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THE STATE OF ASIAN CITIES 2010/11

UNEP
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CASE STUDIES

SANITATION

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

Shared sanitation facilities or community toilet blocks are commonplace in many large South Asian cities such as Mumbai, Chennai, Dhaka or Delhi. In the past, poor maintenance would result in low use, but the situation has improved over the past few years thanks to considerable maintenance efforts. Since then, new schemes have involved communities in the design, location and management of facilities.

Over the past 15 years, efforts have focused on improving the design and management of communal toilet blocks, which were often found to be the most appropriate sanitation provision in slums where insecure land tenure and a shortage of space make household toilets problematic. These efforts have been spearheaded by alliances among community organizations (such as the National Slum Dwellers Federation and the *Mahila Milan* women's group) in partnership with India's Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres, and carried out in close coordination with local authorities. These alliances have focused on community-led processes; however, links with local authorities make it easier to upscale efforts as well as to make bureaucratic processes more responsive to community needs. In Mumbai and Pune, two large metropolitan areas in Western India, over 500 toilet blocks serving thousands of households have been completed and similar initiatives are afoot in nearly 10 other cities all over India. The projects rely on some public funding, but the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres has also mobilised the Community-Led Infrastructure Finance Facility to smooth out the construction loan process. As a result in Mumbai, Pune, Kanpur and Bangalore, US \$1.5 million worth of bridge loans have benefited 260,000 households. A number of non-governmental organisations have also been involved in similar projects in Dhaka and Chittagong, with funding from UK charity WaterAid. While a number of options were provided to local populations, they have opted for community-managed toilet blocks. On the whole, the direct benefits of community management stand out quite clearly: improved, well-adapted designs, reduced costs and improved maintenance, all of which combine to enhance sustainability. Indirect benefits are not negligible, either, as communal sanitation facilities typically work better and improve the relationships between utilities and low-income communities.

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