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**DECENTRALIZATION, EMPOWERMENT
AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN URBAN INDIA:
ROLES AND RESPONSES OF GOVERNMENT,
NGOS AND SLUM COMMUNITIES**

Joop W. de Wit

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Comments are welcome and should be addressed to the author:
c/o Publications Office - Institute of Social Studies - P.O. Box 29776
2502LT The Hague - The Netherlands

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2502LT The Hague - The Netherlands - FAX: +31 70 4260799
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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the Bangalore Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme (BUPP) and the Urban Basic Services Scheme for the Urban Poor (UBSP) presently being implemented in India. Both programmes are decentralized urban poverty alleviation efforts in which empowerment of the poor - especially women - is a key goal. Besides, they aim at the convergence of various existing urban poverty alleviation programmes of Governmental and Non Governmental Organizations, which are to be implemented through participatory, bottom up planning approaches. Both programmes have booked considerable progress. But it comes as no surprise that there have been problems, for example as regards the involvement of and coordination between Government agencies and NGOs, but also with respect to the performance and representativeness of local slum organizations. These problems are listed in some detail, while suggestions are given which may contribute to improved performance. Preceding the description and analysis of the BUPP and UBSP programmes, the paper deals broadly with theory and practice of (the links between) decentralization, empowerment and urban poverty alleviation. Specific attention is given to the ambitious urban decentralization efforts initiated in India under the 74th Constitutional Amendment.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with decentralization in relation to poverty alleviation. Decentralization is often assumed to lead to a larger scope for people to participate in local governance which then translates in more effective policy. This may however not always be the case, particularly where poor and marginalized groups are concerned. Hence, decentralization efforts may be combined with empowerment strategies in order to increase the chance that such groups will in fact benefit from decentralization and that they will (be able to) participate in decentralized policy formulation and implementation. This paper discusses the links between decentralization and poverty alleviation in theory and in practice. It asks the question as to whether empowerment strategies are effective in bringing about broad based participation and in leading to more policy or developmental benefits for the poor. The focus is on the urban poor of India.

This paper does not deal in much detail with decentralization in general. There is a vast and ever growing body of literature on the subject, and I feel that the need of the hour is to examine how decentralization policies have performed, to identify the chief bottlenecks and to define ways to proceed. Such a priority links to present discussions and research efforts for example by USAID and the British DFID. The Development Advisory Committee (DAC) has identified democratic decentralization as an important theme and a workshop on the subject was held in Paris in september 1996 in the context of DAC programme on Participatory Development and Good Governance (OECD, DAC/PDGG 1996). This paper then aims to contribute to the on-going discussions and research efforts on decentralization, participation and good governance, by focusing on the often neglected local and grass roots levels.

The first section of this paper deals with decentralization generally, and considers the question as to whether decentralization can be assumed to contribute to poverty alleviation. Subsequently the decentralization experiences in India are briefly examined. India is an interesting laboratory for the study of decentralization as decentralization efforts date back here to 1958. Besides, India as a federal country with largely autonomous states is a relatively successful example of large scale devolution. Important today are the ambitious decentralization efforts now under way to transfer previously centrally implemented tasks to rural and urban local bodies respectively under the 73d and 74th Constitutional Amendments. In cities and towns, urban local bodies will become responsible for a wide range of local tasks, including urban poverty alleviation and slum upgrading.

The efforts aimed at empowering the urban poor in the context of decentralized urban poverty alleviation programmes are considered next. The present Urban Basic Services scheme for the Urban Poor (UBSP for short) aims, amongst other things, at the organization, awareness

building and empowerment of the urban poor, more specifically poor urban women. The programme is envisioned to become the starting point of localized poverty alleviation efforts on a national scale, establishing the link between slums and urban local bodies created under the 74th amendment. The UBSP programme is implemented in many Indian cities, and is quite similar to the Bangalore Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme (BUPP) where methodology and objectives are concerned. BUPP has been implemented in Bangalore, South India since 1993. It is jointly implemented and financed by India and the Netherlands. This programme too aims at the empowerment of the urban poor; it is characterized by ambitious decentralization objectives in terms of transferring powers and funds to slum organizations.

The core of the paper forms the section which centres on BUPP and to a lesser extent on the UBSP programme, and on the lessons that can be learned from the attempts at decentralization and empowerment by considering the role and responses of government (agencies), NGOs and slum communities. Strengths and weaknesses of both programmes are assessed, as well as their scope for increased participation and empowerment in a context of decentralized administration. This assessment can only be exploratory in nature, as it is too early to properly review BUPP performance, and as evidence on UBSP is limited to relatively few cities, with considerable variation in programme achievements. This paper is concluded with general conclusions, while some specific recommendations are suggested.

It may be noted the present paper links up with a paper I wrote earlier on urban management and urban poverty alleviation (de Wit, 1996b). The latter paper builds on debate on urban management advanced by British writers such as Richard Batley, Nick Devas and Carole Rakodi who argue that we need realistic approaches which start from the limitations of present urban institutions. They argue for example that the form of cities is determined largely by the decisions of individuals and organizations rather than by governments. The paper argues that conditions within urban institutions are marked by a considerable opacity, and by problems related to staffing, finance and political interference. The complex organizational set up of Indian urban institutions is analyzed and the scope for poverty alleviation is assessed from a macro institutional, management perspective. The present paper complements this by moving the analysis down to municipal and community levels, and does not dwell much on the former subjects.

In this paper too, I will try to focus on actual realities and to avoid utilizing too formal, romantic or idealistic visions of subjects such as decentralisation, participation and communities. I feel this is the best way to proceed if we want to address urgent problems of poverty and marginalization, while it may help to put the study of public administration on a stronger footing. A multi-actor, multi-level approach is applied which appears imperative in considering decentralization efforts which imply a multiplication of actors and agencies involved in Governance and policy implementation.

I. DECENTRALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Decentralization is by no means a new or under explored subject. For over fifty years decentralization has been on the agenda where Third World Development is concerned. Today there again a renewed interest in the issue. For example, USAID is strongly advocating decentralization policy and has initiated a six country research programme on democratic decentralization, while field studies on decentralization were carried out for the British ODA and the Ford Foundation (Blair, 1996).

This sustained interest in decentralization is puzzling as it is well accepted that decentralization efforts have only rarely been fully successful, and that decentralization is no panacea for the variegated development problems as some advocates have claimed (Souza, 1996: 551). On the critical side, some authors have said that its popularity is due to:

Its ambiguity, its capacity to conceal more than it reveals, its identification with long established sentiments, its forcible justification from purely technocratic points of view and the political instrumentality it potentially engenders (Souza, 1996: 533).

But there are of course very real and obvious advantages and potentials related to decentralization and I only mention a few from a vast literature. On the one hand decentralization is more relevant and more effective from a Government's point of view: local problems faced by heterogeneous groups can be better addressed even in previously neglected areas; there is more scope for flexibility and innovation, and decentralization may lead to increased administrative performance through more transparency and less corruption. Hence there are clear potentials, largely relating to the domain of public administration, to issues of coordination, effectiveness and control.

From the point of view of those governed - individuals, groups and communities - decentralization may first of all lead to a greater accountability and responsiveness of their governments. It may result in a larger scope for popular participation in terms of providing information, prioritizing needs, and implementing development projects or policy. Decentralization may offset the influence or control over development by entrenched local elites. Empowerment of minorities and vulnerable groups may be another effect or by-product of decentralization as it is made easier for them to get involved at the local level, but this effect may be limited to cases of democratic decentralization which can be equated to devolution of power to elected local bodies.

The latter remark refers to a distinction commonly made in types of decentralization viz. deconcentration (the most common, least ambitious and least problematic type), delegation, devolution and the transfer of tasks to non-governmental or community organizations (for this

typology see Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983: 18ff). I may note that none of these types is necessarily associated with increased democracy or participation. Indeed, decentralization can negatively influence the scope for democracy and participation in such cases where power at the local level is more concentrated, elitist and less pro-poor than at the centre (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983: 17; Manor, 1995: 84). Also, decentralization as a strategy originated in the theory and practise of public administration starting from a more 'technical' point of view. Only more recently this was compounded by an interest in decentralization linked to democracy, part of a wider concern with 'good governance'. However, an exception could be made for devolution (which is sometimes defined as democratic decentralization. It is useful then to discern 'democratic decentralization' as a separate case, understood as any (previously mentioned type of) decentralization which includes the elements of democracy (popular sovereignty, political equality and political liberty). This variant may also be labelled Democratic Local Governance: authority of devolved to local bodies that are accountable and accessible to their citizens, who in turn enjoy full human and legal rights in exercising political liberty (Blair 1996: 4).

Democratic decentralization (DD) will be the focus of the present paper, partly for a practical reason as it the type presently being implemented in India. But more importantly, DD combines the more narrow administrative, technical view of decentralisation with a political one, which is a crucial addition. It is not always sufficiently emphasized that any type of decentralization is basically a political process, in that it refers to the transfer or sharing of power, and decentralization policies are inevitably political strategies (Smith, 1985, Souza, 1996, Conyers, 1990: 28).

Positive impact of decentralisation

Evidence of the success of decentralization is mixed, and the results differ from country to country. Where, as already noted, most reports are relatively sober or negative, there is also positive evidence. There are indications of improved access of people to resources and organizations. In some countries an increased capacity was established of local bureaucrats and leaders to put pressure on central government agencies and to obtain larger amounts of central funds. New organizations were created at local and regional levels, which capacity might be increasing, while one side effect was often an increased awareness of the importance of regional and local level planning.

Blair (1996: 10-12) argues that decentralization has performed relatively well as regards the scope for participation in public affairs, when the citizenry, NGOs or the electorate became more engaged in civil activity (cf. Manor, 1995: 82). Next, there are some cases where decentralization brought about more responsiveness of governments. To a lesser extent there is evidence that local governments performed better in raising local revenues. Particularly democratic decentralization may result in building local capacity, for example as there are

educational benefits or by-effects with people taking roles in elected local bodies. Manor (ibid.: 82) adds that the speed of Government's responses improved 'somewhat' in some cases, as well as the quantity and quality of policy implementation. Manor is quite positive on evidence of decentralization in the Indian state of Karnataka, to which I will return later. All this is no doubt encouraging (but no more than that), but there appear to be no examples which were an all round unequivocal success. What then are the constraints faced, the reasons for the all too frequent failures?

Problems associated with decentralization

It is no surprise to note that the first and chief problem mentioned by Blair (1996) on the basis of extensive literature is a clear reluctance or often an equally damaging ambivalence on the part of (central) governments to decentralize, apart from fairly 'safe' and relatively non-controversial deconcentration approaches. This reluctance may apply to central political leaders unwilling to part with personal power. In other cases, bureaucracies proved unwilling to part with control over their agencies, and weary of an increased public need for accountability. A second problem which may be associated with cases of actual decentralization is local elite take over of decentralization benefits. This may either be the result of 'policy innocence, inattention or indifference at the macro level' so that local elites have a free hand in capturing the benefits. On the other hand, national and local elites may be allowed by national elites to take a large share of decentralization benefits, with a view to maintaining national stability and general control (ibid.: 14).

There are other factors which determine the success or failure of decentralization, starting with 'design problems'. The question here is then whether a decentralization strategy is well thought out, has a clear objective, is properly formulated, and viable and realistic in view of the socio-political context and institutional capacities. Many decentralization policies promise 'to bring power to the people', but fail to provide the means to actually do so (Conyers, 1990: 27ff). One of the chief problems of decentralization then concerns the institutional capacity of implementing agencies. Sub-issues here are staffing (staff motivation, incentives), procedures, roles of various actors and of coordination. Competition between elected officials and bureaucrats may easily develop. Another critical issue is whether the 'receiving' agencies or organizations have sufficient funds to carry out their new (additional) tasks, either through transfers of central funds, or through increased opportunities/powers for local fund generation (taxes).

In a recent article, Prud'homme (1995) has warned against the possible dangers associated with decentralization. While generally supporting decentralization, he feels that it can also cause more harm than good if not properly implemented, and if implemented in the wrong context. On the negative side he notes among other things that decentralization may bring about disparity if, after the termination of central distributive policies, rich regions may yet

grow richer and poor ones poorer. It may lead to fiscal perversity if fiscal discipline is weaker at local than at central levels, and it may lead to more corruption if and when local officials connive with local politicians, and if strong local pressures are brought to bear upon them. Prud'homme argues that it will not do to apply one uniform concept of decentralization for widely different countries (richer and developing nations) for different geographical areas (the needed critical mass in terms of efficiency and effectiveness) and sectors. He concludes by saying that decentralization is not always a panacea; its costs are more certain than its benefits. Generally, all levels of government should be involved in various types of policies: the issue is rather to establish a proper mix of tasks between central, regional and local governmental levels.

Decentralization and poverty alleviation

Manor (1995: 84) indicates that it is unrealistic to expect that decentralization will lead to enhanced poverty alleviation or assisting vulnerable groups. He makes the (disputable) point that the poor may have more influence at higher levels in political systems than at the local level. For electoral reasons there may be close ties between the poor and state/national politicians which may be reflected in local leaders being coopted into state positions. Conditions at the local level are often less pro-poor, in arenas where prosperous landed elements dominate. Decentralization may lead to a situation as in India where local councils have tended to avoid fulfilling their legal responsibilities to provide assistance to poor, low status groups (ibid.: 84).

Smith (1985: 181) argues that participation designed to alleviate multiple deprivation and poverty in a decentralized context, is based on the wrong assumptions. Group mobilization, self-help approaches and increased political power and awareness will not lift the poor out of poverty: rather, low incomes, poor housing, planning blight and high unemployment are the critical concerns. The issue is not group disorganization but multiple deprivation. Smith is not optimistic about participatory neighbourhood approaches:

Only by ignoring the significance of work and incomes for poverty is it possible seriously to suggest that neighbourhood decentralization can provide a political arena in which the poor can effectively combat their deprivation (ibid.: 204).

Besides, the scale of operation of a neighbourhood is too small for effective governmental intervention to counter social and economic deprivation. Elected municipal representatives may be reluctant to let people have the (false) impression that it is not they but the neighbourhood groups which control the needed resources e.g. for services.

In summary, decentralization does not appear to be the most logical choice as a strategy for poverty alleviation. Rather, decentralization and political participation are difficult to achieve precisely as they address the key problem of control by powerful central elites, which includes politicians and administrators (Devas et al., 1993: 204). Blair (1996: 14) puts it like

this: 'a strong case can be made that both time and a strong central authority and determination rather than decentralization per se constitute the road to equity and empowerment for the weak at the local level'.

Empowerment

It is clear then that many policies, including decentralization efforts and decentralized policy implementation as such may not help the poor, as in many cases local elites captured (many of) the benefits. As a consequence, many poverty alleviation programmes presently focus on the empowerment of the poor. Edwards and Hulme (1992: 24) define empowerment as:

A much used and abused term, that we take to mean the process of assisting disadvantaged individuals and groups to gain greater control than they presently have over local and national decision-making and resources, and of their ability and right to define collective goals, make decisions and learn from experience.

So apart from expecting all benefits from the transfer of power and resources to local bodies in the neighbourhood of people, people themselves have to (be able to) claim these benefits, be (made) aware of the potential of decentralization and take up active positions in new administrative structures. The crux of empowerment is obviously manifested at the local level if we consider communities and households, but to be precise empowerment is an individual, personal matter. Empowerment can then be expected to be difficult under conditions of considerable differences between rich and poor, men and women, the literate and illiterate.

These conditions apply to many parts of India. In a social sense, both rural and urban areas are quite strongly stratified, and positions of power are closely related to land ownership, wealth, and status not least in terms of caste. There is an increasing body of literature on problems associated with the access of the poor to decentralized institutions, and in a decentralized context in India (e.g. Vidya, 1997, Aziz, 1996: 161ff).

Bhatt (1987) reports on the impact of decentralization in a poor tribal area of the state of Gujarat, indicating that decentralization actually led to a stronger position of the local elites. This was the chief problem with an otherwise welcome policy shift, but other problems included administrative and financial-technical issues such as corruption and mis-management associated with decentralization (ibid.: 240). He notes '.. the fact that (in) the decentralized institutions, power and resources get concentrated in the hands of the rich, resourceful and powerful sections of rural society'. The rural elite controls the political and public institutions, and the local bureaucracy - often from the same socio-economic strata - colludes willy-nilly. Bhatt goes on to describe a successful programme aimed at empowering the tribal people, which had a positive impact in terms of increased economic welfare, and increased social awareness and action (see also the instructive figures on page 243 and 244). While welcoming these achievements, he does wonder what would be the next step:

Because it is clear that while such small action groups may have been strikingly

effective in fighting against day-to-day village level injustices and corruption, and successful in terms of development activities, they cannot make any dent on even the local administrative systems (...) to change its fundamental character. Even if they multiply in numbers, they cannot make any fundamental impact on the patterns of political, economic or social order (Bhatt, 1987: 264).

Participation

Participation is an old and equally persistent and widely advocated policy goal or method as decentralization. Indeed, there are strong links between the two. Both hold the promise of bringing governance closer to the people and to enhance involvement by people in planning, implementing programmes and to increase their scope for 'ownership' and future maintenance of projects. As is the case with decentralization, 'participation is a term which shades from administrative to overtly political meanings' (Devas et al., 1993: 202). Participation can mean anything ranging from participation as a means to improve project efficiency, sharing project costs, through building beneficiary capacity to (political) empowerment. Community participation relates to the involvement of communities in policy or programme implementation. Questions here are whether (parts of) villages or slums actually constitute viable communities which can be expected to undertake collective action. Significant divisions often exist in low income neighbourhoods based on socio-economic status, religion, ethnicity, gender, caste and political affiliation. To the extent that such factors divide communities, broad based participation is made more difficult. Such divisions may also be accentuated rather than removed as a result of outside intervention or the channelling of funds and opportunities to low income neighbourhoods (de Wit, 1996)

II. DECENTRALIZATION IN INDIA

Decentralisation efforts in India have a long history, and they have found a strong foundation and motivation in Mahatma Gandhi's clear views on village autonomy and autarchy (Gram Swaraj), where there would be perfect democracy and perfect freedom (Matthew, 1996: 205). They date back as long as 1958, when a new system of so called Panchyati Raj was set up. By the mid 1960s, 96 per cent of the rural population was covered under the administration of Panchyati Raj institutions. However, quite a few problems affected the functioning of these rural local bodies, such as inadequate resources and the fact that elections were postponed frequently. Matthew (1996: 211) notes:

Evidence suggests that there was a deliberate plan by the bureaucracy and local vested interests and their elected representatives in the state legislatures and in the Parliament to cripple and eventually discard the Panchyati Raj (PR) because its ascendancy was feared.

He argues that a coalition of the bureaucracy, commercial interests, the professional middle class, the police and the political elite 'ganged up' against democratic decentralization (ibid.: 213). The system of Panchyati Raj was given a new lease of life after the Ashok Mehta report, which resulted in a second generation of PR institutions (PRI) from 1978 onwards, and a revision of PR acts in many states, where the political element was now given due recognition (ibid.: 214). Even though the situation in many states did not improve much, some success was booked in West Bengal - with a stable Government led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) - and in Karnataka - where the progressive Janata Dal Government effectively implemented the PRI legislation.

However, in the latter state the decentralisation efforts under Panchyati Raj suffered later set backs after a the Congress Party came to power. This Congress Government set about to change the initial quite comprehensive PR act in 1990 (Vidya, 1997: 260). Most elected representatives of the local bodies belonged to the Janata Dal party, which 'was not tolerated by the Congress'. While the Karnataka decentralization efforts had many positive results, 'decentralization initiatives in that state have failed to enhance the effectiveness of redistributive poverty alleviation programmes, due to the absence of any commitment to these programmes on the part of the local elites' (quoted in Dreze and Sen, 1996: 108).

In 1993 a new law was passed which incorporated provisions linking the former PR legislation with the 73d Constitutional Amendment, a crucial amendment envisioning decentralization of tasks to rural local bodies. This Amendment was passed by the Indian Parliament in 1992 (Mathew, 1996: 218ff).

74th Constitutional Amendment or Nagarpalika Act

In 1992, the Indian central Parliament passed the 74th Constitutional Amendment, which relates to decentralizing urban governance to a newly created layer of urban local bodies, quite similar in nature to the 73d amendment relating to rural governance.

Put briefly, the 74th Amendment envisions the creation of a new layer of municipal government, which, in the metropolitan cities means the setting up of 'ward committees' (with some resemblance to the 'Stadsdeelraden' in some larger Dutch cities) which may represent approximately 40-50.000 people per ward (for the provisions for smaller cities and towns see NIUA: 1994). A ward committee has as members directly elected representatives of the ward population. One third of the elected members are to be women, while there are provisions for a fixed membership quota of people belonging to Scheduled Castes (the former 'untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes, proportional to their numerical ward strength. Elections are to be held every five years and after a ward committee is dismissed, a new committee will have to be elected within six months. In addition to the members already mentioned ward committees comprise other members, also having voting power. These include the elected municipal councillor, the Member of Parliament (MP: Federal Indian

parliament in Delhi) and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA: in the State Capital) of the municipal area in question. Besides, state Governments are free to appoint experts in specific fields to a ward committee as well as two members from Non Governmental or community based organizations.

Where finances go, the Amendment provides for devolution of financial resources to ward committees, but leaves the specific details to be elaborated by so called 'State Finance Commissions', which have been set up in most states, but which only completed their advisory work in a few states. The ward committees will have specifically mentioned tasks (under the 12th Schedule) which include (amongst 18 broad tasks) the following: urban town planning, regulation of land use, planning for social and economic development, slum improvement and upgradation, and, not least, urban poverty alleviation (NIUA, 1994).

It may be noted that the present municipal decentralization efforts have only just started and there is no evidence yet of their impact. But already before the 74th Constitutional Amendment was passed, there were some critical comments, some of which are important to mention. First, there are objections to the inclusion of Municipal Councillors, Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly as members with voting powers of the Ward Committees. On the one hand such membership dilutes the strength of decentralization in terms of making locally elected representatives the chief decision makers. People may be weary with good reason of having such powerful political specialists in their committee who may easily dominate proceedings. It is also felt that MPs and MLAs have more important duties than to participate in numerous local ward committee meetings (especially of course MPs!). Likewise, there should not be too many appointed experts which would also endanger the ward committee's power: it should be a people's not an expert committee.

Then there are understandable fears that the new urban local bodies will not receive adequate funds to carry out the numerous tasks allotted to them. These fears are based on past experience where there have been frequent problems with money transfers to the decentralized rural local bodies (Panchyati Raj problems), as well as on the knowledge that municipal finance is very poor in almost all Indian municipalities (de Wit, 1996b; NIUA, 1994: 60-1). An even more critical question is whether ward committees can have any expectation to be effective in alleviation urban poverty, which is a complex, multi-faceted, deeply rooted problem with economic, social, gender and cultural aspects. Eradicating or alleviating poverty largely depends on legal and economic interventions at higher municipal, even more so state levels (employment, land legislation, educational policies, acts against child labour and for minimum wages). Such interventions touch upon the structure of societies, and require a long term perspective, sustained interest and adequate budgets. Finally, there is some concern that many states will 'implement the 74th Amendment in the spirit and not in the letter', and that they will dilute or neglect many provisions which have

been made discretionary and not mandatory. This concerns particularly to the scope for the actual transfer of funds or taxation powers to the new urban local bodies.

In spite of these important uncertainties, the 74th Constitutional Amendment has generally been welcomed in India. It has in fact only been accepted after much pressure and lobbying by civil groups and NGOs. We will have to see what impact it will have. Most writers take a cautiously optimistic view, while others foresee the need to again adjust the amendments in some near future.

III. DECENTRALIZATION, URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN URBAN INDIA: THE UBSP AND BUPP PROGRAMMES.

The chief and most comprehensive urban poverty alleviation programme of India is the Urban Basic Services Programme for the Urban Poor (UBSP). It was initiated in 1985 as a joint effort of UNICEF and India's Central Government. From 1992, the programme funds have been provided fully by the Indian State Governments and municipalities. UNICEF retained a role in the field of training. The programme is presently being implemented in about 280 towns. Its prime objective, besides (facilitating) the provision of basic services, is to empower the poor, with a specific focus on women, through development of leadership qualities, promoting of group spirit and self-help and to strive towards the self-reliance of urban communities (Ghosh et al, 1995: 12; Reddy, 1994). The programme is guided by three important principles: community participation, convergence of various existing government programmes and cost effectiveness. Convergence refers to efforts to link or integrate various urban poverty alleviation programmes, so as to enhance their overall impact. An example could be the simultaneous implementation of both health (awareness), education, physical slum improvement and income generation programmes.

The nodal slum level organization in the UBSP programme is the Neighbourhood Committee (NHC) or Neighbourhood Group (NHG), which is assumed to provide leadership in a collective form. This committee can also be seen as an agent in a system of democratic decentralization, as it has planning and implementing powers, and receives funds from the municipality (Ghosh, 1996: 288ff). NGOs are expected to play an important role, particularly in the fields of service delivery, supportive services, technical support and out-reach mechanisms (UBSP, 1994: 11).

Due to the relatively wide coverage of the UBSP programme, and its elements of democratic decentralization, it will play an important role after the creation and empowerment of the new urban local bodies under the 74th Constitutional Amendment. For example, members of

UBSP Neighbourhood Groups could become members of the new ward committees, and the UBSP programme is a logical programme for addressing the tasks of urban poverty alleviation and slum improvement which will be allotted to the ward committees.

Thus (...), the interaction of the people who are working for the UBSP programme, who have very close connection with the Neighbourhood Committee (NHC) and know how the programme works with community structures, has to take place with policy makers and other limbs of the Government who are going to be involved in the (74th Constitutional) amendments. Inputs from this will become important in efforts to dovetail the UBSP structure of Municipal Governments as envisaged in the states by suitable amendment to the Municipal Acts (NIUA, 1994: 63, from a speech by the Joint Secretary of Urban Development, Government of India).

The question is then, what is the track record of UBSP; has the programme been effective so far in empowering the urban poor? And if UBSP will become the main vehicle for combatting urban poverty in relation to the 74th Constitutional Amendment, can it be expected that the poor will be able to profit from potential new opportunities in a decentralized context? Have they been able to utilize their powers in the neighbourhood groups for effective planning, fund mobilization and programme implementation? Evidence of this can be found in various studies carried out on UBSP's impact (Ghosh et al., 1995, Reddy, 1994, Cousins and Soudiere, 1992).

More evidence on the scope to radically decentralize tasks and powers to slum communities is to be found by looking at the Bangalore Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme (BUPP), a programme quite similar to the UBSP programme. I will now briefly introduce the objectives and methodology of this BUPP programme, before analyzing the weaknesses and strengths, the successes and problems of both programmes.

The Bangalore Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme

Objectives and methodology

The Bangalore Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme (or BUPP for short) was started in 1993 after the Governments of India and the Netherlands agreed to initiate a small scale, model building or 'pilot' programme aimed at integrated urban poverty alleviation. The programme was initially planned to last two years; but after having encountered some delays the programme was extended until 1997. The programme aims to develop and test a model of sustainable and comprehensive urban poverty alleviation based on wide ranging forms of community participation. Recognizing that it is women and children who are most vulnerable in low income urban areas, the programme aims to give special attention to these groups. Key concerns of the programme are decentralization; effective planning powers are transferred to slum organizations, which are also given financial and other resources (de Wit, 1995).

Local slum organizations are expected to engage in community or 'bottom up' planning approaches, to identify local needs and to design ways of meeting these needs, mostly in the fields of basic services and employment. But the prime objective of the programme is not the provision of 'tangible' benefits such as shelter, loans or basic services. Rather, its chief objective is the empowerment of the urban poor. The programme recognizes that participatory approaches

have not been accompanied by the development of sufficiently strong 'countervailing and claim-making powers' to match the overriding influence of political and other elites in the planning and development process (BUPP Project Document (PD), 1992: 29).

The core of the programme is then to empower the urban poor, to enhance the countervailing power of community based organizations (CBOs). Apart from this rather political objective the programme aims to bring about an increased participation of the programme population in planning and implementing development programmes, and increased levels of awareness and organization. Other expected results are better access to services, resources and institutions and an increased level of resources in cash and kind. Finally, the programme would be successful if the new institutions created (see below) proved effective and viable/sustainable without further outside support.

Another programme objective is to bring about a close cooperation between Government (agencies) and Bangalore NGOs working in the slums, as well as the so called 'convergence' of programmes of various local Government agencies and of NGOs so that these are linked and integrated to improve their effectiveness and impact in selected BUPP slums. The programme is based on a 'process approach' and is to some extent open ended. It is explicitly meant to be a 'learning by doing' programme.

Institutional structure

The BUPP programme has created four new institutions: the Steering Committee, a Programme Support Unit, an NGO forum and Slum Development Teams or SDTs.

The programme is implemented by the **Steering Committee** or **SC**. The SC is an autonomous body which controls the BUPP funds, appoints all staff and reports to relevant ministries in New Delhi and The Hague. It has eleven members. There are on the hand six representatives of Government agencies such as the Bangalore City Corporation (BCC), the Karnataka Slum Clearance Board (KSCB), the Women and Child Welfare Department and the semi-governmental HUDCO housing corporation. Four SC members are the leaders of four large NGOs working in the Bangalore slums. They have been nominated to the SC by the so-called **NGO Forum**, which unites many Bangalore NGOs active in the city's slums. The Chairman of the Steering Committee is the Secretary of the Department of Urban Development of the Government of Karnataka, who is a senior official with some (not full)

authority over the Government agencies mentioned.

A new **Programme Support Unit or PSU** was created to be in charge of day to day programme implementation, and to function as the secretariat of the SC. It has three functional units which reflect the comprehensive nature of BUPP: a community development or social unit, an income generation unit and a habitat (physical infrastructure) unit. An administrative and accounts unit completes the PSU. PSU has only limited staff: each functional unit consists of one senior and a junior official who have been contracted - with considerable difficulty - for the programme's duration after open recruitment. Most of them have a background of working with or for local NGOs. An executive Director could only be appointed in 1996. He has an academic background.

That the PSU has only limited staff is explained by their limited mandate and the limited tasks they were intended and expected to carry out. The PSU was mostly meant to play a facilitating role, i.e. to stimulate, assist and advise both Government agencies and NGOs with a view to improve the latter's performance and to enhance their capacity in implementing urban poverty alleviation programmes. Besides, an important PSU task concerns making workplans for the programme as a whole, as well as developing and testing guidelines, which is part of constant monitoring and evaluation activities. The latter activities are important in view of BUPP's 'learning by doing' nature and the expectation from the start that programme adjustments will have to be effected frequently.

Next, at the slum level '**Slum Development Teams' or SDTs** are to be constituted. These teams form the organizational core of BUPP: SDTs initiate a planning cycle for their slums, while being responsible for implementation and later maintenance. Team members are elected by the slum community as a whole, for example from one person each from various slum pockets. In principle half the team members should be women. After participating in processes of 'participatory rapid appraisals' (PRA methods) slum inhabitants are stimulated to identify and list their needs as well as resources, and the prioritized community needs are laid down in the so called '**Slum Development Plan' or SDP** by the Slum Development Teams. These slum plans are submitted to the Steering Committee, and after approval the SC transfers the funds required for their implementation to the SDTs bank account. Such an account is opened by a Slum Development Team in a bank near a particular slum, and is jointly operated by one or two SDT members and one member of an NGO or the PSU.

The management of any slum (improvement) programme is ideally managed by the SDT. Even if an existing Government programme is available for a slum, such a programme proposal will first have to be discussed, and perhaps be adjusted by the slum community so as to achieve optimal agreement and maximum participation. Funds from the Netherlands

available for slum plans would be transferred, after SC approval to the SDT bank accounts for financing SDT initiated slum development programmes (BUPP-PD, 1992: 43). On the other hand, funds from local government agencies can also be channelled to SDT bank accounts for utilization by SDTs. As per BUPP philosophy, SDTs would learn much from planning and implementing slum (development) programmes, from utilizing funds, and even from making unavoidable mistakes. Slum inhabitants at large would be associated with these activities through comprehensive participatory processes, which would in turn lead to an increase in self awareness, skills, self confidence and ultimately countervailing power.

These rather ambitious processes of SDT formation and bottom up planning (i.e. drafting slum development plans) are to be facilitated by NGOs working in the slum in question. Implementing Slum Development Plan components is to be facilitated by Governmental agencies and NGOs, whereby the PSU again plays a supportive, advisory and monitoring role - not a leading role.

Assessment in terms of decentralization

From the above it can be perceived that the small BUPP programme is in reality a quite ambitious programme: in a relatively short time an entirely new institutional structure was to be set up (Steering Committee, Programme Support Unit, and Slum Development Teams); tangible improvements were to be effected in selected slums after processes of bottom up planning, while the SDTs themselves would have improved slum conditions utilizing the funds in their own bank accounts. Slum inhabitants would be engaged in participatory processes, leading to involvement in various available as well as new types of programmes, which would eventually lead to their empowerment and to them developing countervailing power vis-a-vis political and other elites.

In two instances there is a form of decentralization. First, BUPP as a programme with Steering Committee as the autonomous implementing agency can be understood as a case of 'delegation to semi-autonomous or para-statal organizations' (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983: 21). A new and independent body is formed at the municipal level to implement the specific task of urban poverty implementation. Even in a financial sense BUPP is relatively independent, as funds from the Netherlands can finance many (initial) costs: of running the PSU, of initial local slum programme costs. However, BUPP has strong links to the Government, if only through the Secretary Urban Development who is the BUPP Steering Committee chairman, as well as through the convergence of programmes which is facilitated by all SC members.

Secondly, and even more ambitious, is the decentralization of tasks and funds from the municipal agencies to the Slum Development Teams. Decentralization here is best termed a transfer of functions to non-governmental institutions, or in terms of Smith (1985: 176) to

neighbourhood action groups. Decentralization here is again assumed to bring about or to be combined with comprehensive participation, not only of members of the Slum Development teams, but of the slum populace at large.

Having now briefly dealt with the Urban Basic Services for the Poor programme and the Bangalore Urban Poverty alleviation programme I will now examine the weaknesses and strengths of both programmes. As they are quite similar in nature, the analysis will apply to both programmes. I may however note a few differences first. First, UBSP focuses exclusively on women, so that for example the **Neighbourhood Committees** or **NHCs** consist solely of women. BUPP has mixed slum development teams, starting from the philosophy that men and women can only jointly effect a change in their living conditions, and that men, if excluded, may not support (their) women to cooperate with a programme. Secondly, BUPP has a much stronger institutional structure with a well staffed separate Programme Support Unit, and a high level Steering Committee which represents all important agencies active in the fields of slums and poverty alleviation. Another crucial difference is that BUPP has a lot more funds than the UBSP programme (which resources differ from state to state and from city to city), also in terms of allowable, per capita expenditure. UBSP relies almost fully on funds made available by State and Municipal agencies, and, in most cases, the latter are very poor, if not more or less bankrupt (de Wit, 1996, 1996b). Not least, BUPP has a more comprehensive approach than UBSP in that it can, in principle, cater to all needs of the slum inhabitants, and this includes addressing and attempting to solve the (urgent) land problems of those urban poor living in illegal or 'objectionable' slums. In contrast, UBSP does not address land issues, but rather focuses on more limited physical/ infrastructure, social and economic activity.

BUPP did so far not have to deal much with political interference in the absence of elected municipal councillors in Bangalore. Elections for such councillors were held after many years only in October 1996 and the impact of active councillors can be judged in the near future. But of course, BUPP is dependent on the cooperation of politicians which is brought out in the involvement of Members of the Legislative Assembly. UBSP appears to have generally avoided involving politicians as much as possible, which may be inferred from Ghosh et al (1995: 288) who indicate that 'the non involvement of elected representatives in the project management group at the town level often creates such conflicts on account of which the programme suffers and the resource allocation cannot be effected in favour of the poor'.

In view of these differences between the UBSP and BUPP programmes, an assessment of both programmes cannot, taken generally, be a fully valid one. However, their comparison and assessment here will be limited to those objectives and components which UBSP and BUPP have in common, such as the 'convergence of programmes', an important role allotted to NGOs, community contributions and the empowerment of (communities of) the urban

poor.

IV. INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF UBSP AND BUPP PERFORMANCE

On the whole, both the UBSP and BUPP programmes did achieve some of their objectives, and they did have an impact amongst the urban poor. Obviously, the achievements of UBSP present a mixed picture: programme performance differed from city to city. There are rich and poor cities, some of which have administrators sympathetic to the programme, while others have not. Both BUPP and UBSP succeeded in providing urgently needed basic services to slum populations, where both programmes provided water supply and sanitation facilities, formal and non-formal education, sewerage and toilets to slums.

Between 1992 and 1994, 2,000 pre-schools, 200 community centres and 100 primary schools were constructed under the UBSP programme. There are an increasing number of saving and credit societies, with women taking loans for shelter improvement and small scale enterprises (UBSP, 1995). Indeed, the programme was selected as an example of a 'best practice' in the Habitat-II conference in Istanbul. According to the available documentation, the UBSP programme performed best in Siliguri City in West Bengal, which state is ruled by the Communist Party of India (Marxist). It has been noted that the Marxist dominated city government saw community participation both as a method to effectively provide basic services as well as a vehicle to build up party support through popular mobilization. There is also a successful UBSP programme in the city of Allepey in Kerala, a state which was ruled for a long time by the same Communist party. In both West Bengal and Kerala literacy rates amongst the poor are higher than in other Indian states, which may be one explaining factor for comparatively good performance, while in the case of West Bengal an additional factor may be stability and sustained interest of the Government. These factors point at the importance of the institutional context of programme implementation.

In terms of coverage, the BUPP programme is only a small 'pilot programme' being implemented in fifteen slums of Bangalore, where approximately nine slum development teams (SDTs) are functioning. An assessment of the BUPP programme must also differ from assessing UBSP performance, since BUPP is a 'model building programme' which aims to develop novel urban poverty alleviation approaches. In contrast, UBSP is a well established and rather large programme, being implemented in about 280 cities. In 1994 33,000 women volunteers were associated with UBSP, and there were over 3,400 Neighbourhood

associations with Resident Community Volunteers and other women serving in leadership positions. The states of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh have expanded programme coverage to all state towns, and additional state resources have been made available in both states.

In many cities, UBSP has succeeded in creating awareness of an alternative approach to urban poverty alleviation. There have been effective campaigns against alcoholism and crimes against women. Women and disadvantaged groups have been able to forge effective partnerships, communities have contributed to infrastructural projects in cash or kind. This is also the case in the BUPP programme. The relative success of UBSP can also be judged from the fact that the UBSP approach/model will be adopted under the recently announced National Slum Improvement programme of India, which will be financed with central funds.

It is no surprise however, that both the UBSP and BUPP programmes have faced various constraints, varying from city to city, from community to community. Both programmes are quite ambitious in terms of decentralization, delegation of tasks and of empowerment ideals. They are invariably implemented in difficult settings: heterogeneous slum populations, insecurity of tenure in illegal slums, risk avoidance amongst very poor and vulnerable groups, and conflicting interests of slum people, mediators, urban bureaucrats and urban elites. Detailed case studies have brought out the chief problems faced (Ghosh et al. 1996: who deal with UBSP programmes in four cities; Reddy, 1994 who studied the UBSP programmes in five cities), while I am familiar with the constraints faced by the BUPP programme in Bangalore.

I will now assess the weaknesses and strengths of both programmes, which can only be done here in an exploratory way. It is too early to review the impact of BUPP, and evidence on UBSP is fragmentary, limited to few cities, and programme experiences there vary widely. The approach is problem oriented, which makes it possible to identify problems and to suggest ways to improve programme performance where needed. The assessment has been structured to reflect the diverse roles and responses of Government agencies, NGOs, slum organizations and slum communities:

1. The responses of Governments and government agencies, which can be judged by assessing the actual convergence of programmes and the channelling of powers and funds to slum organizations;
2. The role, response and effectiveness of NGOs, as intermediaries between the urban poor and urban agencies and institutions, as supporters of participatory and empowerment processes;
3. The role and response of Slum Development Teams (BUPP) and Neighbourhood Committees (UBSP) in view of decentralized local planning and implementation activity, and in properly representing and involving the rank and file slum inhabitants;
4. The degree of empowerment and of involvement in the programmes generally of slum

inhabitants, in terms of broad based development and participation.

Before examining these issues, I will briefly dwell on the overall socio-institutional context in which both programmes are being implemented, where I cannot move here beyond presenting some generalized statements.

Institutional context of urban poverty alleviation efforts

Political interference

The nature of politics and political support is a critical factor influencing decentralization generally, and participatory and empowerment approaches in particular. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to dwell on this exhaustively, and I may refer to my previous paper (de Wit, 1996b) on the nature of Indian urban management and on the importance of politics as regards policy implementation (as separate from policy formulation). Put briefly, I argued that the scope for Indian policy aimed at the urban and rural poor is often impeded by 'political interference'. Politicians often influence or manipulate policy implementation processes with a view to their own personal interest. To further the chances for (re-) election, they may influence officials to implement a programme in a particular slum just before an election, so making it clear that the slum people should be grateful to him, and that he expects them to vote for him. Policy benefits in terms of loans, plots, services can be seen then as 'incentives' to persuade people to vote for a particular politician. The poor are assumed to trade their vote for tangible benefits (incentives). This model of 'machine politics' appears to hold true for many policies aimed at slums which can be seen as easily accessible 'vote banks'. The political ideologies of many parties are in name pro-people or even socialist. But in reality self-interest - rather than an interest in the long term welfare of the people they represent - is an important motivation of many individual politicians, both at central, state and municipal levels (de Wit, 1996). More generally, conflicts of interest between ruling and opposition party politicians, between politicians and Government officials, between landlords and slum dwellers, slum dwellers and local leaders determine to a large extent the outcome of urban policies. These may initially look fine on paper, but their impact on paper may be quite disappointing due to unplanned changes and manipulations during the 'policy transformation process'.

Land

A next serious constraint concerns land ownership. Particularly in the larger cities and metropolises there is an increasing pressure on the available land, and land prices have risen dramatically in recent years. In most cases the urban poor - and especially those most poor - live in substandard and often illegal settlements or slums. Whereas in the past, the urban poor were often able to squat on vacant lands, this is more or less impossible today. Rather, there are indications that forced or policy induced evictions and resettlement are on the

increase. Land owners, property developers and speculators are eagerly eying many slum areas seeing scope for profitable real estate development. Consequently, it appears to be more and more rare that illegal slums are legalized or notified under the State Slum Acts. Urban poor living in so called private slums are forced to subsist under the most precarious conditions. They often lack all facilities and these cannot be provided due to objections on the part of the land owners (de Wit, 1996).

One of the delays in implementing the BUPP programme has been caused by problems encountered in attempting to solve the intractable land problems of some 'illegal, private and objectionable' slums. With a view to select slums which were more or less representative for the city of Bangalore, a few slums difficult in terms of legal land problems were also taken up under the programme. This choice was fully in line with the ideal to also deal with the poorest slums, but it led to long delays and much time and energy spent on legal issues. However, success has been limited to the legalization of only two or three slums out of 8 problematic ones to date. This led to frustrations amongst PSU and NGOs, but more importantly amongst the slum population of specific slums whose high hopes and expectations that BUPP would at long last solve their key problem did not materialize quickly.

Socio-cultural factors

Behaviourial, attitudinal and cultural factors crucially influence the scope for poverty alleviation and for urban policy implementation generally. In India an obvious key issue is the strong stratification of society into caste groups (de Wit, 1996b: 17ff). There are clear divisions between such groups, each group having its distinct perceptions, customs and group culture. Considerable distinctions then exist between these groups, and there appears to be a widely held belief that

There is a division between people who work with their minds and rule and people who work with their hand and are ruled. These beliefs are closely tied to religious notions and to the notions that underlie India's hierarchical caste system.. (..) .. The explanation for policy lies not in interest group politics nor state interests, but in the beliefs and values of elites that shape their political actions, that is, in India's political culture (Weiner, 1991: 5-6).

Even though the latter statement perhaps overemphasizes the role of beliefs and values, it is nevertheless certain that prevalent attitudes amongst the rich(er) and powerful easily reflect on policy implementation, for example where higher status officials deal with low status slum dwellers (cf. de Wit, 1996). Attitudes may also be paternalistic or start from the assumption that the poor are themselves to blame for their predicament. For example, almost all slum inhabitants of Bangalore belong to the Scheduled Castes (former untouchables). This indicates that Bangalore's slum or urban poverty problem is not only, or in the first place, a housing and land problem, but that it has strong social and cultural determinants.

Finance

Finally, the scope for decentralization may be strongly affected by the lack of funds of many Indian municipalities, which only receive limited funds from the state governments and which have a weak tax base. This theme too was already elaborated in my previous paper on urban management, to which I may refer here (de Wit, 1996: 11ff).

V. RESPONSES OF GOVERNMENTAL AND NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The present section aims to assess the responses of governments, NGOs and communities - both the newly created Neighbourhood Committees under UBSP and the Slum Development Teams under BUPP - to the decentralization envisioned in both programmes, and to the opportunities created to enhance the participation and empowerment of the urban poor. This section is impressionistic in nature, as it deals broadly with roles and responses of various actor groups in different cities. General patterns have been depicted, and not so much the specific achievements or problems in specific cities or even slums. It is based on programme experiences documented in a variety of sources available.

Responses of Government agencies

Convergence of programmes

In both UBSP and BUPP the convergence of existing programmes has been less successful than anticipated. A Government source even mentions that it is the weakest part of UBSP, caused by a lack of inter-departmental cooperation and coordination. Generally, the most relevant programmes for convergence include shelter programmes for the Scheduled Castes, employment and income generation programmes, health and education programmes, most of which normally come under the responsibility of the Municipal Corporations. Other relevant programmes include shelter and slum improvement programmes of municipalities, the Housing and Urban Development Corporation HUDCO, and State Slum Clearance Boards. Programmes implemented by other agencies should also be considered, for example most programmes of the State Departments of Women and Child Welfare, and programmes implemented independently by NGOs.

Problems associated with the convergence of programmes can almost fully be attributed to the functioning of the relevant government agencies, and to the many constraints which hinder effective inter-agency cooperation. The chief issue concerns coordination problems, which are already considerable normally. Many agencies operate like small kingdoms, and have their very own dynamics, working cultures and incentive structures. There is no 'culture

of cooperation' across agencies. Service departments more often than not have a narrow departmental outlook (Reddy, 1994: 63). So when coordination is already difficult normally, it is not realistic to expect that agencies will be easily able to coordinate with other agencies with a view to convergence. It will require time and the sustained interest of high level officials and department heads.

Problems for convergence result from the fact that each agency has its own annual budget and targets, and no agency is easily ready to part with its own funds or to risk that targets cannot be met. Another issue concerns the general lack of funds with almost all agencies, so that programmes and funds available for convergence are also limited. For example, in Bangalore, the Karnataka Slum Clearance Board proved to be a poor agency, so that the scope for utilizing the Boards' funds or programmes proved limited. Availability of funds is also one of the chief UBSP problems, as funds for programmes are scarce in almost all cities due to the enormous needs of large numbers of urban poor. There is competition then for programmes and funds, and it cannot be precluded that some funds/programmes are earmarked not only on the basis of real need, but (also/rather) on the basis of political expediency, with a view to accommodating to vote banks by politicians eager to be (re-)elected. So where programmes and funds are scarce, this automatically restricts the scope for convergence. And if convergence of existing programmes and funds does not materialize, both BUPP and UBSP have to rely on funds directly made available to them. That means Dutch funds in case of BUPP, and State and Municipality funds for UBSP. The latter situation has led to 'delays to obtain funds' and diversion of funds in some cities where UBSP is being implemented. In contrast it may be noted that in quite a few cities the money reserved annually by State or Municipality for UBSP is not being spent on the programme (Reddy, 1994: 65).

There is a clear overall tendency to focus on the physical 'hardware side' of programme implementation rather than on community participation and empowerment components of both programmes. Hence, Ghosh et al. (1996: 291) note that 'in most cases, instead of community development, the local governments have placed emphasis on physical development which is easy to provide'. In BUPP also, Government agencies have a preference for visible, tangible improvements, while the participatory, awareness and community mobilization activities were sometimes perceived as very time consuming and to result in delays in programme implementation.

It must be added, that to some extent such impatience is shared by people in the slums. After all, they are in urgent need of very specific and concrete provisions, women often again more so than men: e.g. drinking water, toilets, electricity, creches, paved roads, and improved shelter. While they agree on properly planning such provisions, too much emphasis on many meetings, too high expectations of community wide participation and contributions may have

the effect of decreasing enthusiasm or even interest. The poor may carefully calculate the cost/benefit ratio of an individual investment required for a collective provision; if it takes too much time/money/labour they may drop out.

Institutional factors

Especially in the case of UBSP, but also in the case of BUPP the administrative or institutional programme structure is relatively weak. In UBSP, the officer in charge may be a lower level official of the Municipality, or an Assistant District Coordinator who may complain about the lack of cooperation from municipal health, women and child welfare agencies and banks for convergence of programmes and funds. But, being of relatively low status, he has no power to enforce cooperation.

In the case of BUPP there is some uneasiness amongst Government agencies about the ambivalent institutional location of BUPP. BUPP is only loosely linked to the Government, as programme authority is vested with the combined Governmental and Non Governmental organizations in the Steering Committee. BUPP is not institutionalized in an existing agency such as the City Corporation or Karnataka Slum Board. Rather, the BUPP Programme Support Unit (PSU) has its own office and staff, and it has to approach either Governmental agencies or NGOs to get things done, not being backed by the daily authority of an institution - even though it does have the high level support of the BUPP chairman, the senior level Housing Secretary. Of course this set up of relative autonomy has its advantages, for example some freedom to introduce and implement innovative methodology and a position to cooperate freely with any agency or NGO.

Nevertheless, BUPP has an ambiguous status, and tends to be perceived as neither a Government programme, nor as an NGO controlled programme, and this unclear status may have been a reason for less than full commitment of Government and Non Governmental organizations to the programme. Another reason for a general lack of enthusiasm or commitment with higher and lower level officials may be that they tend to assess both UBSP and BUPP as small programmes, where only little money is involved. They may feel their time inputs do not match with the (limited) amounts of money being spent. The issues is related to the necessary 'critical mass' required for commanding broad interest.

Generally, in India, there is a rather high incidence of government officials being transferred from one post to another. The problem is one of continuity: new officials are unaware of the programme philosophy, and have to be briefed, sometimes convinced about UBSP or BUPP programme methods and objectives. For example in the case of BUPP, in a period of three years, there were three different/successive Municipal Deputy Commissioners, three KSCB secretaries, three BUPP Chairmen. This obviously had an impact on policy continuity and Steering Committee participation.

Decentralization: transfer of powers and funds

The ideal of participatory development, bottom-up planning and of transferring tasks/policy implementation to communities may be endangered by attitudes prevalent amongst Government officials, and by the force of accepted, time tested practices and routines within agencies. Korten (1981: 186) has described well the fundamental problem associated with the change required from officials who wish or are expected to effect a policy shift from 'top-down' towards participatory approaches:

The signals regarding preferred behaviours in a centralized, service-delivery oriented agency are usually quite contrary to those appropriate for a participatory approach. Consequently when an agency tries to switch from one approach to the other, the signals that the existing systems convey become obstacles to generating community participation. Reorienting these systems is a major challenge facing any manager who desires to encourage his personnel to use a participatory approach.

Agencies are often characterized by a centralized way of working, and by strong hierarchies. This may be quite contrary indeed to the ideal of decentralization, of transferring powers and funds to lower levels.

Specific practical issues - some of them relating to the above - are listed here. There appears to be some reluctance amongst Government Organizations (GOs) to cooperate with BUPP/PSU due to different methods and procedures applied. BUPP aims at integration, at allowing for people's views and inputs, at bypassing cumbersome bureaucratic procedures if necessary. Government agencies are rather characterized by a centralized way of working, 'top-down approaches', inflexibility due to fixed rules and procedures, and by hierarchy. These differences in style and methods, even organizational cultures is a real problem but would be solvable, given time and the patient elaboration of new rules, relaxation of other rules and allowing for some flexibility. It must be recognized that the bureaucracy works according to elaborate rules and regulations, and that deviating from such rules may be problematic and at least time consuming.

Related to the above, there appears to be some reluctance amongst Government agencies to channel funds, resources and programmes to the slums for implementation by or through SDTs/NHCs, as this also implies a rather dramatic change in normal practice, for example in terms of accounting procedures. Besides, a lack of confidence may exist on the part of GOs as to whether SDTs/NHCs can effectively carry out or supervise slum activities/works. To some extent this may be understandable. Obviously it took some time for SDTs to function adequately; they first had to prove their reputation. A lack of confidence on the part of GOs may also apply to the role and functioning of NGOs, who are expected to assist SDTs in local planning and implementation. Some Government officials are suspicious of NGOs, having a negative view of their reliability and effectiveness.

Responses of NGOs

In both the UBSP and BUPP programmes there is a strong emphasis on the involvement of NGOs. They are seen as important agents to help implement the programmes, and they are perceived to be well equipped to deal with slum communities. However, specifically in the UBSP programme NGO participation has been less than anticipated, and there have been some problems as regards NGO involvement in BUPP. The reasons why NGOs have not participated much in UBSP have not been specified in the available literature, and more research on the matter is necessary.

NGOs cooperated well in the context of the BUPP programme. It may be noted the four NGO members of the BUPP Steering Committee played a useful role. The NGOs are generally very interested in and committed to BUPP; meetings of the Bangalore Urban NGO Forum were lively and mostly useful. NGOs proved better informed than (the frequently transferred) Government officials of the actual conditions in and the land status of Bangalore's slums, so that they played a very valuable (even if sometimes partisan) role in identifying and selecting slums. They were instrumental in providing access to such slums while there a number of NGOs have been very active in assisting and guiding SDTs.

Nevertheless, in BUPP NGOs have not been able to play the substantial and multi-faceted roles which were assigned to them. One reason may have been that NGOs were initially expected to perform tasks in BUPP slums without any compensation. Next, that NGOs were unable to fulfil the large, often implicit expectations in BUPP is understandable as these NGOs normally already have more than enough work in the slum areas where they already work, and they were unable to take on more work. It is not quite clear to what extent UBSP actively canvassed for NGO support, or whether UBSP expected NGOs to team up to support the programme (cf. Ghosh, 1995: 299). In view of this, in the BUPP programme a system was evolved eventually where one staff member of an NGO working in a particular BUPP slum can be compensated financially. Such persons are called 'link persons' as they function as a bridge between slum communities, BUPP/PSU, NGOs and government agencies. Regular meetings of such so called 'Link Persons' are held and NGO Link Persons are trained in areas where they lack specific expertise.

Related this is the fact that NGOs were expected to play a role in a variety of fields so as to achieve the aim of integrated improvement of slums and general welfare. Barring few exceptions, NGOs are mostly strong in community organizational and community mobilizing work, and much less in equally critical areas such as (assisting in) providing basic physical services and employment/ income generation opportunities. Many NGOs have a valuable problem solving approach, solving urgent issues when these arise, functioning as intermediaries between the poor and the bureaucracy. Not all of them fully take account of

participatory processes, and the complexities related to empowerment work. In some cases NGOs were more ready to support or accept community demands where this is not fully in line with the participatory BUPP philosophy, for example where community contributions are concerned.

It next appears as if many NGOs prefer to work alone and in some isolation in specific ('their') slums, relying on what they perceive as their own time tested methods and accountability systems. Hence, NGOs may have their own stable relationships with communities and community leaders, and it could be that in some cases NGOs form an additional layer between the urban poor, the bureaucracy and UPA programmes. Finally, the functioning of some NGOs leaves to be desired, in terms of financial discipline, keeping timings for meetings and the like. In some NGOs there is a marked difference and gap between the assertive and well qualified NGO leadership and the less qualified rank and file staff.

But with regard to all these issues, it must be kept in mind that there are vast differences from one NGO to the other, and that many NGOs which did lack certain expertise and skills, participated in training and workshops with a view to improved performance. We must keep in mind that BUPP has quite high and specific expectations in terms of methods, attitudes and behaviours from all its partners, and that it is not surprising that it takes time and much effort to bring these about.

NGO-NGO and NGO-Government cooperation

It has proven difficult for two different NGOs to work together in any one BUPP slum. This would have been effective in some cases, for example for an NGO specialized in community organization to work together with an NGO specialized in construction. This has rarely happened, and there have been some cases of misunderstandings between different NGOs. It seems that NGOs often prefer to work alone in one ('its') slum.

And as already stated before, there exists some mutual suspicion between Government officials on the one hand and NGO staff and leadership on the other. This has however not directly affected the functioning of BUPP generally, or of the Steering Committee in specific. But, as indicated, it may have been one reason for a less than enthusiastic Government response to cooperate with a programme where NGOs play such a critical role. Where the UBSP programme is concerned, it appears that in the UBSP programme NGOs did not play a large role; it is stated to be an important lacuna in UBSP. 'Very few NGOs came forward to play this effective role especially in government funded programmes' (Ghosh et al. 1995: 299; the role refers to stimulating participation, motivating people and acting as intermediaries between local government and beneficiaries).

VI: RESPONSES OF SLUM ORGANIZATIONS AND SLUM COMMUNITIES

On the whole, there are many examples of well functioning Slum Development Teams in BUPP slums and Neighbourhood Committees in the UBSP slum areas. In both programmes there are indications that the confidence and assertiveness of slum inhabitants has increased, which is for example stressed by Reddy (1994: 69), who established a fair amount of empowerment in the UBSP slums which he studied:

People are no longer hesitant to approach municipal agencies and service departments which was unthinkable earlier'. He goes on to say: 'More importantly, a palpable sense of motivation and confidence in their collective strengths is discernable.

This also applies to BUPP where the people who have seized the opportunities offered by the programme have benefited in terms of a higher awareness, a better access to agencies, and improved links to groups in the same or other slums.

Neighbourhood Committees and Slum Development Teams

Forming new slum organizations

It may be noted from the outset that any slum has one or more 'slum leaders', who are active as mediators between illiterate and poor slum inhabitants and important actors such as officials, employers, politicians, and the police. Such leaders may also be active as money lenders, plot traders and local level political agents for any of the political parties. They are normally related through patronage relations to higher level political arenas, and normally have excellent access to higher status actors related to slums and the urban poor (see de Wit, 1996). Dependency relations may easily develop between slum leaders and the urban poor, and leaders may exploit their powerful position. It is against this background that we must examine the formation of new organizations under UPA programmes: SDTs and NHCs.

It is then not so surprising that there has been a tendency in both UBSP and BUPP programmes that some new leaders of the respective slum organizations (NHC/SDT) are the former leaders or wives of leaders, who quickly managed to take up or capture the new positions. States Reddy (1994: 65):

Only a few members of the Neighbourhood Committees are active in most places and

there is an impression among the slum people that it is these few who have benefited most from the programme, which is not a false impression.

In contrast, in other cases such existing slum leaders proved to be a great help, being effective, respected by their communities and reliable. Since slum leaders are so well established and connected, they can also - if so inclined - be quite effective in mobilizing community support, find ways to solve implementation problems etc. SDTs also function as a forum or spring board for young enterprising men and women to are keen to take up leadership positions and who can be supported and guided in the process. Hence, most SDTs have a mixed membership of established leaders, respected or assertive persons who were elected to the team and new, keen aspirants. SDT membership is not always stable; the distinction between the existing Community Based Organizations (CBOs) or (political) slum organizations on the one hand and the new SDTs or NHCs on the other is often blurred and or only crystallized gradually.

There are positive examples of men and women who are elected to SDT membership and who develop well keeping in mind their roles and responsibilities. But it does not come as a surprise that often persons are elected to who are more assertive, literate or wealthy, and/or who are well connected to the most influential slum families or slum leaders. However, in many instances such more assertive members have made place for other SDT members as they proved unacceptable to the slum inhabitants at large, or were too much self interested. There have been cases where newly elected members started to claim benefits they felt are associated with their new role and status of leader. But, again, these are initial problems which could be overcome, through - admittedly laborious and time consuming - guidance by NGO or PSU.

In one BUPP slum, two slum leaders clearly dominated the SDT, but this fitted the accepted patterns and practices of the slum and the expectations of the slum people. As a result, the people profited well from the leaders' eager cooperation with BUPP. The slum did very well in terms of BUPP funds spent and basic facilities provided. However, participation, let alone empowerment of the slum's rank and file remained problematic, as the leaders only continued the existing dependency relationships intact. In a micro sense, there was again 'top-bottom' implementation by leaders.

As could be expected, some leaders active in UBSP or BUPP slums have proven to be a hindrance to the functioning of NHCs/SDTs, being more keen to serve their personal interests. Examples of problematic slum leadership concern those leaders who are also money lenders and who obstruct the setting up of savings groups in their slums. Another example is a leader who did not want an SDT to be formed as it would endanger his own autocratic role. He was the only slum man participating in a women awareness programme but due to his overpowering presence the women were generally unable/too shy to participate

properly.

Pre-existing patterns of linkages outside and inside the slum may remain more important than the new links provided under UBSP or BUPP. For example, slum leaders in UBSP/BUPP slums may be influenced strongly by higher level party functionaries. At times of elections NHCs/SDTs activities may come to a virtual standstill; organizations may hardly have meetings as the members and leaders are busy with pre-election work.

SDT functioning and membership

In BUPP many women have are taking up membership positions in SDTs, and in many cases there are as many male as female SDT members. In some slums women have claimed and are now exercising powers equal to those of male SDT members.

In other slums women are SDT members while having little or no decision making power. On the other hand, women have been the most interested and active members of the newly set up savings and credit groups which are almost fully managed by women. In terms of local participatory planning processes and financial management, there is not yet enough evidence to make a proper assessment. In one slum the SDT was very slow and irregular in settling bills and submitting vouchers; in another slum this was done swiftly and accurately.

In summary, STDs are not yet in all cases actually and truly representing slum communities at large. On the one hand this is due to their coping with many new tasks and responsibilities (construction, meetings, reporting, accounting etc.). On the other hand, in the individualized context of slums with many internal divisions and jealousies, people may still tend to have a personal (or household/family) interest in membership, which then translates in less participatory behaviour. But most of all, it cannot be expected that novel bodies like SDTs will come be constituted easily and that they will function properly right from the start. There are bound to be starting problems, with people uneasily testing the new grounds, their new tasks and powers and each other.

Community participation and broad-based empowerment

Divisions exist in all slums, and in some slums organizing the people is difficult due to political factionalism, in others due to religious difficulties, and in yet others there is a marked domination of slum men over slum women. Both in BUPP and UBSP there are instances of slum disputes arising out of caste or political differences which rendered the slum organizations dysfunctional (Reddy, 1994: 66). Ghosh et al (1996: 289) state that

Of all 1,600 households surveyed only 12 % in Sambalpur and 7 % in Siliguri are directly involved with the (UBSP) programme as resident volunteers. In the other two cities, the responses in this effect were negligible.

Another quote:

At the organizational level also the participation of the surveyed households is limited.

Although the Neighbourhood Committees have been set up, they are not very effective always in expressing the felt needs of the community (ibid.: 294).

In BUPP the degree of participation appears to be strongly related to (the initial) provision of (tangible) benefits. For example, the highest priority of the slum development plan of one slum located on privately owned land was the legalization of the slums; next the provision of more water, toilets etc. But when the slum's land problems could not be solved, this also obstructed the provision of the other planned facilities. This again led to frustration in the community, and the SDT in this slum all but collapsed and people lost interest in BUPP for some time. In contrast, in a legalized but poor slum basic services were provided fast, which led to considerable community wide interest and the organizational and awareness building processes developed quite favourably. Another successful case where community mobilization was combined with the provision of tangible benefits was a participatory housing project. Here 112 houses were constructed by slum inhabitants themselves, under guidance from an NGO and PSU staff. Funds were jointly provided by the Government of Karnataka and BUPP (The Netherlands).

Community contributions remain a problematic issue in both UBSP (Ghosh et al, 1996: 290) and in BUPP. This is partly related to well established practice that the poor do not pay for their services, and if they are to pay, contributions are often waived after interference by politicians. Still, in BUPP there are encouraging indications that communities are ready to contribute. One successful example concerns the paving of slum dirt roads: people level the roads and help place the slabs. This of course is an example where the benefit is both collective (environmental improvement) as well as individual (more useable space in front of the hut, cleaner pavement). Contributions in terms of unskilled labour inputs were also provided in constructing a community hall in another slum, but this proved more problematic.

The issue may be of finding the proper mix of collective/ individual benefits, and to make a proper assessment of community capacity to carry out specific tasks. Reddy (1994: 68) notes that people's participation is not stimulated sufficiently in UBSP in all stages of the programme: decision making, implementation, benefit sharing and monitoring. He goes on to state that: 'the level of participation at present is not satisfactory due to ignorance, indifference and cynicism'. This is perhaps too strong a statement to apply also to BUPP, but participation is no doubt influenced by existing patterns of awareness, literacy and some (quite understandable) cynicism resulting from frustrations encountered during previous Government programmes or NGO efforts. One must also take into account the fact that the poor generally have to work quite hard in order to survive, that they work long days and that they come home tired. Women often have both reproductive, productive and community management tasks. The incidence of alcoholism amongst slum men may be quite high, which

is another factor impeding participation. An average poor person may therefore have as little or less time and opportunity to participate than an average middle or high class person. A poor person will therefore carefully assess the potential benefit of investing in participation.

On the basis of the available information it appears as if in most UBSP and BUPP slums, actual knowledge of and especially participation in the programme is as yet relatively limited. Many poor people, perhaps precisely those most poor may not be affected by or have not yet benefited from the programmes.



VII. CONCLUSIONS

There are encouraging but not yet fully convincing signs of empowerment as a result of both the UBSP and BUPP programmes. But I must stress at once that the findings presented here can only be tentative. It is too early to judge the programmes on this count in view of the fact that empowerment can only be achieved after persistent efforts over long periods of time. Time is by all means the chief explanatory factor as regards participatory and empowerment approaches and decentralization strategies. Actual impacts can only be expected in the long term.

The chief constraints identified with respect to both programmes can all be solved in principle, given the commitment of all parties involved, and that resources are made available. The chief problems - which of course are not all relevant to or equally serious in each city or slum - included: at the slum level, relatively isolated and fragmented participation and empowerment, rather than broad based slum wide impacts; relatively high overhead costs to achieve comparatively limited and fragmented impacts to date; indications of dominance of slum leaders and the richer sections amongst the slum population; a general reluctance on the part of communities to contribute to community plan components partly due to pre-existing patterns of dependency. Besides, the institutional capacity of both Government agencies and of NGOs is not optimal. This also applies to their record of actually being ready to transfer tasks, powers and funds to the newly created slum organizations.

Policy recommendations

Some broad ideas or suggestions to improve on the present functioning of both programmes are briefly listed here:

The critical mass of programmes should be increased. Presently, UBSP and BUPP remain scattered and relatively isolated programmes failing to achieve an overall city wide impact. City wide or state wide approaches would increase this critical mass. This will raise the interest of policy makers, and most critically, implementing officials. It may enhance the chances of success and thereby the scope for sustainability. It would also help to streamline urban poverty alleviation programmes according to a similar pattern. This need has been recognized and the recently launched national urban policy 'Swarna Jayanti Rozgar Scheme' appears to provide for such a uniform urban policy across India.

Before and during programme implementation, account should be taken of the divergent interests of actors and groups related to the programme or policy: direct participants, those who contribute inputs into the system (e.g. contractors, creditors, high level policy makers) and those with a more indirect but profound interest without being directly involved in the

system (e.g. very important actors (groups) such as land owners, but also intermediaries such as slum level leaders and 'slum lords').

Much more training is needed at all levels, including community organizers, NGOs CBOs, officials, engineers and project staff. Besides, more attention needs to be given to the local institutional context, including social, cultural and political factors while preparing or designing programmes. An 'institutional map' should be made before starting a project. During an inception period, sufficient time should be allowed for participatory viability assessments, including participatory rapid appraisals (PRA). One should also allow for flexibility, in a case-to-case approach, so that there is a proper fit with local conditions and possibilities.

The focus should be on previously neglected groups and areas by locating local offices in poor neighbourhoods, so that officials and engineers are also brought closer to the people and be informed of people's views and needs. Attempts could be made to involve politicians in poverty alleviation efforts, to identify common areas of short term interest between politicians and poverty alleviation programmes/the urban poor, leading to long term (institutional) changes.

Concluding remarks

This paper has brought out the dynamics of efforts aimed at decentralization, poverty alleviation and (community) empowerment in India. It is clear that India has set on a long and ambitious road to decentralize governance in both the rural and urban policy context under the 73d and 74th Constitutional Amendments. India already has a long experience based on earlier decentralization efforts. Where democratic decentralization in relation to urban poverty alleviation is concerned, it is fortunate that India can build on the existing UBSP and BUPP programmes. These could be further adjusted and improved after considering their performance, their weaknesses and strengths.

India's newly adopted decentralization efforts in rural and urban areas are in principle very appropriate, and they hold a large promise for the future. As indicated, there are some areas of concern, but these may yet be improved upon in the course of time. It may be hoped that the 73d and 74th Constitutional amendments will not suffer a fate common to decentralization efforts in many other parts of the world. Conyers (1990) puts it like this:

Opponents of decentralization may decide that it is easier to obstruct decentralization at the implementation than at the design stage; this may apply to civil servants whose access to the policy making process is often limited.

That India is an open democracy, with a vigilant media and a small but quite active civil society, may help to ward off these dangers. But a long and arduous road is certain to follow.

In general, the following quote from Dreze and Sen (1996: 108) relating to rural decentralization is quite apt. I feel it applies equally to the urban context:

If these (decentralization) reforms are not supplemented with a more active programme for social change, they stand in some danger of leading to a proliferation of bureaucracy without any real improvement in democracy. On the other hand, if they go hand in hand with an expansion of public initiatives and social movements aimed at more widespread literacy, a stronger political organization of disadvantaged groups and a more vigorous challenge to social inequalities, they would present a real opportunity to transform village politics in rural India.

There are obviously limits to decentralization, as well as to empowerment approaches. It does not seem very effective to delegate policies aimed at urban poverty alleviation to small and localized ward committees in cities. As correctly argued by Smith (1985: 181) critical determinants of poverty are low incomes, poor housing, high unemployment, and we may add insecurity of land tenure in slums, extremely costly credit and unequal gender relations. The issue is not group disorganization, which appears an underlying assumption of both UBSP and BUPP programmes. What is at stake is in fact multiple deprivation, and this cannot be solved at the local level in a decentralized context. As Manor (1995: 84) and Blair (1996) correctly argue, poverty alleviation policy may actually be more effective when conceived and implemented at or through higher, centralized levels, where there is some chance that legal issues (slum legalization, land reforms, education, minimum wages, gender issues) can be addressed, and where effective measures can be taken as regards employment, education and health. While tasks may be transferred to local bodies, the question is whether these bodies will receive or be able to collect sufficient funds, revenues and taxes. Local politicians may not be keen to impose fresh taxes which will mostly affect salaried groups, and which make them unpopular with their constituents (cf. Manor, *ibid.*: 84).

And while empowerment is a useful strategy to enhance the awareness, organization and access possibilities of the urban poor, there are clear limits as well. Empowerment is in reality a political strategy and may find its limits in the disapproval or repression by the state, elites or the police. Empowerment relates to actively pursued strategies to 'empower people' which is in fact laborious and difficult, and which has quite uncertain outcomes. Bhatt (1987: 264ff) argues that empowering the poor is a necessary strategy to enhance their chances of benefiting from decentralization. But such strategies have not changed the local administrative systems, they have no fundamental impact on the political, economic and social order.

Would it therefore mean that small action groups (...) go on indefinitely managing development and fighting for justice as they have been doing now? Because, sooner or later they would get tired, exhausted and frustrated, distortions may creep in, the leaders themselves may develop vested interests and like the other rural elites occupying positions in formal institutions, begin to manipulate politics and administration. Viewed from this perspective, it is not only a question of more or less

decentralization, nor a question of their initiative, participation, mobilization, nor a question of replication and multiplication. It is perhaps a more fundamental question of the design of a different political order and its institutional arrangements.

From a more theoretical, public administration point of view, the complexities described in the field of decentralization, empowerment and poverty alleviation point at the need for research and analyses which take into account specific localized socio-institutional contexts. These should focus on the scope to enhance the likelihood that policies and projects reach their goals, that target groups are actually reached and that their impact is sustainable. Ultimately policy implementation takes place at the local grassroots level, in local arenas where local agencies, bureaucrats, local elites, politicians, land owners/speculators contractors, NGOs and social workers operate. All these groups and actors have their own perceptions, aims, interests, strategies and a specific institutional culture and history. Hence, much more attention is needed for this local level institutional context, for micro-planning and politics. With a view to this, it is important to combine insights and approaches from the disciplines of public policy and administration studies as well as from political science and anthropology.

Such approaches can be seen as an attempt to deal adequately with urban complexities, and represent what has been termed 'a new realism'. These approaches assume a multiple-actor, multi-level and multi-dimensional analysis, necessitated by the fact that decentralization multiplies the number of agencies, actors and groups involved in policy formulation and implementation. This requires the study of relationships between central agencies and (newly created) decentralized bodies and institutions over time, so as to document the changes and processes related to the transfers, claiming and utilization of tasks, power and funds. New approaches must take into account the entanglements of poverty, policy and politics. The focus should not only be on the state or state agencies. Account should be taken of the roles and modes of operation of various interlinked state and non-state actors, actor groups and networks. These directly or indirectly influence policy formulation, by implication decentralization and participatory and empowerment approaches aimed at the urban poor.

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