodies to undertake three different programmes under the urban basic services scheme: Urban Community Development, Low Cost Sanitation, and Small and Medium Towns Development. The activities and projects implemented during this period were essentially sectoral in approach. The funding and implementation of the scheme was managed solely by the UNICEF with no direct involvement of the Government of India. Subsequently, the Government of India thought of merging all the three programmes, implemented during this first attempt of the UNICEF, into one, and converging it with the other central and state government schemes already in operation, in order to avoid duplication and to make the scheme more effective. The scheme of Urban Basic Services (hereafter UBS) was thus evolved by merging the UCD, LCS and SMTD in the year 1985 under the 2nd M.P.O. over the period 1985-89. This scheme is now centrally sponsored like the other schemes which are in operation with the direct involvement of the Government of India, the State Government and the Local Bodies concerned.

As the UBS is a community oriented scheme, aiming at the development of the community as a whole, the importance of community participation in the implementation of the scheme was given utmost priority.

Scheme Objectives

The basic theme of the scheme is to improve the living conditions of the urban poor—in particular, women and children. In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives were formulated:

- (i) to inculcate a community spirit among the people;
- (ii) to provide primary education to women and children;
- (iii) to provide primary health and nutritional facilities to urban women and children of the low income groups, in order to improve their survival rate;
- (iv) to motivate community organisation and group action;
- (v) to impart vocational training to women of low income categories and facilitate their employment opportunities in order to improve their economic position;
- (vi) to provide basic civic facilities.

Modalities of Implementation and Machinery

The approach of the scheme is multi-disciplinary and the strategy adopted is that of convergence of the various activities. A spectrum of activities like employment generation, health, nutrition, skill development, education and training, social and economic awareness and provision of civic facilities form part of this scheme. As the

scheme, per se, does not involve much financial commitment, its integration with various ongoing developmental programmes at the town level is envisaged, to help bring about a composite over-all development.

Preparation of plans is attempted at three levels: district, town and neighbourhood.¹ The main functionaries responsible for implementing the scheme are the district coordinator, the assistant coordinator, the project officer, the community organiser and members of the neighbourhood committees.² The municipal commissioner or the executive officer is expected to supervise the implementation at the town level. The district coordinator is made responsible for the preparation of the district plan. The plan of action at the town level is prepared by the project officer, in consultation with the municipal commissioner, and with the assistance of the community organisers. The preparation of the community level plans (basti- or mini-plans) are entrusted to the neighbourhood committees. Over and above these, the actual implementation is left to the community itself.

Objectives of this Study

The purpose of this paper is

- (i) to examine the overall performance of the scheme;
- (ii) to outline the factors affecting the speedy implementation of the scheme; and
- (iii) to study the role of voluntary organisations.

The observations made in this paper are based on a field study conducted in selected towns.³

Findings of the Study

The scheme commenced in the year 1985. Initially, it was designed to cover 200 towns. On an average, each town was allocated Rs. 3.00 lakhs per year and the financial pattern is in the ratio of 40:20:20:20 for the UNICEF, the Government of India, the State Governments and the Local Bodies, respectively.

As per the guidelines of the scheme, identification of projects is the responsibility of the neighbourhood committees. This means that the formation of neighbourhood committees should be followed by the formulation of projects. The formulation of projects begins with the identification of slums. And for the identification of slums and projects, a base-line survey is a pre-requisite, and this base-line survey is to be taken up by the neighbourhood committees, with the assistance of the community organisers. By doing this, it was expected that the various projects would reflect the real needs of the community. But, this has not happened in the sample towns under study. No base-line survey was conducted to identify the slums and the real needs of the community. Slums were selected from the existing list, which was prepared a long time ago by the municipal staff. Even the different projects designed are based on the pre-conceived notions of the municipal staff and do not, necessarily, reflect the real needs of the communities. This was due to the considerable delay in the appointment of the scheme functionaries.⁴ In the absence of the UBS functionaries, the municipal staff did the preliminary work relating to the selection of the slums and the

identification of the projects which were to be undertaken under the scheme. In most of the towns, the formation of neighbourhood committees is yet to be completed.

As a result of this initial delay, the release of funds commenced only in the latter part of 1986-87. The UNICEF released its first instalment in November 1986, in all the selected towns under study, except Bhavanipatna and Kariar (in Orissa), which received it in September and June of 1987, respectively. The Government of India, on its part, released the first instalment for all the sample towns in Andhra Pradesh and Kariar in Orissa during 1987-88. For the remaining three towns in Orissa, the first instalment was released in March, 1987. On the other hand, the state government released their first instalments in March, 1987 (except in the case of Anantapur and Cuddapah towns in Andhra Pradesh). Almost all the municipalities added their due share to the fund as and when required. Delay in the release of funds hampered the pace of the implementation of the scheme. As a result, there were considerable constraints on the programmed expenditure.⁵

The absence of specific written guidelines, and the lack of clarity about the role of each functionary, are the major obstacles facing the functionaries. This apart, the concept of the UBS scheme is still not clear to the functionaries. These three issues need more attention. A number of merely oral instructions from the UNICEF put the functionaries in a dilemma of whether to follow them or not. This is because, in the present bureaucratic set-up, every guideline or clarification should be lucid and in writing. The functionaries are hesitant to carry out the instructions given orally, as they are directly answerable to the government as and when the latter seeks clarification, regarding the various aspects of the scheme. In the absence of specific guidelines, the functionaries are reluctant to take decisions at the right time, which results, inevitably, in a wastage of time and a delay in implementation.

It was observed that the project officer felt neglected and humiliated in a number of cases. This is because he has to function under the direct supervision of a municipal commissioner, and both of them are senior officers. Apart from their different backgrounds, they have status problems too. The project officers are not even provided with supporting staff. They have to depend, for everything, on the municipal commissioners, and this makes their position irksome. The roles of the project officers and the municipal commissioners are not clearly stated in the guidelines. This causes problems of coordination between these two functionaries. In the process, the functioning of the community organisers has become more complicated. They are compelled to work under two equal ranking senior officers, often uncertain about whose orders they must carry out. The commissioner is one of the members of the selection committee constituted for the selection of the community organisers, and this makes the community organisers obliged to accept the orders issued by the commissioners, although they do not belong to the municipal cadre. Contrary to this, the community organisers are placed in the lowest hierarchy of primary UBS functionaries and, hence, are subordinate even to the project officer. They find themselves in a dilemma when the commissioner expects them to carry out only his orders and not the project officer's, and vice versa. This problem did not, however, surface wherever there was no project officer. A clear and specific role demarcation for each functionary is, thus, very essential. The conflict of roles was also seen at the level of the assistant coordinator. The assistant coordinators, who are drawn from the rank of deputy collector, are not even provided with the minimum facilities, such as a

separate room with supporting staff. In a few towns, all the three primary functionaries are compelled to carry out their jobs sitting in a single room.

The Commissioners, in certain cases, are under the impression that they have no direct role to play, as a separate cell was created in the municipality for the implementation of the scheme, and, hence, they are not directly responsible for any drawbacks in the success of the scheme. This is not the situation in other centrally sponsored schemes like IDSMT, EIUS and Low Cost Sanitation, where the commissioners are made responsible for implementing the schemes.

Among the functionaries, including the municipal commissioners, the concept of UBS' is not yet clear. This is, primarily, due to the lack of experience in this field. This scheme involves working with the people, community development and community participation, particularly of the urban poor. Regular field exposure, and the sharing of experiences among all the levels of the functionaries, is vital in developing community orientation.

One of the main weaknesses observed relates to integration of this scheme with the other ongoing (centrally and/or state-sponsored) urban development schemes. In the selected towns in Andhra Pradesh, where one or more centrally or state-sponsored urban development schemes like IDSMT, EIUS, LCS, and UCD are in progress, no attempt has been made to integrate these programmes with the UBS scheme. This lacuna was not noticed in the sample towns in Orissa State as there was no other major scheme under implementation, other than the UBS.

In the implementation of the UBS programme, a wide gap was observed between the aims and the actual performance. The various types of projects recommended under the scheme can be grouped into the following five components:

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of the Component</i>	<i>Projects covered under each component</i>
1	2	3
1.	Water	Drilling of borewells, provision of hand pumps and soak pits.
2.	Health	Training for dhais, training in first-aid and oral dehydration to NHC members, supply of ventilators, distribution of vitamin tablets, and immunization.
3.	Sanitation	Low cost individual and community latrines, dust bins, construction of common platforms near borewells with soak pits, smokeless chullahs, low cost drains, street lighting and tree plantation.
4.	Education	Balwadi and adult education centres, T.V., radio and reading centres, film shows, and awareness programmes.
5.	Training	Training for the UBS functionaries, members of NHCs and housewives.

While the projects listed above are incorporated in the town action plans, the projects attempted in the towns under study are immunization, tailoring, balwadi and adult education centres, dust bins, smokeless chullahs, and awareness programmes. Only a few municipalities in Orissa could implement other additional projects, namely, low cost community halls, individual and community latrines, tubewells with platforms and hand pumps, and supply of ventilators. On the whole, it is seen that, though a number of projects were incorporated in the town action plans, implementation was restricted to only a few. For that matter, the income generating projects, which are given much importance in the town action plans with a view to improving the living conditions of the urban poor, are conspicuous by their absence. The only exception to this is the project which gives training in the field of tailoring. The reasons for the shortfalls in achieving the desired results are as follows:

- (1) Non-availability of either government or municipal land in the selected areas in the towns, because of which the municipalities are unable to undertake projects like the construction of community halls or balwadi centres. In the absence of community halls, it is very difficult for the urban local bodies to run the balwadi/adult education centres as envisaged in the guidelines. Currently, these centres are located either in the instructor's own house or in rented rooms. To pay the rent, some fee is being collected from the beneficiaries themselves, leading to a confusion among the people about the very purpose of the scheme.
- (2) Poor inter-agency coordination during the implementation of the scheme was observed. Urban local bodies are the primary agencies for the implementation of the scheme, but they also have to depend on the other departments, as the scheme is multi-sectoral. This is due to inadequate manpower as well as expertise available in the municipalities. The major departments, whose cooperation is required during the implementation of the scheme, are education industries, health, women and child welfare, public relations, industrial training institutes, youth services, revenue and horticulture. In order to seek cooperation from these departments at the district levels, the Joint Collectors are placed in charge of the overall monitoring of the scheme. But, it was observed that the municipalities are confronted with a lack of cooperation from these departments, resulting in a wastage of time.⁶
- (3) The absence of clarity relating to the service conditions, and to the continuity of the scheme after the withdrawal of the UNICEF, has created considerable confusion among the community organisers, and they are, therefore, losing interest in the implementation of the scheme. To compound the problem, the scale of pay of community organisers has been reduced from the existing scale, causing a hue and cry among them.
- (4) Political pressures and the non-involvement of men-folk during the implementation of the scheme are further reasons for the poor results. As per the guidelines, all members of the neighbourhood committees are females. There is no scope for men becoming members and it has resulted in the development of a negative attitude among the men, who will not allow their wives to participate in the scheme.
- (5) The UNICEF has imposed certain restrictions in the utilisation of its share of

financial assistance, and this has had a negative impact on the functionaries and beneficiaries. The restrictions are listed below:

- (i) restriction on appointing ayahs;
- (ii) restriction on taking accommodation on rental basis to run the balwadi and adult literacy centres, and tailoring centres;
- (iii) no provision was made to supply nutritious food to the balwadi centres;
- (iv) no provision was made for the payment of remuneration to the instructors of the sewing centres;
- (v) the fixation of a ceiling of Rs. 15,000/- on the cost of construction of community halls, and the insistence that the beneficiaries contribute one-fourth of the total cost;
- (vi) no provision was made for engaging any supporting staff to assist the functionaries in their daily official duties;
- (vii) the insistence that the urban local bodies put in their share into the scheme account simultaneously.

Only in a few cases did urban local bodies go ahead ignoring the constraints imposed on them, in order to avoid a delay in the implementation of the scheme, by providing ayahs and nutritious food (mostly bread slices) to the balwadi centres and paying remuneration to the instructors of tailoring centres. All these were done under compulsion and against the accepted norms of the scheme.

- (5) A lack of regular and effective review meetings at the district and town levels to monitor the implementation of the scheme was observed.
- (6) The involvement of voluntary agencies was not as envisaged in the guidelines. Wherever voluntary agencies are involved, good results have been noticed. In a few cases, the functionaries themselves, being the members of voluntary organisations like Rotary and Lion's Club, could mobilise the support of these voluntary organisations in organising training camps on literacy, health and income generation aspects. Except for these stray instances, not much effort was made to involve voluntary, and other such allied, agencies, in the implementation of the scheme. Hence, this is an area which needs greater attention, as participation of voluntary organisations is one method of getting people's participation in the development programmes.

Suggested Remedial Measures

In the light of certain weaknesses observed, the following suggestions are made to strengthen the scheme:

- (1) Convergence is the basic principle of the scheme. In the towns, wherever other development programmes are in progress, they can be integrated with the Urban Basic Services Scheme in order to avoid duplication and help achieve a total perspective of development on a target population.

- (2) Before launching the scheme, identification of needs is a pre-requisite. The specific requirements of the people, in the light of services available in their localities, needs to be taken into consideration. For this, a base-line survey has to be undertaken. And if the projects are formulated, based on the survey, they will reflect the 'felt needs' of the people. In most of the community development programmes, this effort of conducting a base-line survey by the neighbourhood committees, prior to the finalisation of the projects, is lacking. This activity has to be made compulsory.
- (3) A package of income-generating activities for women of low income groups could be designed under the scheme, on the lines of DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Area Programme). Feeble attempts have been made in this direction, mainly in the form of training in *papad* making and knitting. Imparting training alone will not automatically improve the living conditions of women of the low income group. Training in both manufacturing and marketing of various household goods like candles, chillies or turmeric, *sambar* powders, fryums, soap, nut powder, leaf plates, pickles, bags, stationery items like writing-pads and note-books, simple food stuffs, must be imparted simultaneously. Similarly, in the case of different occupational groups like Medara, training in the household manufacturing of various types of decorative items, made of bamboo and cane, can be imparted, in view of the large demand for such items in different parts of the country. Additional income for the low income groups could be created by such efforts and would help in the improvement of living conditions. To achieve this, apart from training and marketing, seed money must also be provided. The involvement of various agencies like public financial agencies, departments of marketing and co-operatives, industrial training institutes, and departments of small scale industries, thus, becomes necessary in this process.
- (4) The present practice of constituting and holding separate monitoring meetings, to review different urban development schemes individually, could be replaced with a comprehensive committee for all the schemes, with the concerned officials and non-officials as its members. This will make it possible to hold a comprehensive sitting in order to review the progress of all the different urban schemes at one time. Not only will it help in sorting out inter-departmental problems, but will also facilitate cooperative efforts in solving the problems of the urban poor. It is advisable to hold the meetings once in three months, rather than once a month, as there would not be much progress or change in the scheme implementation in just a month.
- (5) Training programmes, and orientation on various aspects of the scheme, are to be organised for all levels of functionaries, such as the UNICEF staff, members of the voluntary agencies, community leaders, housewives, and members of the municipal council. This apart, workshops-cum-seminars need to be conducted for the higher officials at the state level, like secretaries and directors of municipal administration, in order to make them understand the theme of the scheme more clearly, and for them to know the role they are to play in the scheme.⁷
- (6) Most of the assistant coordinators and project officers feel that they had accepted the jobs either because of personal obligations or unavoidable

compulsions. To them, the new assignment is not in the least attractive from the point of view of exercising their powers. The amount of interest they have in the scheme is negligible. In the light of these aspects, and taking into account the time-bound nature of the scheme, two alternatives appear to be appropriate: (i) to motivate them by giving independent charge, with the required infrastructure facilities; or (ii) appointing persons for these positions from the municipal administration department itself. Today, these functionaries are facing a status problem and once it is solved there would be a greater impetus for their participation in the scheme.

- (7) Similarly, doubts relating to the service conditions, and the continuation of the scheme after the withdrawal of the UNICEF from its association, has created much uncertainty among the community organisers. It is a natural tendency, given the present state of unemployment. Most of the community organisers feel that if they get permanent positions and scales of pay, they can spend their time and work on this job with more commitment and involvement. Hence, there is an urgent need to clarify these doubts among the community organisers who are the vital elements for the implementation of the scheme.
- (8) Procurement of the land (municipal/government and/or private) before the finalisation of projects, is necessary in order to avoid undue delay in the implementation of the scheme. In this regard, interaction between the municipalities and the revenue department should be sound.
- (9) Provisions pertaining to the appointment of ayahs, remuneration for the instructors of the tailoring centres, and the allocation of funds towards the payment of rents for the accommodations taken to run the balwadi and adult literary centres, and tailoring centres, must be made in the scheme. This apart, supply of nutritious food to the balwadi centres must also be introduced.
- (10) The role of each functionary should be made clear in the guidelines, in order to avoid role confusion and conflicts.
- (11) With respect to the construction of the community hall, the beneficiaries need not be compelled to contribute their share of one-fourth of the total cost of construction, as they are ready to put in 'labor' as 'shrama daan' (free of cost).
- (12) There should not be many restrictions on the utilization of funds provided by any agency. The local bodies should be allowed to share the expenditure on the repairs of the vehicles, the drivers salaries, diesel or petrol costs for the vehicles under the UNICEF account, or else this will have an adverse impact on the functionaries.
- (13) In view of their catalytic nature, the voluntary organisations have a vital role to play in the scheme. Further, the scheme covers areas such as social welfare, provision of services, development of socio-economic environment around human beings by improving the degree and quality of survival, and the development of activities of women and children, which are similar to those of the voluntary agencies. Every effort should be made to motivate the voluntary agencies to involve themselves in the implementation of the scheme. Regular links must be established with these organisations at the town,

district and state levels by the functionaries, including the commissioners of the urban local bodies.

- (14) The people's participation in the scheme needs to be encouraged at all costs. Awareness programmes relating to the concept and objectives of the scheme through films, interaction with service-oriented persons, drawn mostly from mahila mandals and other related agencies, have to be organised. People's participation should be encouraged at all stages of the implementation of the scheme, from the stage of the formulation of the projects to their final evaluation.

In conclusion

The authors feel that, so far, the achievement of the objectives of the scheme has not been as expected. Yet, it is hoped that in the remaining period, the objects will be realized.

Notes

1. The district plan consists of the analysis of the urban situation on the district; selection of towns in the district; objectives to be achieved; programme activities; staff requirement and financial commitment. The plan of action is a town level plan document. The plan of action, linking all the mini-or basic-plans, is prepared. It consists of component-wise details of each activity, along with the objectives and action programmes of each implementing agency, targets to be achieved, budget allocation, and the expected outcome of each activity. The plan is prepared within the frame work of the district plan operations. The basti-plan, which is the basis for the preparation of the plan of action at the town level, reflects the problems and immediate needs of each and every household in the community, and necessitates the people's participation in the implementation of the scheme.
2. The joint collectors act as the district coordinators at the district level. The status of the assistant coordinators is equivalent to that of a deputy collector. They are on deputation from the revenue department on a full-time basis to monitor the scheme at the district level. The project officers, whose status is equivalent to that of a Block development officer, are also drawn from the revenue department on deputation. The community organisers are recruited afresh at the town level. The neighbourhood committees comprise elected volunteers, each representing 20 to 25 families.
3. The towns covered under the study are Srikakulam, Nalgonda, Suryapet, Miryalaguda, Anantapur and Cuddapah in Andhra Pradesh, and Bhavanipatna, Kariar, Junagarh and Titilagarh in Orissa.
4. In most of the towns, the community organisers were appointed in early 1987. In Kariar and Junagarh towns in Orissa State, the appointments for the position of community organisers were made only in September/October, 1987, while in Miryalaguda Municipality in Andhra Pradesh no community organiser was appointed till November, 1987. It was a similar case for the appointment of project officers.

5. By the end of December, 1987, the expenditure incurred on the scheme by the sample municipalities is as follows: Nalgonda (87%), Suryapet (82%), Miryalaguda (0%), Srikakulam (41.92%), Kariar (97%), Bhavanipatna (60%), Junagarh (71%), Titilagarh (39.47%).
6. For instance, the Kariar Municipality had been requesting the revenue department to demarcate a bit of government land in a particular locality where it proposed to construct a community hall. Noticing undue delay and poor response from the revenue department, the municipality took the initiative and started the construction of the community hall in order to avoid wasting time. The work is under progress. This is, of course, in anticipation of orders from the revenue department. The question is, how many municipalities can take such an initiative when there is poor cooperation between the municipality and other departments?
7. The Regional Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies, Hyderabad, has successfully completed the first round of training programmes for all the functionaries, covering two states, namely, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, in collaboration with the UNICEF. The reorientation programme is currently going on at the Centre.