PRIA

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY

Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

Appreciation Programme

Participatory Urban Planning:

Making Cities Inclusive of Urban Poor

Module - IV

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Introduction and Objectives

Introduction

Planning is a very elaborate and complex issue especially in the context of urban areas. This complexity can be attributed to not only the heterogeneous composition of the population but also to the complex regional variance, as well as diverse needs of the stakeholders. It is against this backdrop, that this s Module has been developed, which focuses on the challenges faced by the planners in the process of Participatory Urban Planning.

In the previous Modules, we have studied in detail about planning, urban planning and participatory urban planning. We have also learnt that every kind of planning mentioned above faces resistance and challenges, at various levels. But these situations should not deter us from making plans for the urban areas. Rather, we should take those challenges in a positive manner and try to make a plan addressing the needs of all the stakeholders. These challenges have been discussed in detail in this Module.

Objectives

This module will help learners to understand

- Various types of challenges faced by the planners in developing and implementing development plans for urban areas
- The challenges and issues related to Participatory Urban Planning
- Dealing with various stakeholders and addressing their needs.

Unit 1: Overview of Challenges and Issues

Development practitioners are quite familiar with the idea of participatory planning. There has been a growing practice of using participatory approaches in rural development, which has further, inspired participatory planning in urban slums. There are also instances of civil society groups, such as residents welfare associations (RWAs) in middle-class residential areas working together to keep their own surroundings and environment clean. Such experiences, although valuable in themselves, are criticized for keeping community participation restricted to the level of projects and localities and therefore peripheral and isolated from mainstream urban development practice.

There are many cases of participatory slum improvement projects in the world, which have often been cited as best practices. However, they have had little impact on opening up institutions towards citizens' engagement in local decision making, or of commitment to an inclusive approach by local government. Participatory urban planning is seen as an answer to this problem by NGOs, as well as the government and has been incorporated in recent urban programmes. These programmes include the City Development Plan (CDP) of JNNURM and the Slum Free City Plan of Rajiv Awas Yojana (Ministry for Urban Development, GoI, 2013) (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, GoI).

In the following sections we will summarise the challenges for putting in place participatory approaches to urban planning. Some of these have already been touched on in the various sections. We will also look at various issues and see how existing opportunities can be taken forward and new opportunities created.

Broadly speaking, we will examine the challenges and issues with respect to the complexity of cities, the governance framework, institutions and planning processes and how new opportunities presented by the CDP and Slum Free City Plan can be better utilised.

1.1   The Complexity of Urban Places

The nature of the urban population and the complex activities in cities pose a challenge for any kind of planning and its implementation. The particular challenges for participatory planning are:

- **Cultural and Social Heterogeneity:** Unlike rural and tribal communities, urban populations are extremely heterogeneous in their composition. This poses significant problems in people's participation and prioritization of issues. The situation becomes particularly difficult when a group of persons or an individual dominates discussions or conversations because of their gender, class or caste and tries to impose their views on the rest of the group.

- **Varied Economic Status:** The rich-poor divide in terms of living environments, affordability and priorities, exists in all cities and towns and can develop into contentious issues. For example, tax payers' money is proposed to be used for upgrading informal areas or the richer population of the community opts for private service providers, at their own costs. In such situations, equitable provision of services and development of a plan that is considered satisfactory by all citizens becomes difficult. Moderating the planning process with built in techniques of conflict resolution is important in ensuring that resources reach where they are most needed.

    Diversity of occupation: The many and diverse activities in cities, makes cities a complex places to plan for. Cities are also the centre of politics, entrepreneurship and industry and highest GDP contributors.

At the same time, they also have half their populations living in slum like conditions with little or no access to basic services like water and sanitation. To ensure that any plan for any city supports the larger common good as well as the welfare of individuals and communities, it is important that all the diverse stakeholders have a say in it including:

- Varied service providers
- Different manufacturing industries
- Educational institutes
- Health facilities
- Transportation
- Commercial enterprises
- Officials and bureaucrats from the government
- Private sectors
- Politicians

Unit 2: Tapping into the Potential of Decentralized Governance

Municipal structures provide ample opportunities for participatory planning. This is complemented by the fact that the 74th CAA has the necessary provisions for inclusion of all representatives and stakeholders. Urban planning is a task already delegated to municipalities under the 74th CAA. So far, however, decentralisation has meant additional responsibility, without additional powers or resources and with inherently weak systems. But as we have seen, Master Plans continue to be prepared by institutions such as UDAs and State Town Planning Departments.

However, in the last few years certain 'non-statutory' forms of planning such as the drafting of City Development Plans (CDPs) have created the potential for municipalities to lead the planning process with local stakeholder participation. All these goals and objectives of a good CDP are in tune with the indicators of 'good governance' that we have read about in a previous section (Module II; Unit 1).

Terms like 'inclusive', 'participatory', accountable', 'transparent, 'equitable', 'efficient', all figure in both good governance and CDP guidelines. Indeed, planning and good governance go hand in hand. But here too, the lack of capacity of local government, unreasonable time frames and financial restrictions set by JnNURM have meant that the opportunity for meaningful participation is lost.

PRIA conducted the project for 'Preparation of Participatory City Development Plan (CDP) for Dumka and Chhapra', in Jharkhand and Bihar respectively (PRIA, 2012). DFID supported Andhra Pradesh Urban Services for the Poor, MP Urban Services for the Poor and Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor (DFID). These projects have demonstrated the validity of the participatory approach.

Participatory Urban Planning enables the cross section of citizens' demands and voices to reach civic institutions and helps to make institutions accountable and responsive to citizens.

The conditions under which these processes can be successful are:

- Highest level of political and executive support within each municipality
- Representation of all major stakeholder groups in the town/ city
- Clearly demarcated responsibilities to individuals or groups
- Strong commitment to consulting community groups, especially the poor
- Active involvement of elected members and municipal staff
- Commitment to accountability and transparency at all stages
- Availability of skilled and experienced NGOs to facilitate processes and carry out a monitoring function
- Availability of basic data for planning
- Availability of funds to implement priority actions identified in the plans

The Community Participation Law or **The Nagar Raj Bill** is an instrument which can institutionalise community participation platforms/systems and bottom-up participatory plans, for inclusion in district and metropolitan plans. The Ward Committees proposed by the 74th CAA was very extensive and thus did not prompt required levels of participation. Thus the Community Participation Law proposed the Area Sabhas that included smaller groups (areas that come under the same polling booth or a small group of polling booths). This meant more intensive interaction among the people, and consequent participation in urban governance.

1.2.1 Overcoming Capacity Constraints

The challenge is for both municipalities and facilitating NGOs, to build their own capacity in terms of skills, commitment and institutional structures to facilitate processes on a sustained basis.

- A major capacity building activity is needed to develop skills and attitudes of staff and elected representatives in municipalities, on how to work with citizens. Such training implies a major exercise in change management, as participatory planning spells out a way of working and management styles that are completely different from current conventional practices in municipalities. It may be noted that it is not easy for individuals in municipalities to make the transition, unless systems and procedures are designed to make it happen.

- The NGO sector is known for its effective use of participatory development techniques, when working with village and urban slum communities, however, only a handful of NGOs can claim to have the experience of participatory urban planning. In fact civil society has been active mainly in areas such as health and education. It is only in the last decade that it has diversified its domains and begun supporting communities in areas of enhancing their demands for basic services, planning, housing for urban poor, and social accountability of local government etc.

- Local stakeholders can act as partners only if they are interested, adequately informed and vocal. A major hurdle to overcome would be people's apathy towards civic engagement, which seems to be a widespread urban phenomenon.

Unit 3: Resolving the Institutional Muddle

Ideally participatory planning should be in the domain of urban local government. But we have seen in previous Modules that institutional roles are fuzzy. Specifically,

- There is lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and jurisdictions, coupled with multiplicity of agencies with overlapping functions. There are agencies both at state and local level that are carrying out the function of urban planning for e.g. TCPO, UDAs, ULBs, Metropolitan Development Authorities and even industrial development agencies.

- There are contradictions between the provisions of acts and laws: The 74th CAA devolves the function of urban planning to the urban local bodies but the Development Authorities Act assigns the same function to respective Urban Development Authorities.

- Even though TCPOs are in principle expected to provide technical expertise to municipalities, they assume the role of independent planning bodies, with the barest minimum of consultation with municipalities.

- In addition there are a large number of service providing agencies such as public works department, public health, engineering department, water board etc. which have their own mandates. Their actions are very often based on considerations other than local priorities.

The multiplicity of agencies at state level results in ambiguity in terms of responsibility and thus they are unaccountable to people, as well as being non-transparent in their functioning. This also results in unavailability of updated information and statistics for proper planning decisions.

An often asked question is: Can ULBs play a more assertive role and take responsibility for planning their own cities?

There is a possibility that participatory planning creates pressures from stakeholders which are difficult to ignore.

3.1 Reforming the Planning Process

In the previous modules we have seen that urban planning practice is traditionally top- down and non-inclusive. It is not that urban planners have purposely left out people from the process of planning - their professional education and practice has, till recently only included people only to fulfill the conditions of plan preparation and approval as laid down in the Town Planning Acts. These Acts make it mandatory to invite the public to give objections and suggestions on the Draft Plan. Based on those plans there may be public hearings after which the Plan is modified accordingly. Thus, the planning process has mainly focused on technical efficiency and economic feasibility of plans rather than their social acceptance, leading to expert- driven plans with little value attached to local knowledge. Further, there is a serious dearth of successful examples of people's participation or knowledge about participatory practices in urban areas. It is only recently that the planning community has realized that people's participation has minimized confrontations and actually facilitated implementation of proposals that were agreed upon collectively.

The CDP and other urban plans, which provide the scope for people's participation, have not touched the process of Master Plan preparation, which continues to be non- participatory. Any change would logically require amendments to the respective Town Planning Acts. However some recent examples of master plan preparation show significant consultations with different stakeholder groups.

The argument is that broad land use and circulation patterns should be based on considerations of equity, efficiency and environment sustainability; however, area planning at sub-city levels (ward/zone) should be participatory and bring in the social and cultural dimensions, as well and be based on priorities identified by those who live and work there. Though, this logic is also reflected in the Acts, it is observed that sub-city planning is most often neglected. Nevertheless, if operationalized, it can provide a way forward.

An opening is provided by the newly launched Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), a national programme for making cities 'slum free'. One of the reforms RAY proposes for participating states is to make urban planning more inclusive by incorporating pro-poor and participatory elements. The 'slum free city plan' to be prepared as a pre-requisite for accessing funds from the Government of India, has participatory elements built into the entire project cycle, including mapping and surveys in poor settlements, prioritizing slums for investment, selecting housing options, undertaking local development and monitoring. RAY seeks to build partnerships between local government and NGOs to build capacity of groups from poor communities to participate effectively. The effectiveness of RAY in enabling city wide participatory planning remains to be assesses. (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, GoI).

Summary

This Module provided a detailed examination of the challenges and issues that are faced by Participatory Urban Planners. It has also provided constructive methods in overcoming these challenges. Of particular importance are the aspects of complexity of urban places, tapping into the potential of decentralized governance, overcoming capacity constraints, resolving the institutional muddle and reforming the planning process.

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