

Sustainable sanitation: experiences in Pune with a municipal-NGO-community partnership

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Jane Hobson is an urban geographer with an MSc in urban development planning, working with Shelter Associates, a small, local NGO which works with the urban poor in Pune, India. The staff comprises architects, planners and social workers, and seeks to facilitate and provide technical support to community managed housing and infrastructure projects. It works closely with collectives of poor people, especially women, on community-building through facilitating crisis savings, housing savings, community meetings and learning exchanges between communities. At present, alongside the toilet project described here, Shelter Associates is preparing for Pune Municipal Corporation a socio-economic and spatial database of over 500 informal settlements in Pune. This is based on primary data collection by poor women and men, coordinated by Shelter Associates. The household and settlement level data are being processed, linked and analyzed using GIS software. The author is grateful to Srinanda Sen, Pratima Joshi and Meera Bapat for ideas and helpful comments on earlier drafts.

SUMMARY: *This paper describes a communal toilet construction programme in the city of Pune (India) undertaken through a partnership between the municipal corporation and eight NGOs. It focuses on the 13 toilet blocks that are the responsibility of one of these NGOs, Shelter Associates, and includes details of how they have been working with local residents with regard to design, construction, provision for maintenance and incorporation of space for community activities. It highlights the positive aspects, especially the municipal corporation's willingness to try a new approach, while also describing the difficulties that NGOs face in having to meet official implementation schedules and cope with bureaucratic delays while delivering for, and remaining accountable to, low-income groups.*

I. INTRODUCTION

THE CAPACITY OF urban governments in India to implement sustainable sanitation or other infrastructural improvements which benefit the poor is usually viewed with despondency.⁽¹⁾ While this has long been the case in Pune, an ongoing municipal initiative is demonstrating a more positive approach. Currently, 237 toilet blocks with over 3,000 toilets are under construction by eight NGOs in partnership with the Pune Municipal Corporation. The project started in November 1999, with the aim of completing construction by mid-2000. The overall time-scale is long-term, with NGOs committed to maintaining the blocks for 30 years.

The objective of this paper is to give an account of the project from the perspective of one participating NGO, Shelter Associates, and to share and explore some reflections on their experiences. Since the project is not complete, this paper can only put forward current experiences, without the perspective of hindsight. The aim at this stage is to present some thoughts on the nature of the project and the difficulties as well as the potential of working on a project where the parameters have been set by the municipality.

As an NGO, Shelter Associates' objective is to work on building capacities among the poor as a basis for sustainable, community-led projects. In previous projects, their contact with the municipal corporation had been to negotiate with or on behalf of poor communities for projects initiated by the communities and Shelter Associates. In contrast, the current project is led and controlled by the municipal corporation, which has taken a positive step in initiating and funding the project and by establishing a

new institutional partnership in Pune by bringing in NGOs. The challenge for Shelter Associates is to deliver their commitment to the corporation while simultaneously seeking to use the project as an opportunity and tool for community-building. The sections below explore the experience so far of how the corporation has supported and hindered this goal, and the attempt so far to use this project to strengthen communities.

II. BACKGROUND

PUNE IS A fast-growing city and major industrial centre with a population of just under 3 million. In 1997, the city's administrative boundaries were extended to include 36 surrounding *gram panchayat* (village government) areas in recognition of the existing reality of urban development in some areas and in anticipation of future growth in others. At present, approximately half the population of Pune lives in about 500 informal (unauthorized low-income) settlements. These vary in size from fewer than 50 to several thousand dwellings and are located across the entire city.

A number of factors combine to cause a deprived and stressful living environment in different informal settlements, from the threat of eviction, to flooding and other hazards, to an overall lack of basic infrastructure. Common to many settlements is a lack of basic sanitation. Thousands of dwellers have inadequate access to toilet facilities and responsibility for communal toilet provision in informal settlements lies with the Pune Municipal Corporation which recognizes that the current situation is inadequate.⁽²⁾ Forty-one of the 400 informal settlements in Pune surveyed by Shelter Associates have no toilet facilities whatsoever. People living in many other poorly served settlements, where crude toilet to person ratios can be as low as 1:2,500, also effectively have no access to facilities. Even where the figures indicate that toilets are available, many are old, dilapidated and unusable. Thus, many people have to use already over-used toilets in neighbouring informal settlements or find it easier to defecate on nearby empty plots, river and canal banks and railway lines.⁽³⁾

Each block provided by the municipal corporation is cleaned, theoretically, once a day by a corporation employee, but the numbers using the facilities are so great that the blocks cannot be kept clean under this system.⁽⁴⁾ It is also doubtful whether this daily cleaning is carried out in many areas. With so many people using toilets which are always dirty, and in the knowledge that someone is employed and paid by the corporation to do this work, there is no motivation for the users to maintain them. There has been no system of any kind for community involvement in the maintenance.⁽⁵⁾

Few of Pune's informal settlements are connected to the municipal sewer system since many areas of the city, particularly outside the central areas, lack the infrastructure. public toilets provided by the corporation are usually based on the aqua-privy tank system, where liquids flow into municipal sullage lines and solids collect in the tank under the toilets. Decomposition of the solids is very limited since the tank contents are disturbed each time the toilets are used and there is no system of liquid flow through the tank (as in a septic tank system). Gases accumulate in the aqua-privy tanks, causing cracking and a danger of small explosions. Sullage lines tend to be overloaded and cracked, and the aqua-privy tanks are rarely emptied often enough. Thus, both pipes and tanks are clogged, leaking and overflowing, resulting in unusable toilets and pollution in the

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1. See Chaplin, S (1999), "Cities, sewers and poverty: India's politics of sanitation", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 11, No 1, pages 145-158.

2. Interview with Ashok Kalamkar, Urban Community Development Commissioner, on 25 January 2000 in his office at the Pune Municipal Corporation.

3. Shelter Associates' own database of 400 informal settlements in Pune, compiled in 1998-99.

4. Interview with Anil Gaikwad, Assistant Municipal Commissioner (Slum Department), on 25 January 2000 in his office at the Pune Municipal Corporation.

5. See reference 2.

6. See Bartlett, S (1999), "Children's experience of the physical environment in poor urban settlements and the implications for policy, planning and practice", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 11, No 2, pages 63-73 for more details on children's sanitation needs.

7. The Municipal Commissioner heads the municipal administration of the Pune Municipal Corporation. He/she is a professional administrator, an officer of the Indian Administrative Service, who is posted to a city for a limited tenure, usually of three years.

8. See reference 4.

9. See reference 4.

surrounding areas.

Other factors typically contribute to the pollution of the area around a toilet block. The shortage of toilet facilities means that children are often pushed out of queues at busy times or may have difficulty waiting to use a toilet.⁽⁶⁾ It is thus generally accepted that children defecate in gutters or on open ground outside the toilets. Since the area around a toilet block is already dirty and malodorous, it is the obvious place for residents to dump their garbage. Flies, mosquitoes and pigs are attracted and this part of a settlement becomes more polluted. In high-density settlements, toilets are unlikely to be located at any distance from dwellings, so people's homes are located adjacent to these hazardous areas.

Toilet construction was previously contracted out by the municipal corporation to commercial builders but few new blocks had been commissioned in recent years. Under the tenure of one recent municipal commissioner,⁽⁷⁾ the corporation commissioned a large national NGO which specializes in toilets to undertake the construction of some blocks, but these proved expensive and implementation was slow. A subsequent municipal commissioner had intended to prioritize toilets, but his tenure was cut short before he could act. Overall, both provision of new blocks and maintenance of existing blocks in Pune have been very inadequate although the issue had been on the municipal agenda in recent years.

III. OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT

THIS PROJECT WAS initiated by Municipal Commissioner Ratnakar Gaikwad, whose tenure in Pune began in May 1999. In his previous posting in Mumbai, Gaikwad had been a key official in a sanitation drive and had overseen the construction of some 100 toilet blocks. During this time, Gaikwad had become familiar with the approaches of different NGOs to the building and maintenance of toilets. After taking up tenure in Pune, he prioritized sanitation and initiated the current toilet project. In response to advertisements in Pune and Mumbai newspapers in August 1999, the Pune Municipal Corporation received proposals from 18 NGOs offering to participate in the current toilet project, from which eight were selected.⁽⁸⁾

Initially, the project focused on the demolition and reconstruction of old dilapidated toilet blocks which had been identified in the corporation's own surveys,⁽⁹⁾ in the process increasing the number of toilets in many blocks. Later, other sites were identified for completely new blocks. The blocks vary in size from ten to 60 toilets and each block has a caretaker's room incorporated into the design. Where possible, the toilets are connected to the municipal sewer system or are otherwise based on septic tanks. Public toilets, located on roadsides, will be maintained under a "pay and use" system where users pay a caretaker over the counter each time they use the facility. Community toilets are located within informal settlements and here, households using the toilets pay a monthly sum of Rs.20 (an affordable amount which is the maximum allowed by the corporation) which generates adequate income to cover a caretaker's salary and maintenance costs. In both cases, the NGO remains ultimately responsible, according to the contract with the corporation.

The corporation's role in the project is to provide the funds and coordinate the project. It also agreed to provide electricity and water supplies to each site free of cost for the construction period and future use. Corporation funds are provided up to a maximum cost per toilet and officials

check the quality of construction and the accounts before releasing payments. The role of each NGO is to demolish the existing toilet block, which includes clearing the sludge from the old aqua-privy tank, to construct the new block within the cost and time limits, and to take on responsibility for the 30-year maintenance of each block.

Shelter Associates undertook responsibility for the construction and maintenance of 13 community toilet blocks. This was a realistic figure based on the small size of the NGO and the speed required for implementation by the corporation. Shelter Associates were initially allocated sites in five settlements in the Yerawada area of northern Pune. Later in the project, the corporation agreed to Shelter Associates' proposal to build in Ambedkar Nagar settlement, in the fringe village of Dhayari, where they have been working with a collective of women since 1998, and then requested them to build in two other fringe villages. The settlements in which they are building fall into three categories: Ambedkar Nagar, where the NGO was already working with a strong community group; Bharat Nagar and Shanti Nagar in Yerawada, where Shelter Associates had worked in 1994 and had some contact with the residents; and five settlements which were new to them.

IV. THE PROJECT AS AN OPPORTUNITY

THE URBAN POOR are rarely the focus of large-scale urban development initiatives in Pune. This is a courageous municipal project in a city where vocal middle-class citizens and environmental pressure groups tend either to ignore the "brown agenda"⁽¹⁰⁾ or campaign for a clean and orderly city, typically seen in terms of solid waste management in middle-class residential areas and the demolition of all illegal structures. Any kind of improvements to informal settlements are rarely considered a priority or even appropriate by other city residents.⁽¹¹⁾ Sanitation and other issues relating to the local environment in low-income settlements have not previously been taken up by the municipality on this scale. It is easy to point out that the corporation should have tackled the poor sanitation situation earlier, but it is more constructive to support the initiative now that they have taken on the responsibility of initiating, funding and coordinating this project.

The corporation's decision to work in partnership with NGOs on a project of this scale represents a new approach to urban development in Pune, which stems partly from its own recognition that the system of contractor built and Corporation maintained toilets was failing.⁽¹²⁾ As noted by Kundu, the "...widening gap between demand and supply of basic services has forced urban local bodies to desperately work out alternate institutional arrangements rather than depend on the state governments or their own resources."⁽¹³⁾ In this case, the corporation is able to provide financial resources and institutional powers but has had to look elsewhere for other forms of resources, namely, organizations with the capacity and motivation to undertake the construction and long-term maintenance of toilet blocks. By working with NGOs, the Corporation is able to keep construction costs lower than private contractors would and can also transfer the responsibility for the maintenance either to the NGO or, via the NGO, to the local residents. This is a pragmatic approach in view of the Corporation's current incapacity in this area. From Shelter Associates' perspective, this is an institutional arrangement with the potential for poor women and men to have some involvement in a project

10. The "brown agenda" refers to basic environmental problems of water supply, sanitation and waste disposal; see UNCHS (1996), *An Urbanising World: Global Report on Human Settlements*, Oxford University Press, page 156.

11. For example, in 1997, a Citizens' Committee on Sanitation was convened by the Municipal Commissioner to report, initially, on solid waste management in the city. At the first meeting, the issue of sanitation in informal settlements was relegated to the "miscellaneous sub-committee". When the interim report was formally presented by the committee to the municipal commissioner, the section on informal settlements had been omitted and was only added later after pressure from Shelter Associates.

12. See reference 4.

13. Kundu, A (2000), "Innovations in institutional arrangements for urban infrastructural development", paper presented at "Cities of the South: Sustainable for Whom?" conference organized by UNRISD, EPFL and E&F/N-Aerus, Geneva, 3-6 May 2000.

which directly affects their settlements.

While Shelter Associates' priority as an NGO is to work as a facilitator and supporter of community-led initiatives, they feel that it is equally important to play a role in any development project initiated by the municipality for the low-income groups. Recognizing the urgent need for improved sanitation in informal settlements, they decided to take the opportunity of participating in the project, also aiming to use it as a tool for community-building and for promoting the role of community groups to the corporation.

V. THE SANITATION PROGRAMME

a. The Project as a Tool for Community-building

IT HAS BEEN a new experience for Shelter Associates to participate as a partner in a municipal corporation project. In the past, the corporation featured in their work primarily as a negative body which demolished settlements, frustrated their work and was often unwilling to negotiate with them. A key lesson has been the realization that the corporation is not necessarily uncooperative. This section explores the extent to which Shelter Associates have, so far, been able to involve local women and men and use the project as a tool for community-building, and the ways in which the nature of the project has supported or hindered this.

Shelter Associates' approach to the project has drawn on earlier experiences of organized poor communities with toilets in other Indian cities¹⁴ and has incorporated ideas from local women and men. The aim particularly is to involve local women, in view of the central role they have in managing the home and local environment, and in the healthcare of their families. In the past, Shelter Associates have found that women in some less vulnerable informal settlements have often been less interested than women in very vulnerable settlements in coming together to discuss issues or in setting up community groups. However, the experience of this project so far indicates that a toilet block can be a very tangible focus in different settlements for bringing people together, to discuss both the toilets and also broader issues relating to the settlement and local environment.

b. Project Pace

A central feature of the project is the fast pace required by the corporation, particularly Municipal Commissioner Gaikwad. He uses an efficient and good-humoured weekly meeting of NGO representatives and Municipal Corporation Slum Department officials as a powerful tool to this end, demanding action from his staff and publicly lauding or criticising NGOs. As a result, implementation has continued at a remarkable pace. Keeping up with the implementation schedule has been a key criterion by which the municipal corporation has judged participating NGOs. As a result of Shelter Associates' ability to maintain the pace, they have gained a high level of credibility with the corporation, particularly with the municipal commissioner. This has led to a constructive relationship, unprecedented for Shelter Associates, which has also placed them in a stronger position to negotiate for future projects.

However, the required pace of the project has sometimes compromised

14. For example, see *Toilet Talk* (1998), a publication of SPARC/*Mahila Milan*/National Slum Dwellers Federation, Mumbai.

Shelter Associates' ability to work very closely with local residents prior to and during construction, particularly in view of the scale of the project. Site supervision and community work in eight different settlements across Pune has posed a considerable challenge to Shelter Associates and the community groups working with them. In addition, delays on the corporation's side have slowed the pace and made community work more difficult.

Dealing with middle-ranking officials on day-to-day matters is often difficult and time-consuming despite measures taken by the municipal commissioner to ensure that the Corporation procedures do not delay work. NGO staff have to chase officials for, among other things, sullage vans, payments, and water and electricity connections. While this is not unexpected, it is worth noting that it requires considerable patience for an NGO to work in partnership with the municipality.

More seriously, the effects of bureaucratic delays are also felt by the residents of the settlements where the toilets are being constructed. In these cases, Shelter Associates has found itself caught directly between the Corporation and the local people. Obtaining water and electricity connections has proved an extremely lengthy process for each site, delaying the construction work to the inconvenience of the residents. At one site in Shanti Nagar, after demolition and sludge removal, the old tank flooded with water due to leakage from cracked, corporation-built gutters up-slope. The delay in the provision of the electricity connection prevented the pumping out of the water with the result that a hazardous tank full of water remained standing for several days, to the anger of the residents. Eventually, in desperation, Shelter Associates hooked up to an inadequate connection from a neighbouring house in order to work the pump. At another site, also in Shanti Nagar, the ward office failed to collect containers it had provided for the sludge removed from the old tank for almost one month, despite repeated requests. Children became sick and the local women were understandably upset with Shelter Associates. In cases such as these, Shelter Associates staff meet with the local women and men to listen to their comments and try to explain and thereby ease the situation. Fortunately, in Shanti Nagar, most residents understood the nature of Shelter Associates' work as an NGO and showed remarkable patience. But the overall lesson has been that even where a problem is caused by the corporation, it is the NGO which is on the front line from the residents' perspective and which has to negotiate with both sides to resolve the situation.

c. Construction

The pace of implementation required by the corporation has not always been conducive to involving residents in the construction stages. Community construction is a learning process which takes time. It has, however, been possible to employ skilled people from within the settlements to work on the project, which has increased local interest and a sense of connection to the new toilets. Residents from Kirkitwadi fringe village are working on their toilet block and two Shanti Nagar residents took on the painting of their toilets and added their own murals to the block. They are now also painting other blocks in the same area of Pune which may provide a basis for constructive community links between these settlements.

In Ambedkar Nagar, in Dhayari fringe village, community involvement has been central from the start. At the time of writing, women from

this settlement play a key role in organizing the materials on site, keeping track of deliveries, coordinating on a daily basis with the Shelter Associates office and organizing community members to carry materials from the road to the construction site. This can be attributed mainly to Shelter Associates' prior relationship with the community, as they had been working with the settlement's community organization for two years, and its staff and community women had already been negotiating with the corporation for permission to build a toilet block prior to this project. In addition, the work involves the construction of a completely new block. In settlements where old toilets are first demolished, a tankful of sludge and raw sewage has to be cleared. This is very low-grade unpleasant work in which most community members, and even many labourers, refuse to be involved.

d. Design

In most settlements, Shelter Associates was able to generate some interest at the design stage despite the lack of time for extensive discussions or workshops. Inputs from local women and men have defined some significant aspects of the layouts. A local leader in Adarsh Indira Nagar suggested constructing a two-storey block to replace two ground-floor blocks in order to make space for the rehabilitation of eight families whose houses abutted the old blocks. Initially, this seemed like a good idea but, at a large and heated community meeting, it became clear that the women felt strongly that separate women's and men's blocks would minimize harassment and be safer for them. The families concerned agreed to relocate to some nearby empty land at the edge of the settlement. In Shanti Nagar, discussions arose about the number of toilets for women and men in the first new block. This particular block, originally, had been solely for men but, after discussion, a compromise was reached to include three women's toilets in the new block.

Other design changes emerged later. In high-density Shanti Nagar, women living next to the toilets suggested shielding walls at the toilet entrances. In Sangam Wadi, women residents were indecisive about the position of the entrance to the women's toilets. Initially, they asked for it to be on the opposite side to the men's in order to minimize harassment but then changed their minds during construction because the new position placed the entrance in front of a house which, they decided, was to be avoided as a priority.

Each of the new blocks built by Shelter Associates is different, according to the needs and ideas of the local people and the available site and space. The toilets are pour-flush latrines, that is, water tanks (approximately 800 litres) are located outside both the women's and the men's toilets so that anyone using the toilet can take in a jug or small bucket of water. This is sufficient to flush the pan and uses less water and is easier to maintain than a mechanical flushing system. The toilets are based on septic tanks since none are in areas of Pune which are served by municipal sewers.

Each block has a small toilet for children under the age of five. This consists of a half-pipe which the children can squat over and is located inside or just outside the women's side, where mothers or older sisters can supervise. This is flushed in the same way as the adult toilets, by the women who accompany the children.

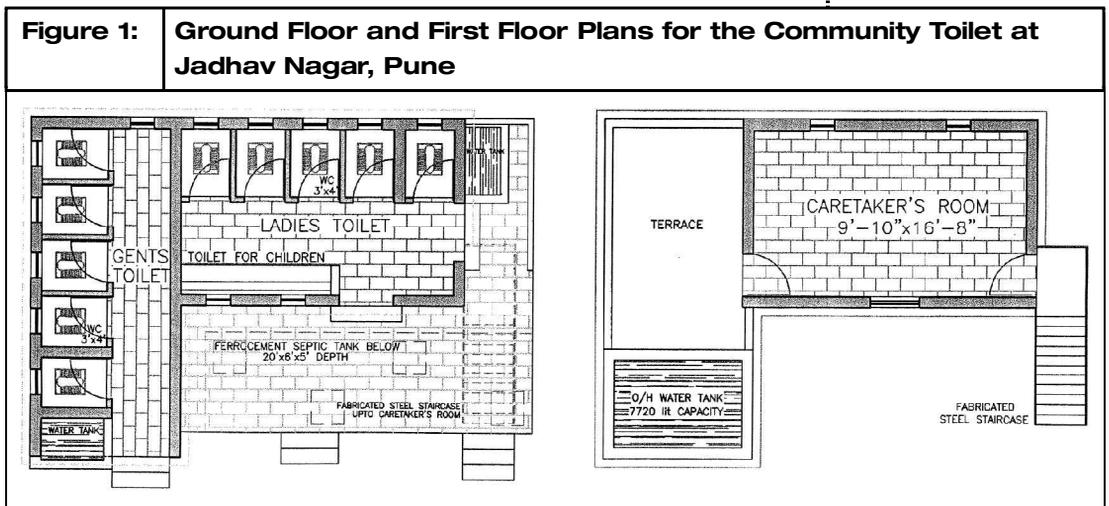
Initially, the corporation set out a number of building specifications which Shelter Associates has adapted in several ways. Most toilet blocks

have been built using load-bearing structures on the basis that they are as effective as RCC frames but more economical and faster to build. Several septic tanks have been constructed using ferro-cement which is faster to build with than masonry. Concrete blocks are used for construction since bricks tend to be of poor quality in Pune. Instead of ceramic tiles, which can crack or become porous once the glaze has worn away, Shelter Associates opted to use hard-wearing stone for the toilet floors. Ceramic tiles are used for tiling the toilet walls. For doors, steel frames, aluminum shutter frames and cement particle board infill panels were used. The overall aim has been to use techniques which are appropriate, low-cost and of good quality.

e. Organization

Prior to the inauguration of a new block, the caretaker, together with other community members and with the support of Shelter Associates, draws up a list of the households which will be using the block. This list may be added to subsequently. Currently, the numbers using the new blocks vary from settlement to settlement. For example, 70 households (with an average of around five persons per household) are listed in Jadhav Nagar, which has five women's and five men's toilets (see Figure 1); in Adarsh Indira Nagar, there are 16 women's and 16 men's toilets for 220 households; in Sangam Wadi, there are ten women's toilets for 100 households; and in Shanti Nagar first block, there are eight men's and three women's toilets for 110 households. In the latter two settlements, other blocks are available for the men/women as applicable. The number of toilets is adequate so there have been no queuing problems with respect to the toilets which are already in operation.

Each household is issued with a card on which their payments are recorded. The caretaker is responsible for collecting the monthly payment of Rs.20 per household and can prevent people from using the toilets if they have not paid. Folding gates have been installed across the toilet entrances, which the caretaker may lock if necessary and which act as a threat and therefore an incentive to pay.



Drawing by Swapna Kunte

f. Maintenance

Overall, Shelter Associates' focus has been on involving local people in the maintenance of the completed block. Community members are best able to work out a maintenance system which will function effectively in their own settlement. This does not mean that local people are expected to clean and repair the toilets themselves but it places them in a position where they decide who will maintain them and how, and can ensure that the work is satisfactory. Such a system is also likely to be more sustainable over the long term since it reduces the dependence of poor women and men on outsiders for clean and functioning toilets, whether the outsiders be corporation employees or an NGO.

At the time of writing, two blocks built by Shelter Associates are completed and in operation at Bharat Nagar and Shanti Nagar. So far, community interest in the maintenance of both has been very positive. The Bharat Nagar block is being maintained by one local young man, employed as caretaker, with the help of his friends. The caretaker is motivated by the salary but also by the use of the caretaker's room for the local boys (see next section). At the time of the inauguration, maintenance options were discussed and some local women expressed doubts over the ability of the boys to maintain the block. A trial period of one month was agreed, after which a further meeting was held where it was decided that the boys could take on the long-term maintenance as long as the community continued to be satisfied with their work. In Shanti Nagar, another young man came forward who was prepared to work as caretaker and he is also acting as a keen and efficient contact between Shelter Associates and the residents.

g. Caretaker's Room

The caretaker's room has evolved as a key community focus and an area where the corporation has proved very supportive of community involvement. It was a requirement of the project that a caretaker's room be incorporated into the design of each block as part of the corporation's recognition of the importance of establishing systems for long-term maintenance. In the settlements where Shelter Associates is building, this room has been recognized by different communities as a potential space for a number of uses.

In Bharat Nagar and Shanti Nagar, each community has employed a caretaker who already lives in the settlement, meaning that he can work for the salary without requiring the room. This has allowed the local people considerable freedom in deciding on a use for the new room. In Bharat Nagar, the community has allowed the local boys to use the room as a gym and general common room, an arrangement which is a motivation for the boys to keep the toilets clean. On seeing this potential, women on the other side of Bharat Nagar suggested using the room in their new block for the local playgroup, which is currently cramped into someone's house. At Shanti Nagar, community members suggested using the room as a venue which residents could hire for events such as weddings, the money from which could go towards maintenance costs. Some community members have suggested using the room as a local community group office at other times. In this way, the caretaker's room has considerably increased community interest and, therefore, involvement. A community room which is attached to a toilet block helps ensure that the toilets also become a community focus and the room becomes an extra motivation

for ensuring that the toilets and surrounding area are kept clean.

The caretaker's room as a community asset is a development that came from the local people and which the municipal commissioner has supported. He has agreed that Shelter Associates can add a clause to the official contract stating that, in settlements where the maintenance is undertaken by a resident who does not require the caretaker's room, this room may be used instead as a community space for activities to be decided on by the community. This is an area of the project where residents have already been able to take on a controlling role which the corporation has recognized and accepted.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

THIS PROJECT REPRESENTS a positive new departure in urban development which focuses on the poor in Pune. The combination of the municipality's funds and powers, and the commitment of NGOs is enabling the implementation of a large-scale and long-term project which is beginning to tackle the severe sanitation problems affecting thousands of poor women and men. The overall project has harnessed the resources of two actors, allowing both sides to gain experience in working together constructively. While the project is corporation-led and NGO centred, Shelter Associates' priority has been to support the programme and take advantage of the opportunity it has presented, simultaneously ensuring that community involvement is placed on the agenda and encouraging it in practice in the settlements where they are building.

By working on a corporation initiated project, Shelter Associates has placed itself in a position where it is caught between the demands and everyday workings of the corporation, which sets the terms, and the interests and priorities of local women and men whose community toilets are the purpose of the project. Certain aspects, most notably meeting the corporation's requirement for fast implementation, have made community-building more difficult at these early stages. However, the experience so far indicates that the project has provided a significant and tangible focus for working with women and men in informal settlements. In initiating this project, the corporation has demonstrated a new willingness to tackle their responsibility towards providing basic amenities for the urban poor. For Shelter Associates, working with the municipality on their own project has been an intense learning process about combining the practicalities of a municipal project with the ideology which underlies their work as an NGO.