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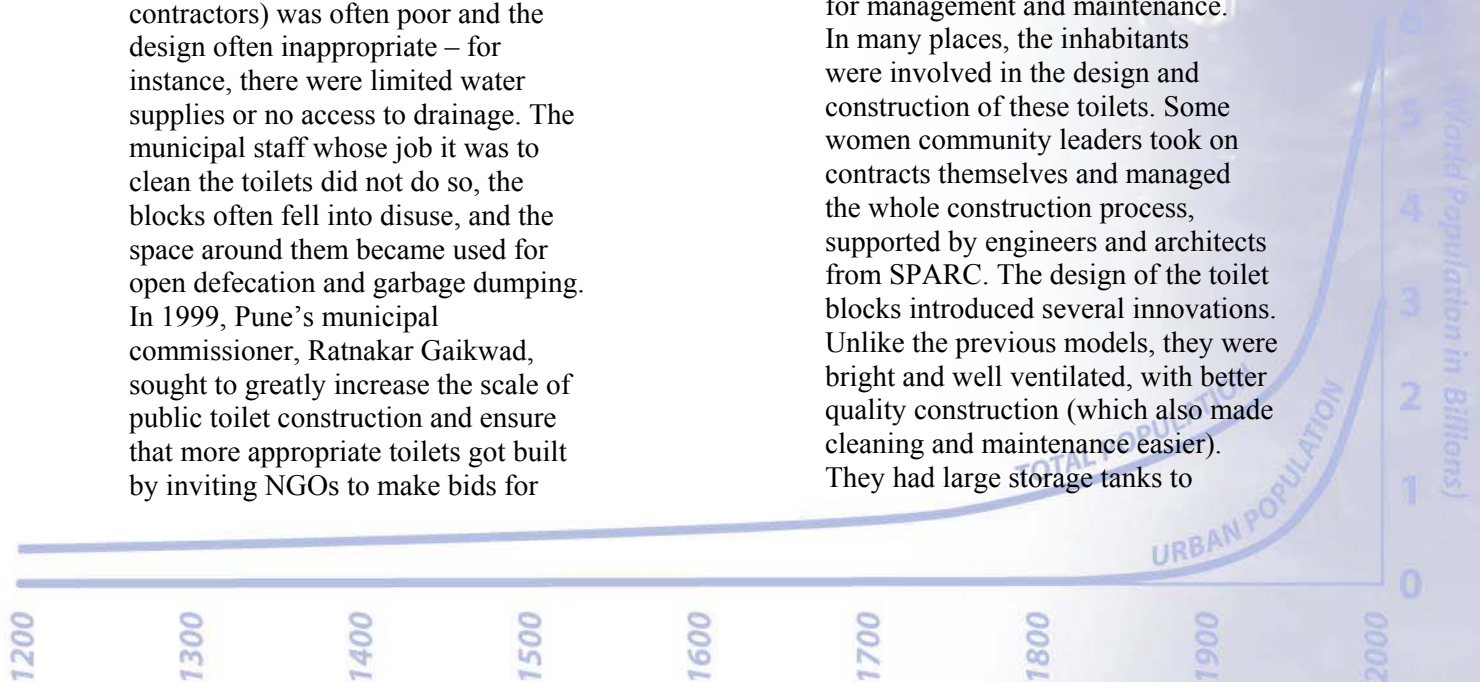
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Resource Box

Community Toilets In Pune And Other Indian Cities Community

In Pune, a partnership between the municipal corporation, NGOs and CBOs has built more than 400 community toilet blocks. These have greatly improved sanitation for more than half a million people. They have also demonstrated the potential for municipal–community partnerships to improve conditions for low-income groups, and similar programmes are now being developed in other cities. Pune has 2.8 million inhabitants, two-fifths of whom live in slums (there are over 500 in the city). Various local government bodies are meant to provide and maintain public toilets in these settlements, but provision is far below what is needed. In addition, in those settlements in which toilet blocks were built, there was no consultation with the inhabitants regarding the location, design and construction, and the agencies responsible for construction and maintenance had little accountability to the communities. The quality of toilet construction (undertaken by contractors) was often poor and the design often inappropriate – for instance, there were limited water supplies or no access to drainage. The municipal staff whose job it was to clean the toilets did not do so, the blocks often fell into disuse, and the space around them became used for open defecation and garbage dumping. In 1999, Pune’s municipal commissioner, Ratnakar Gaikwad, sought to greatly increase the scale of public toilet construction and ensure that more appropriate toilets got built by inviting NGOs to make bids for

toilet construction. Between 1988 and 1998, only 22 toilet blocks had been constructed; the new programme planned to build 220 blocks during 1999–2000 and another 220 during 2000–2001. The contracts were not only for building toilets but also for maintenance. One of the NGOs that received contracts, SPARC, had a partnership with two people’s organizations, the National Slum Dwellers’ Federation and Mahila Milan (a network of slum and pavement women’s savings and credit groups). The three institutions had been working in Pune for five years prior to this, supporting a vibrant savings and credit movement among women slum dwellers. Now this alliance became one of the principal contractors and constructed 114 toilet blocks (with a total of more than 2000 adult toilet seats and 500 children’s toilet seats). The alliance designed and costed the project, the city provided the capital costs and the communities developed the capacity for management and maintenance. In many places, the inhabitants were involved in the design and construction of these toilets. Some women community leaders took on contracts themselves and managed the whole construction process, supported by engineers and architects from SPARC. The design of the toilet blocks introduced several innovations. Unlike the previous models, they were bright and well ventilated, with better quality construction (which also made cleaning and maintenance easier). They had large storage tanks to





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ensure that there was enough water to allow users to wash after defecation and keep the toilets clean. Each toilet block had separate entrances and facilities for men and women. A block of children's toilets were included, in part because children always lose out to adults when there are queues for a toilet (so they often defecate outside because they cannot wait), and in part because many young children are frightened to use conventional latrines. The children's toilets were specially designed for children's use, including such features as smaller squat plates, handles (to prevent over-balancing when squatting) and no large pit openings. In many toilet blocks, there were also toilets designed for the elderly and the disabled. Toilet blocks also included a room where the caretaker and his or her family could live, which meant that lower wages could be paid for maintenance, thus reducing the running costs. In some toilet blocks, where there was sufficient space, a community hall was built; the small fees charged for its use could also help to cover maintenance costs, and the presence of a community hall right on top of the toilets also puts pressure on the caretaker to keep the complex clean. Despite these innovations, the cost of the toilet blocks was 5 per cent less than the municipal corporation's costing.

This programme was also unusual for India because of its transparency and accountability. There was constant communication between senior government officials and community leaders. Weekly meetings brought all stakeholders together to review progress and identify problems that needed to be addressed. All aspects of costing and financing were publicly available, and the access that

community organizers had to senior officials also kept in check the petty corruption that characterizes so many communities' relationships with local government agencies.

The alliance of Mahila Milan, SPARC and the National Slum Dwellers' Federation is also managing a comparable large-scale, community managed public toilet construction programme in Mumbai.

Source: Burra, Sundar and Sheela Patel (2002), 'Community toilets in Pune and other Indian Cities', PLA Notes 44: Special Issue on Local Government and Participation, IIED, London, pages 43-45; and Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and Slum/Shack Dwellers International (2003), *Community-Driven Water, Sanitation and Infrastructure*, ACHR, Bangkok.

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