Levelling Up:

The Challenge of Creating Inclusive Cities

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

Cities across the globe are becoming increasingly unequal, and the gap is widening between the rich and the poor in terms of incomes, and access to services, opportunities, and State institutions. As economic growth does not always translate to the common good, a critical policy objective for a country aiming to be inclusive must be to make societies cohesive. Such inclusiveness is about building a collective stake in the city's planning, resources, and sustainability. After all, people who participate make powerful change agents; they think, interpret, and choose appropriately. The act of participation builds shared values and a common purpose. This paper aims to address the challenges in building inclusiveness, in the context of the low-income communities who have been part of development projects organised by the NGO, CURE (Center for Urban and Regional Excellence).

INTRODUCTION

Unimagined urban growth is making cities both uneven and complex. This is true of most cities across the world; it is true of India. To begin with, many cities are poorly designed and thus unable to cope with unabated overcrowding. As a result, increasing numbers of people are pushed into living in slums and environmentally degraded neighbourhoods—at the intersections of growth, on one hand, and poverty, on the other. This is not

genuine urbanism. Real urbanism is about levelling up, creating cities that are "smart, people-centred and capable of integrating the tangible and the intangible aspects"[1] and where the poorest become part of the city's narrative and are able to share in its growth benefits. Sharing a city, particularly its growth effectiveness, is usually contested between those who have the power and who also control more of the urban resources, and ones with neither means nor the voice. For stakeholders engaged in development, negotiating urban equality may yet be the ultimate challenge.

Involving people, say participation practitioners, is the means by which the idea of a city is shared. Participatory processes help nurture social capital and incubate social relationships that maximise the notion of 'commons'. Despite its demonstrated importance in achieving sustainable urbanism, participation is a highly complex process. Its trilemma consists of: one, its poor conceptualisation within the public discourse and subsequent operationalisation; two, half-hearted application of its methodologies whose reasons have never been analysed; and three, its anecdotal, hard-to-quantify and therefore arguable impact evidence. Because participation is important, its concepts must be investigated to understand what is needed to apply them.

This paper explores the theories and literature on participatory processes and social capital nurturing and their application in the projects of the Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE), a development organisation based in Delhi, aimed at determining critical policy objectives that will make societies more cohesive, inclusive, and equal.

COLLECTIVE URBANISM: THEORIES ON PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

The idea of collective urbanism and the theories that untwist it emerge from three disciplines—social, economics (social capital), and planning (communicative). Various researchers who have explored the idea of community participation have focused on its: (a) essentialness, in the belief that individuals are capable of making unique contributions to decision-making[2] and that this helps build a sense of community; (b) processes, of

organisation and involvement in decision-making, that transfer power to the people;[3] (c) functionality—structures and collectives for collaboration;[4] and (d) operationalisation—dialogue, contestations and systems for consensus building.[5]

Social Theories

Arnstein was the first to elevate the question of community participation to a public discourse. She affirmed that real (as opposed to ritualistic) citizen participation could do three things: (a) create and redistribute citizen power from the haves to the have-nots; (b) deliberately include the outliers and create opportunity for them to participate in formulating public policies that directly affect them; and (c) benefit the society by producing outcomes (programmatic and reformist) that are in the broader interests of all and which reflect a collective vision.[6,7]

Arnstein used a metaphor to represent her idea of community participation: as a ladder where each rung corresponded to the degree of citizen influence in planning. At the base, she located participatory processes that were purely symbolic and manipulative, where communities were informed, consented to pre-existing plans, and were placated with temporary solutions. Up the ladder, community control was total and all decision-making was delegated to all stakeholders and meaningful partnerships emerged (See Figure 1).

Neo-theorists, while recognising the value of community participation in improving effectiveness of public programmes and investments, have argued that Arnstein's seminal work was overly simplistic and that community participation was far more complex. These researchers concluded that the depth and outcomes of engagement were influenced by at least five factors: (i) real world contexts and situations or the nature of a community, and therefore a mix and diversity of approaches and participation tools is needed (Connor, 1988); (ii) participants in these conversations—elderly or young, men or women, married or unmarried, those with or without power, those with or without place identity or a sense of community—and their attitudes, perceptions, and personalities.[8] The

jury is still out on whether place attachment promotes collective action or not. Researchers such as Manzo and Perkins[9] believe place attachment nudges the revitalisation of neighbourhoods by intensifying participation, while others, such as Kilburn and Maume,[10] are unconvinced and find that newer residents often take greater interest in community improvement activities; (iii) community's valuation of the benefits of such participation or empowerment. According to Baum,[11] a shared identity can weave people in a strong and effective social fabric—individual ideas informing the whole and generating feelings of personal and collective efficacy;[12] (iv) affordability and opportunity costs. Paradoxically, observe Kilburn and Maume,[13] poor and informal neighbourhoods who could benefit most from forming a collective are the least likely to do so when compared with affluent and formal communities due to the former's survivalist preoccupations; and (v) capacity and inclination of local governments to engage with communities.

Figure 1: Eight Rungs on the Ladder of Citizen Participation
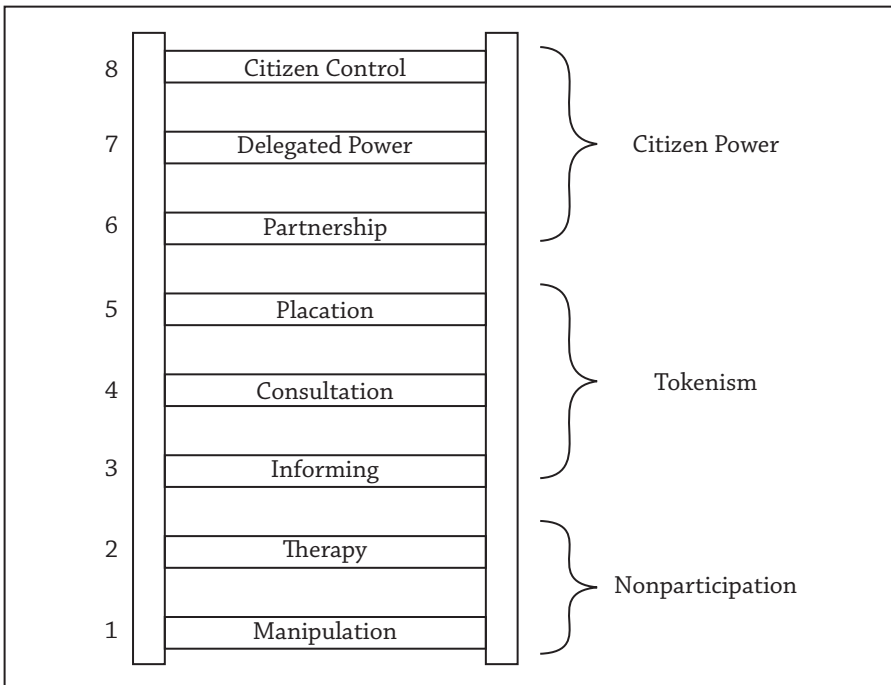
Source: Arnstein, Sherry R., 1969.

Despite the variability of opinion, there is significant agreement on four aspects. One, the definition of community participation—such as that by

Stoker[14] of all stakeholders "taking part in any of the processes of formulation, passage and implementation of public policies" or by Ndekha, Hansen, et al.[15] "a social process whereby specific groups with shared needs living in a defined geographic area actively pursue identification of their needs, take decisions and establish mechanisms to meet these needs"— extending the idea to empowerment and implementation. Two, need for participation—the belief that without enabling stakeholders to influence and control priority setting, policy-making, and resource allocations, poor communities will be left behind and not benefit from the products of development.[16]

Three, process must be genuine and designed to achieve independent citizen control and not cynical, entrusted where an idea is sold[17] or conventional, top-down and reductionist[18] or where participation is misinterpreted as consultation[19] and neither information nor power is shared. Four, empowerment—deciding together, which Wilcox's[20] says may not always transfer power from the powerful to the powerless, but still has value depending on the type of participation.[21]

Theories of Participative Planning

Two thought streams—social and communicative—inform participative planning theories. Two prominent social theorists are Giddens (Structuration Theory) and Habermas (Communicative Action Theory). Giddens theorises that people construct a sense of self through their daily interactions and their particular history. This, in turn, determines their behaviour and use of community resources. According to him, people are situated in relative positions of power, but they do choose to engage and make deliberate efforts to change the power hegemony.[22]

Habermas' theory is built around the notion of "public conversation," wherein all affected stakeholders have a voice that is heard. Healey[23] notes that because this conservation happens between two very unequal stakeholders or 'worlds'—a systems world of governments and experts and a life world of people and social existences—the systems world dominates because of its better scientific and technical knowledge. This becomes

problematic in a pluralist society where many spheres of reasoning coexist, contend with one another, and where those who 'know' are able to maximise their own interests. Habermas believes that, open debates "where people are able to freely explore their relative concerns and acknowledge competing claims", can bring the two worlds on level and promote "cultural and structural formation and transformation."

Communicative planning theorists Innes,[24] Forester,[25] Lauria and Soll[26] recognise that all forms of knowledge are socially constructed and therefore it is important to pay attention to practical local knowledge together with expert scientific and technical knowledge while planning. Participation helps in sharing of information between government and people. Communicative planning process must therefore focus on two things: one, **include**—remove all distortions that discriminate and exclude and create consensus so that real shifts in power are achieved. According to Healey,[27] these transformative efforts are never easy and involve power struggles among stakeholders which need to be addressed to produce just outcomes.[28] Two, **dislodge**—free the communication from the wider considerations of power, private and government interests that influence planning practice[29] and which are hard to displace through communicative practice.[30]

Theory of Social Capital

Social capital comprises the relationships embedded in a group. It is a complex and controversial idea with diverse interpretations—of definition, dimensions, approaches, and levels, as each researcher gives it a fresh overview. Bourdieu defined social capital as a collective of individuals, "aggregate of the actual or potential resources… linked to… a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition or…. membership in a group—which provides each of its members… the backing of the collectively-owned capital."[31] James Coleman defined it by its structure, function and outcomes, making a departure from individual outcomes to that for groups, organisations, institutions or societies: "a variety of different entities having two characteristics (social structures) in common … and they facilitate certain

actions, of actors... within the structure."[32] Robert Putnam,[33] for his part, explored the idea of social capital from the perspective of governance and built a set of indicators for measuring it.

Later researchers expanded on the notion, comparing social capital to the financial and concluding that it is: (a) investable and has future gains;[34] (b) is convertible[35] but non-trade-able;[36] and (c), requires investments of time and effort by individuals and groups.[37] Most researchers agree that: (i) social capital is based on trust, cooperation, reciprocity, social norms, attitudes and networks, formal, informal and historical;[38, 39] (ii) it can be built through regular engagement;[40] (iii) its operationalisation is context-specific depending on the nature of causal relationships and externalities; (iv) it could be gendered and embedded in the intergenerational hegemonies within a society, and could exacerbate women's disadvantages by excluding them from social networks;[41] and (v) its form and outcomes will vary based on context. Social capital is therefore hard to measure or quantify and better presented as descriptive analysis.

CHALLENGES IN PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

The review above raises several questions. First, what is a 'community' and who are its genuine representatives, particularly in the poor and slum neighbourhoods of cities, and who get excluded? Second, what tools are applicable in what contexts to get real community engagement? How does one "preserve place",[42] i.e., get communities to participate in local planning and decision-making processes so that "positively experienced bonds" are developed?[43] Third, how does one identify and build on a community's resources in development planning, enhancing acceptance of proposals and effectively implementing neighbourhood improvement programmes? Fourth, what human capabilities are needed in local governments and practitioners for building communities? Fifth, how does participative planning impact the practitioners themselves—could there be a 'participation fatigue' that causes practitioners to leapfrog over the process? This section is an attempt to answer some of these questions and draw lessons from the experiences of CURE's work with these communities, in

particular Savda Ghevra and Safeda Basti from Delhi, and in various communities of Agra. CURE, a development organisation based in New Delhi, India, has as its core strength the ability to work with urban poor communities, organising them for real participation, getting them involved, and bringing their knowledge to the process of reimagining urban design.

REIMAGINING 'COLLECTIVE PLANNING'

1. Making Place from Non-Place: What is Community?

Slums are where poor "make place out of non-place".[44] This 'locality' binds people into a relationship or community, potentially for some shared goal achievement. There is also a community of non-place, constructed from the idea of: one, self-hood of shared religion, gender, ethnicity, occupation, class, etc.; and two, the spirit of community or the sense of attachment to a place, group or idea. Place and non-place forms of community, especially where the two overlap, build value-based relationalities of 'solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust' (Frazer 2000: 76[45]). Sometimes, the two diverge although communities of place or interest and no shared identity, are still capable of generating a sense of belonging (Willmott 1986;[46] Lee and Newby 1983;[47] and Crow and Allen 1995[48]), and make the community a resource and 'a referent of their identity' (Cohen 1985: 118[49]). Occasionally, they meet heads on and split urban societies down the middle into those that belong and those striving to make place—the migrants, slum dwellers and the poor.[50] Divergence between the insiders and the outsiders, originating from the money or political power each is endowed with, promotes or restrains their abilities to choose how and where they live, and maintains the original inequities (Inclusive Cities, 2007).[51] Community building, by nurturing a sense of urbanity of place and non-place, can nudge communities, especially of the excluded, to reach a state of resilience by enhancing their adaptive strategies and skills to construct new place (and non-place) identities.[52]

> ***De-engineering for Solidarity:*** *Nine thousand families of mixed self-hood in Delhi united by their loss of place, evicted from*

their slum homes and resettled in Savda Ghevra, are making 'place from non-place' by building homes, businesses and society at the city's edge. The lack of water and sewer infrastructure here is a collective concern. The challenging experience of some families in constructing personal toilets (hollow pits pretending to be septic tanks below kerchief-sized plots, with high/recurring clean up costs and causing the groundwater underneath to be polluted), dreamed up the idea of a shared system — a cluster septic tank, networked to homes through simple sewer lines, and upended to a decentralised wastewater treatment system that would convert the black water into a useful resource for irrigating, flushing, construction, etc. The idea was affiliative. People in this mixed neighbourhood participated in the decision, the design, the construction and the maintenance action. A maintenance fund was capitalised from monthly household contributions and managed by a block operation and maintenance committee, an aggregation of street leaders. The mutuality of the need formed the basis for a value-based relation of solidarity and commitment.

Networking for Place Identity: *Safeda Basti is a small slum settlement in East Delhi. Two common threats of people here related to eviction and safety for women and young girls from sexual harassment, especially when defecating openly. The home toilet was a dream project for the women, safe, dignified and healthy. The unstated goal was the project's potential as a space formaliser. The design people agreed to invest in was a simple sewer line that dropped into the neighbourhood trunk sewer. The collaboration nourished trust, sufficient for people to jointly bank large savings and contribute a one-third cost for the system and build toilets at home. Huddling around the drawing board, the group understood the nuts and bolts of engineering and actively participated in the implementation, negotiating with the contractor and overseeing the construction.*

The cluster septic tank in Savda Ghevra or networking solution in Safeda Basti are two examples of CURE's work where value-based urbanities were nurtured, helping forge place identity, constructing a community of insiders and outsiders around a shared ideal—home owners and renters, the poor and the poorest, and men and women.

2.   The Illogic of Informality: Who is Excluded?

Even when clearly sensible, not everyone in a community may participate. Among the poor, their reluctance to participate is for three reasons: desperate poverty and need to earn, the lack of place—illegal slum and being un-propertied, and informality—no ration, voter or identity cards. Such a lack of nativeness makes their experience of space, institutions and the services they provide, asymmetric to those that possess these.[53] Other than income, deprivation, power or lack of official status, there are many unequalising social and economic processes in the society. Inequities caused by such social practices sustain because the better-off benefit from it. The last to be heard are the poorest, new migrants, minority groups, women, widows, differently-abled, elderly, irregular and informal workers, and the non-place owners. As it is, building conversations and consensus is not easy and if some do not get to speak at all, the development process can be seriously skewed. Informality thus makes the task of inclusion not only extremely challenging but also inherently contradictory, where the excluded are sought to be included within a social relationship that has been deliberately unequalled.

> **Continuum of Informality:** *Slum communities range from mostly informal to the largely formal. In its effort to get taps and toilets into homes of the poor, CURE has struggled with land illegality. On a tenure security continuum, CURE's settlements can be said to have a broad sweep. At the lowest end are the least secure, like Safeda Basti, an inner city slum on public land. Next in line are the moderately secure, such as State-developed resettlement colonies of Savda Ghevra with short-term live, work*

and inherit licences. At the top are the highly secure low-income but under-served settlements such as in cities of Agra where people have inherited occupancy rights or property titles. Conventional wisdom says that the highly insecure would be the most reluctant place makers. On the contrary, where plans respond to a collective need—e.g. home toilets in Safeda Basti, a community of mutuality that is accommodative of a community's multi-culturalism— is formed quickly and contributes (including financially) to the planning and implementation of civil works. Residents of more stable neighbourhoods are often less inclined to form collectives for meeting common goals, deeming it as the city's job.

3.   Genuine Participation: A Reality Check

Social inclusion, says Guildford (2000[54]), is about bringing the excluded in, to get them accepted and to enable them to participate fully within their communities and society. Besides place and non-place identities, many other exclusionary pressures, says Peterson (2011),[55] impact participatory projects. These include overt and covert forms of exclusion or external and internal exclusion and levels of participation. External exclusion practices are those that keep certain groups or individuals deliberately out of the decision-making processes, leaving control of participatory spaces with the powerful. Internal exclusion is less obvious. Here groups and individuals are nominally included in the deliberative spaces but get little or no opportunity for intervention (Young, 2002)[56] due to the divergence of culture/class, procedures (meeting timings, agendas, etc.) or strategy (access to information) (Parkins and Mitchell, 2005).[57]

Genuine participation is about negating the subtle and the not-so-subtle forms of exclusions. However, if participatory process, says Arnstein[58] (1969), are dissimulated and/or manipulated, and kept in the realm of information giving, consent taking and placation, which is often the case, these do not result in partnerships and a sharing of power and control. Where participation is full, Skinner[59] believes a community will adopt five

roles. They could be beneficiaries and users of services, representatives of local opinion, participants in general community activity, deliverers of the programme and long-term partners in community redevelopment. Community participation, therefore, says Skinner (1995),[60] is not just about finding a level, but also about understanding who participates, in what and for how long. Crowd pulling in the early discussions and participation in general community activities such as cleaning up is easier than sustaining the engagement through the entire value chain. Chanan (2000) notes that people and numbers who get involved in a project change across its life. Building community capacity to ensure continuity, McArthur (1998)[61] estimates, requires maybe five years.

To ensure genuine participation, the idea should be to create community organisations that help people with vastly different resources or capacities readjust their social identities and get equal opportunities to enter the discussion. Despite the best of efforts, it is hard to build collective consciousness, especially where diverse urban communities have hugely varying underpinnings—socio-cultural backgrounds, needs and aspirations, and uneven pace of social mobility. In the early stages of organisation people pick leaders who will represent majoritarian opinion. In the long-term, these leaders could morph into the new gatekeepers or resource capturers, generating fresh community tensions.

Community participation in CURE's work is designed to do three things: (a) mine local information that is respectful of individual differences; (b) support people's choices by providing information and building pathways that would help incorporate these ideas and solutions into implementation designs; and (c) identify local resources, talents and networks and build upon these to liberate the energy required for sparking local action and change.

Miscellany of Community Organisations: *Communities are viscerally mixed in their internal structure, nature and need. CURE's community groups have responded to such patchiness by clustering people around shared interests, ideas, geographies or identities. In Kuchpura, a settlement in Agra, people were organised into toilet savings groups, microenterprise groups and a*

Mughal Heritage Walk Enterprise. In addition, everyone participated in the planning, construction, operation and maintenance of a bio-remedial decentralised wastewater treatment system (DEWATS) to clean up the dirty storm water drain in their backyard that affected all. The DEWATS has transformed Kuchpura's living environment and land wealth. Its three unintended benefits have been the reduction in untreated sewage discharge into River Yamuna, a changeover from sewage-based to clean water urban farming and a water resilient community.

The youth of Nagladevjeet operate and manage a Mughal Heritage Walk for tourists to the lesser-known monuments inside their settlement. It generates incomes for the animators and several associated enterprises — the street theatre group, tea terrace owner, souvenir makers, bag makers, henna artists, among others.

Across Yamuna, five women in Ambedkar Nagar displayed entrepreneurialism, joining up to invest in and operate a water treatment plant to supply potable drinking water to their water-starved area, saving people from the more expensive, exploitative and poor quality supply regime of private operators. In other settlements, people have banded together in the short-term to fix spots, clean and reclaim public spaces/streets, and to maintain and use these for community events.

4. Negotiating Boundaries: Building on a Community's Resources

Poor communities find themselves having to negotiate for the most basic services like water, sanitation, housing, and livelihoods. Their negotiating capabilities depend on how they experience the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.[62] Negotiation, says Shrestha,[63] is a complex process that is

not about winning or losing but contesting ideas within an elaborate mosaic of social, cultural, economic and spatial arenas that in turn is influenced by five typical attributes and four pillars. The attributes comprise the: (i) actors or people, with differentiated access to resources, opportunities and capabilities to participate; (ii) practices or daily struggles to get access to livelihoods and secure basic services; (iii) institutions that define resource access and use, and public accountability by laying norms, rules and regulations; (iv) resources or material on which economic participation depends both physical (water, toilets, transport, housing) or symbolic (position, prestige, honour, status, legitimacy); and (v) discourses that enable the contestation to happen. The four pillars in this mosaic are capability, opportunity, voice and representation, and accountability. In CURE's projects, where communities are organised as strong collectives, it is easy to demand resources, opportunities and political and economic space. It is also possible to create a long and broad enough goal that is aligned with a city's vision. However, this needs community leadership with appropriate technical knowledge, negotiating skills, organisational abilities and confidence levels nurtured in the community.

Picking the right leaders is critical to participatory processes. Randle and Warren (2005) believe that community leadership must be of high standard to ensure legitimacy and that leaders must be capable of influencing others, work in partnership and have a wider worldview.[64] CURE's projects, therefore, have looked for these 'trusted' community leaders who speaks for the excluded. They become part of, and validate, every decision by actively engaging in community-city conversations, while others pursue their works. Such leaders while negotiating their entitlements are capable of accommodating the community's multi-culturalism.[65]

Revitalising Social Networks for Water Resilience: *Agra, once a water resilient city with numerous wells, ponds, tanks, a flowing river, and storm-water drains, finds itself in a deep water crisis. Increasing population served by an inadequate municipal*

system has led to indiscriminate use of ground water, damaging the area's water ecosystem. To restore the city's ground water aquifers, the traditional wisdom of people needed revival and bridges built between them and the city. CURE is capacitating communities to plan, fund and build systems at home and in the community, to conserve water, harvest and recharge rainwater and treat and reuse wastewater. It is more than just harvesting rainwater. It is about contributing to the creation of public opinion so that a resource can be augmented to the benefit of all. Local youth groups are leading conversations with people, convincing them, persuading them and creating a sense of ownership. They are also front-ending discussions with local elected representatives and with CURE on design aspects.

In other settlements, residents are discussing plans for their area's development and volunteering to fix hotspots—waste dumping areas, leaking taps and pipelines, blocked and overflowing drains, and broken toilets. They have washed and cleaned feces off streets and whitewashed the walls, reclaiming spaces for public use. They have chosen leaders who are responsible for the proper use of the recovered space. Bringing people, including the poor to the table, hearing their voices, involving them in such programmes has helped change the developmental narrative of these settlements.

5.   'Communicative Inaction': Local Government Capabilities

Participation is considered central to planning practice. Its purpose is to make the State transparent, inclusive and open. Accepted in principle by development planners, the practice is mostly tokenistic. Practice is to follow established procedures and norms or take the advice of a select group of insider experts, which, says Day,[66] is in contravention to the principles of democratic decision-making. This unequal relationship has its origin in the way the State is imagined as welfare provider, dominant and powering over

the powerless. Reimagining this engagement from unequal and top-down to shared and bottom-up is the big challenge.

Bureaucratic reluctance to engage with people is due to several factors: one, lack of expertise to engage with the communities; two, unwillingness to communicate and debate with people; three, low technical skills in new emerging technologies; and four, unwilling to be held to account. "Even where partnership structures may exist, the characteristic processes of governance—formality, outputs and quick results—often preclude genuine participation," say McArthur, et al.[67] Healey[68] concludes that local bodies are wired such that a distance is created and maintained between officials and local communities. This disconnects governments from local concerns, resulting in people-unfriendly decisions. Innes[69] calls this 'communicative inaction'.

The CURE experience suggests that this dialogue among people, governments, businesses, and other stakeholders is possible, but can be lengthy and contentious. In all CURE's projects, State approvals took significant time, requiring nimble navigation and bargaining, made possible only by an informed interlocutor. Goldstein and Butler[70] explain that this is because multiple interests of plural societies and groups compete to define the policy agenda and may pursue fixed or adversarial positions in the belief that power is finite and 'empowerment of some involves dilution of others'.[71] The easy option is to draw broad-brush policy strokes, which are then used by the government to formulate plans[72] whereas the effort should be to "reduce adversarial relationships and redress power and resource disparities among stakeholders".[73]

6.   The Paradox of Empowerment: Impact on Practitioners

Two important things happen in the process of community participation. People get empowered and people get disenchanted. Skelcher (1993) refers to this as the 'paradox of empowerment'. Truly empowered and informed communities, as CURE's sanitation projects suggest, are increasingly able to negotiate with the practitioners, changing goal posts and delaying gratification. In Savda Ghevra, people refused to build home toilets and

connect to the infrastructure till the roads dug up were reinstated to their satisfaction. Delayed implementation, too, results in disenchantment and flagging community interest, and civil society organisations find it hard to keep up the adrenalin.

URBAN INCLUSION: CHANGING THE DISCOURSE TO 'EQUISMART'

A city is not just a physical place. It is where all development challenges meet: health, education, liveability, and jobs, among others.[74] Cities also drive economic growth and so must strive for social inclusion to ensure development works for and benefits all, in particular, reaching the poorest and the excluded. Non-inclusive cities are harder to manage. If cities put their disadvantaged at the peripheries of development (physically and programmatically), the poor will find it harder to work and contributeto urban growth. On the other hand, cities themselves will need to go further (physically and programmatically) to reach settlements of the poor with services, adding to their costs.

Inclusive cities must do two things—level up, and become smart. 'Levelling up' is about equal access to all services and opportunities, which must be a city's ultimate goal. Becoming 'smart' is aspirational. It is about data wiring, analytics and innovation. Smart cities are built on ground evidence that is analysed intelligently and used for designing neighbourhoods and spaces and nudging innovation. Such ground evidence must come from the people. Where smart and equity co-exist, inclusion will be inevitable and the outcomes, sustainable. 'Equismart' (Equal and Smart) cities recognise that working with people to generate solutions is critical to making them work.

Equismart cities will integrate and mainstream people at the intersections. As a start, they will simplify and de-engineer. Simplifying is about unscrambling information and making this available to people so that they can make appropriate choices. It is also about making policies transparent—such as for slum and neighbourhood development, land uses, zoning and incentives; economic growth; and services—their norms, access pathways and public policy decision-making systems. Simplifying these will

make cities accessible to all and create the space for participatory discourse. Communities that come together will manage to innovate, descale and fit designs to their contexts. They will help disassemble mega infrastructure to smaller, decentralised, pocket-sized solutions that are aligned with the living styles. Such new thinking will churn out creative and win-win solutions for both low and high-income communities and shall connect all the dots for a comprehensive urban plan and design. In return, communities will get some explicit benefits/investments in their neighbourhoods such as new infrastructure and common spaces.

Step two in un-complicating the city will be to get rid of all obstacles (systemic, financial, legal) that thwart community-led development both for the established groups and the dispossessed. People would feel reassured that their participation is worth the time and energy and that their plans actually grounded. At the same time, cities would have proof that urban development is possible to sustain only with inclusion.

Poor people and their settlements are an indispensable narrative of today's urbanism. They both drive a city's economic growth and are equally entitled to all its services and opportunities. The idea of a sustainable, prosperous and vibrant city is hard to imagine where the commixture has not happened. Inclusion is thus about right urbanism. ⊕RF

ENDNOTES:

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