

**PALACKY UNIVERSITY IN OLOMOUC**  
**FACULTY OF SCIENCE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**MASTER THESIS**

**Challenges for participatory development in informal urban settlements**

Supervisor: Dr Erhard Berner

Olomouc 2011

Bc. Lenka SOBOTOVÁ

I declare in lieu of oath that I wrote this thesis myself. All information derived from the work of others has been acknowledged in the text and in a list of references is given.

In Olomouc, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2011

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signature

## ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Bc. Lenka SOBOTOVÁ**  
Osobní číslo: **R09972**  
Studijní program: **N1301 Geografie**  
Studijní obor: **Mezinárodní rozvojová studia**  
Název tématu: **Výzvy pro participativní přístupy v rozvoji městských  
chudinských komunit**  
Zadávací katedra: **Katedra rozvojových studií**

### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Cílem práce je zhodnocení příležitostí a hrozeb pro participativní přístupy v rozvoji městských chudinských komunit tzv. slumů na základě případové studie z vybraného rozvojového regionu. Teoretická část práce poskytuje přehled o přístupech, teorii i běžné praxi v komunitním rozvoji, část praktická je zaměřena na studovanou problematiku v kontextu vybraného regionu. Pro vypracování analýzy postihující specifika komunitního rozvoje a participativních metod ve slumech je práce založena na sběru primárních dat ve vybrané lokalitě. Výzkum pro vypracování této práce je kvalitativní a výsledná analýza poskytuje interpretaci založenou na jeho výstupech.

Rozsah grafických prací: **dle potřeby**  
Rozsah pracovní zprávy: **20 - 25 tisíc slov**  
Forma zpracování diplomové práce: **tištěná**  
Seznam odborné literatury: **viz příloha**

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **Erhard Berner**  
Katedra rozvojových studií

Datum zadání diplomové práce: **26. ledna 2010**  
Termín odevzdání diplomové práce: **13. května 2011**

Prof. RNDr. Juraj Ševčík, Ph.D.  
děkan

L.S.

Doc. RNDr. Pavel Nováček, CSc.  
vedoucí katedry

V Olomouci dne 26. ledna 2010

## Příloha zadání diplomové práce

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to express special thanks to my supervisor Dr Erhard Berner for his guidance and long-term support while I was writing the paper.

I would also thank to Dr T. Vasantha Kumaran and his colleagues from the Department of Geography at Madras University and staff of the Loyola College in Chennai for their consultancy, assistance and cooperation during the fieldwork in slums.

My thanks go as well to Joel Cuffey and his wife for the proofreading and their helpful comments.

## ABSTRACT

Today's world is characterized by unprecedented urban growth. Such development presents a range of opportunities and various stresses to the urban population. Proper housing has become a precondition to overcome poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor, and their participation has been one of the most important instruments in sustaining positive change in their living conditions. On one hand participatory development in informal urban settlements as an approach is challenging, on the other hand overused participation in development practice faces criticism for lack of proper analysis, insight and understanding.

This thesis aims to study preconditions for and implications of slum residents' participation in slum upgrading and improvement programmes in the fourth biggest Indian metropolis – Chennai. Challenges for participation are analysed with respect to sustaining or to developing outcomes of upgrading programmes in the study area. The main objective of the field research in Chennai slums was to assess threats and opportunities for participatory development and the paper identifies some areas of possible difficulties for community participation in the context of slum dwellers' lives. The analysis further provides an outline of recommendations to be taken into consideration in designing a programme or a project.

**Keywords:** urban poverty, vulnerability, informal housing, social capital, community participation, slum upgrading

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Act 1971	Tamil Nadu Slum Areas (Improvement & Clearance) Act
ADMK	(All India) Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (the political party)
ASIS	Accelerated Slum Improvement Scheme
CBO	Community-based Organization
CDW	Community Development Wing
CMA	Chennai Metropolitan Area
CMDA	Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority
CMSWB	Chennai Metropolitan Solid Waste Board
CMWSSB	Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewage Board
COC	Corporation of Chennai
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (the political party)
EIS	Environmental Improvement Scheme
HUDCO	Housing and Urban Development Corporation
JNNURM	Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission
MC	Municipal Councillor
MGR	M. G. Ramachandran (the popular political leader)
MUDP-I	Madras Urban Development Project-I
MUDP-II	Madras Urban Development Project-II
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PWD	Public Works Department
SHG	Self-Help Group
TNHB	Tamil Nadu Housing Board
TNSCB	Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board
TNUDP	Tamil Nadu Urban Development Project
UNICEF	United Nation Children's fund
WB	World Bank
WC	Ward Committee
74 <sup>th</sup> CAA	74 <sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment
Kucha house	Provisional and temporary thatched shelter, built of brushwood
Pucca house	Durable and solid shelter, built of bricks
Patta	Ownership deed

# **1. Introduction**

Secure and adequate housing is one of the most crucial human needs. Neuwirth even compares the right to have a place to live with the right to breathe (2005: 290). Despite this, to ensure the right in urban areas has been recently more and more challenging. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by unprecedented urban growth; within one generation the urban population is expected to almost double (UNFPA, 2007: 1). Such development presents a range of opportunities as well as social, economic and environmental stress to the urban population. In a rapidly urbanizing world, proper housing has become a precondition for further development of the cities, however, it is estimated that ‘one third of the global population do not live in adequate conditions and lack access to safe water or sanitation’ (UN-HABITAT, 2003: 5). Those called the ‘urban poor’ occupy marginal, overcrowded land in slums or dwell on pavements lacking basic services and stable livelihood.

## **1.1 Context and problem statement**

All over the world the challenge of living on a ‘planet of slums’ is being addressed by a number of organizations trying to assist slum dwellers find a way out of poverty and vulnerability. There are programmes at the local, regional, national and international levels. Much has been done and most should be done better. The frequently criticized World Bank’s initiative introducing slum upgrading programmes in the early 1970s has brought some lessons learnt. Based on a pre-condition that informal housing presents a solution rather than a problem, government in developing countries started gradually adopting slum improvement and sites-and-services schemes. First enthusiasm derived from short-term achievements was replaced by disillusion and scepticism. The self-help housing without greater involvement of the government failed in long-term perspectives (Werlin: 1999). Various studies show that the necessity of secure land tenure, proper targeting and community participation was underestimated (Davis, 2007).

Next generation of the Bank’s programmes stressed the role of government notably. Inspired by the idea of Hernando de Soto, regularization of illegal settlements have become common practice. In India slum notifications were largely executed in the 1990s (Edelman and Mitra, 2006). It has led to reduce slum dweller’s housing insecurity and to stabilize their livelihood. In spite of this, legalization imposed higher land prices, development of gentrification and growing slum population in many cases. Slum dwellers were rarely

involved in the planning and identification part of the projects. In fact, the World Bank's improvement and 'site-and-services' programmes had not changed much for the poorest of the poor.

Concerning community participation, it has become 'one of the most overused, but least understood concepts' (Botes, Rensburg, 2000: 41). Although participation presents one of the elementary preconditions for sustainable positive change in people's lives, in development practise it has turned out to be a buzzword for development professionals, academics, experts and students. Participation is an important precondition for an intervention to be accepted, to be understood and to sustain its positive outcomes; on the other hand participatory approaches in development work are often questioned and criticized for lack of proper analysis, insight and understanding of the concept. Simply, it has turn into a fashion.

Participatory development as an approach is challenging. There are success stories from urban areas, but in reality still many projects and programmes in informal urban settlements struggle, lacking sustainability and recipients' or donors' long-term interest. Lack of various assets makes slum dwellers apathetic and unwilling to take action to change their living conditions (especially those less tangible). Grassroots and community-based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments face obstacles to stimulate slum dwellers' long-lasting energy to improve their livelihood and environment. The circumstances of slum residents' activities should be taken into account to make a participatory intervention successful.

## 1.2 Objective of the study and research questions

This paper aims to study selected determinants of successful slum dwellers' participation in upgrading programmes and to analyse its consequences for their lives. It is based on a case study from Chennai, the fourth largest Indian city. The main research objective of the study is to assess threats to and opportunities for participatory development in informal urban settlements in Chennai. The core research question is: *What are challenges for successful participation in Chennai slum upgrading programmes?*

The related research questions are:

- *What are preconditions, barriers and stimuli for participation in upgrading programmes?*
- *What are the main obstacles to sustained positive outcomes of slum dwellers' participation?*
- *What is the role of government and politics in slum dweller's participation?*
- *What is the role of social and political contacts to encourage/discourage slum dwellers' participation in upgrading programmes?*
- *What are barriers to informal social networks and contacts that could be advantageous for the poorest?*
- *What are impacts of informal contacts on participatory development in slums?*

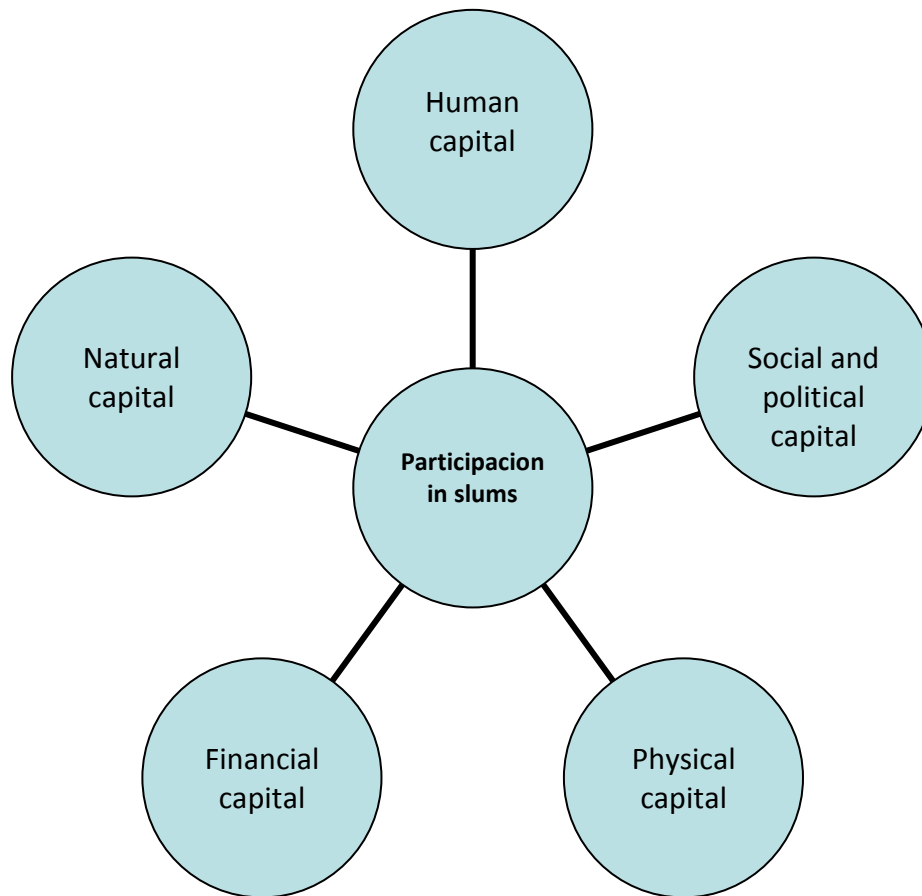
### **1.3 Conceptual framework**

The background behind the research is a deeper understanding of the complexity of informal housing. An illegal settlement is a composite of diverse circumstances and connections. The framework outlines various factors which I take into consideration in the analysis, with an emphasis on the role of social and political contacts. To achieve the research objective first I disassemble the complex of people's assets influencing community participation in slums using Rakodi's livelihood framework (2002: 9). She identifies five types of capital which affect livelihood strategies of the poor (human, social, physical, financial and natural). In Figure 1.1 five categories of determinants for slum residents' participation are defined. Those can be understood as categories covering a range of assets crucial for decreasing or increasing urban poor vulnerability and instability with a special focus on their participation in a programme.

The framework is further developed and modified using Carney's description of livelihood assets (in Rakodi, 2002: 11) and the comprehensive analysis of poverty aspects (Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2004: 15). Each category below presents a simplified and abstract division as they are interconnected with each other. However, the framework provides a comprehensive approach covering all important factors for participation in slums.

It starts from the assumption that the lack of various assets imposes increasing vulnerability of the poor. Moser states that 'the more assets people have, the less vulnerable they are, and the greater the erosion of people's assets, the greater their insecurity' (1998: 3). She describes the 'assets vulnerability framework' showing how asset management affects the vulnerability of the urban low-income households. Based on a fivefold framework (labour, human and productive assets, household relations and social capital) she argues that to insure more secure and less vulnerable living it is important to transform diverse assets into appropriate basic necessities (Moser, 1998: 5). In other words, an asset or a capital presents a potential to be invested, developed or to stimulate for a long-term achievement. However, it is not possible to use the whole framework in this study; therefore I focus more on social and political capital in participatory development in slums.

**Figure 1.1** Categories of participation's determinants



**Human:** level of education and skills, personal capacity and abilities, health status, number of household members (productive, non-productive), age, household conditions (family background and problems), life philosophy

**Social and political:** social stratification and hierarchy (vertical), networks (horizontal), social and political contacts, relationships of trust and reciprocity, religion , gender, traditions, access to information, bureaucracy, civil and political rights, memberships

**Physical:** basic infrastructure (transport, shelters, water, sanitation, energy, communications), provision of public services (access to health care, education, electricity, garbage collection, access to assistance and crime protection)

**Financial:** income generating activities, savings, credits and loans, remittances, expenditures and costs (consumption)

**Natural:** land (especially security and stability of tenure), other common natural resources, vulnerability (level of threats of natural disaster)

## **1.4 Relevance and justification**

Before starting to involve slum dwellers in an upgrading programme or enable a community to change its environment to be less vulnerable, it is important to assess any threats (to deal with) and any opportunities (to take advantage of) which will arise in the process. The various factors which influence community participation have to be considered for the analysis. These come from the field research in selected informal settlements in Chennai and provide the base for further investigation of participatory development in slums. As mentioned above, the concept of participation in development practise is often overused without being questioned or re-examined. The paper aims to critically analyse community participation and its implication in Chennai slums. It is also going to identify some areas of possible difficulties for participatory development in the context of slum dwellers' lives.

## **1.5 Analytical framework**

The analytical framework is based on instruments to test the previous conceptual framework. To answer the main research question and related sub-questions I base the analysis on two components. The analytical framework consists of a) general pre-conditions, for slum dwellers' participation in a programme; b) concrete challenges of their participation in upgrading programmes. The analysis aims to clarify possible threats and opportunities for participatory development in slums and make final recommendations. It is important to highlight that the research provides only a small-scale analysis from the examined region. Therefore its results are exploratory and preliminary to illustrate the complicated nature of participatory development in informal urban settlements.

The assessment of general pre-conditions for slum dwellers' participation in a programme (a) is primarily based on related literature and supplemented by observations and findings from the field researches in Chennai (winter 2009 and 2010). Analysis of challenges to participation in upgrading programmes (b) is based on especially the field research in 2010 accompanied by relevant secondary resources. Final recommendations incorporate the theoretical and practical parts of the thesis; however, the scope is limited and suggests further study. It does not provide enough space here to analyse all factors outlined in the conceptual framework in depth. The paper focuses on the role of social and political capital for success of participatory development in Chennai slums.



## 1.6 Methodology and the field research

The research is based on first-handed information from participatory observations in slums and interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries. It presents qualitative and explanatory research focused on the situation in selected slums in Chennai. The inductive approach of the analysis aims to answer research questions with respect to the emerging need to understand the role of informal social and political contacts in development practice. Tools for data gathering included questionnaires, semi-structured and open-ended interviews (questionnaires and the list of open-ended questions is attached in the annexes) and limited participatory assessment methods.

The primary data gathering was done in January and February 2010 in four selected informal settlements in Chennai. Interviews were conducted with 46 respondents from the slums in total, among them 37 female respondents. In addition, six other respondents were questioned. These six were from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government or official or university experts from relevant institutions (the list of institutions is included in the annexes). Selected slums were identified according to the following criteria: location in North or Central Chennai, proximity to each other, daily accessibility, considered to be *de facto* recognized or formalized settlements, involved in government upgrading programmes (in the past or recently) and having no more than 3 000 households. Slum profiles are described in the fourth chapter. In this study I also use notes, observations and research outcomes from previous field research in Chennai slums between January and March 2009 when I interviewed more than 40 respondents from two slums.

## **1.7 Structure of the study**

The paper comprises five chapters including this introduction (first chapter) and the conclusion at the end. The second chapter aims to briefly introduce the theory of participation and outlines general constraints and challenges for community participation based primarily on the reviewed literature. The third chapter provides an overview of the population and housing situation in Chennai and summarizes urban poverty in the city. The second part of this chapter covers both Tamil politics and slum policies which play significant roles in the following analysis. Participation in selected Chennai slums is analysed in the fourth chapter, illustrating how informal social and political contacts influence slum dwellers' interest to participate. The study concludes with some recommendations derived from the previous theoretical and especially practical part and the analysis.

## **1.8 Limitations of the study**

The analysis of pre-conditions and challenges of participatory development in slums did not focus on any specific intervention or programme. The study takes into account especially slum dwellers' participation in past and on-going upgrading programmes and economic empowerment initiatives in the research areas. The aim of the study is rather to outline possible threats and opportunities for participatory development in slums in general; therefore I preferred not to narrow the field research to a specific programme. Another reason was the limit of the research, thus was no possibility to observe a certain programme over a longer period of time.

Next to the upgrading programmes taken into consideration, the widespread concept of self-help groups was taken up in the study. Female slum dwellers are mainly involved and their achievements (on top of economic empowerment) are to tackle the shared problems of a community. Self-help groups are generally understood as one of the milestones for a community to achieve improvement in their living environment. Moreover, most of the interviewed slum residents were women and participation was examined through their experiences and membership in a self-help group as well.

Although most of the respondents from selected slums were female, gender dimension was not further studied in the analysis. There are some specifically female issues in the participation, but the observation and outcomes from the field research reflect the reality of men's dominance in the Indian society in general (for example men's interest

and/or agreement is crucial for a community participation). The gender dimension of participation in slums is recommended for another study.

## **2. Participation and self-help: theory in practice**

This chapter provides a brief introduction into participation theory and practice. It aims to conceptualize the nature of participatory development and its challenges, specifically to assess pre-conditions, barriers and stimuli for community participation in slums in particular. Then, the limits of both upgrading and sites-and-services programmes in the global context are described carrying out a critical overview of their impacts on slum residents' assets. The chapter presents the basis for the subsequent analysis of participation in Chennai slums.

### **2.1 Understanding community participation**

There are a variety of explanations for how to understand the term *participation*. In principle, 'dichotomized means/ends' rhetoric prevails in the debate about participatory approaches. Cleaver describes the distinction between 'participation as a tool' to achieve satisfactory programme/project outcomes and 'participation as a process which enhances the capacity of individuals to improve their own lives and facilitates social changes for the advantage of disadvantaged or marginalized groups' (1999: 598). Participation as

a means should ensure quality and sustainability of achievements through beneficiaries' ownership and increase efficiency through their contributions (Berner and Philips, 2005: 18). A lack of emphasis on one or another approach faces vast criticism in development practice. The necessity of both, efficiency and empowerment arguments is less articulated.

Beneficiaries need to see outcomes of their effort as well as to be encouraged to invest their energy in the long term process of change. This suggests searching for synergy rather than selecting either a 'tool' or a 'process'. A programme or project by its nature is defined as a 'package' filled by activities to be achieved within a time-limited framework and cost-effective budget (Cleaver, 1999, Botes and Rensburg, 2000). Empowerment itself stays in the shadow in reality. 'The process (participation) is not an attempt to ascertain the outcome and priorities, but rather to gain acceptance for an already assembled (project) package' (Botes and Rensburg, 2000: 43). Community participation in many upgrading programmes has been observed to follow this direction.

More deeply understanding the complexity of people's lives is crucial for an intended intervention to avoid repetition of failures in participatory development such as promotion of patronage or exclusion of economically and/or socially marginalized groups and other vulnerable 'non-participants'. Commonly the term *community* more likely identifies a homogenous entity bounded by natural, social and administrative boundaries. The definition is desirable to outcomes-oriented intervention based on less pragmatic 'solidarity' models of a community finding difficult evidence of social tension or conflicts (Cleaver, 1999: 604). If so, there is a threat to define heterogeneous social structure through simple categorization of a social or occupational role such as women, leaders, poor etc. (Cleaver, 1999: 605). An oversimplified perception of the nature of community tends to target failures and exploit those in a 'wrong' category or not involved at all. The Chennai slum policies present an example for all.

The debate about appropriate methods in participatory development imposes 'technique-based participatory orthodoxy' which fails to address inter-linkages in social reality (individual and institutional – both horizontal and vertical) and distribution of power, information and other resources in a community (Cleaver, 1999: 600). Starting from here, the next part aims to demonstrate difficulties which have to be taken into consideration speaking about more efficient community participation in slums.

## 2.2 Assessment of participatory development in slums

If participation is translated into ‘managerial exercise based on ‘toolboxes’ of procedures and techniques’, a risk of oversimplified solutions ignoring inclusion of different social groups becomes real (Cleaver, 1999: 608). A scale of barriers to community participation has been identified in development literature. For the purpose of the study, a division between the external and internal obstacles is helpful; however, none of them stands alone being interconnected with each other.

External impediments are included rather implicitly in conceptualizing slum improvements in the next section. It often demonstrates targeting problems and external interference likely to be ‘top-down dictate’ or ‘political strategy of control’. In addition, upgrading programmes are mistakenly more oriented on ‘hard’ projects (development of infrastructure, housing, facilities) than on ‘soft’ ones (economic empowerment, education, social protection etc.) (Botes and Rensburg, 2000). Participation may also be weakened through non-understanding of the different institutional structures of a community by an intervening organization.

Internal obstacles present the main issues in the assessment of pre-conditions for slum dwellers’ participation. The three factors that challenge community participation in slums, which are also the most communicated limits of participation in Chennai slums, follow:

### *Heterogeneity: whose interests count?*

An informal settlement consists of diverse interest groups and individuals of various social, cultural or religious status, political interest, livelihood activities and needs to be fulfilled. Their perceptions of a community action and ‘common good’ differ in hand with their role in the community. In a ‘slum’ new comers live together with old timers, tenants with owners, unemployed with employed, these legally working with informally self-employed, residents of different age, sex or level of education, etc. It is reported that ‘people (community members) are often less likely to participate due to divisions of language, tenure, income, gender, age or politics, than in less diverse communities’ (Botes and Rensburg, 2000: 48). Those may have even opposing desires which affect their motivation to be or not to be engaged.

### *Patronage and exclusion*

‘There is always the danger that decision-making at the community-level may fall into the hands of a small and self-perpetuating clique, which may act in its own interests with disregard for the wider community. In this regard, Friedman (1993: 29) has used the term ‘positioning for patronage’ (Botes and Rensburg, 2000: 48). Local elites, gatekeepers, slum leaders or brokers wish to attract outsiders’ interest and to speak out for the community needs. Then, no recognition of exploitation and marginalization inside the settlement is observed (Berner and Phillips, 2005: 24). The poorest, disabled, in-debt or similarly disregarded slum dwellers benefit the least, if ever. The picture of selected Chennai slums demonstrates how the most vulnerable groups are excluded from making their choice and from increasing their voice.

The so-called ‘community leaders’ are often deliberately controlling information channels from the intervening agency towards the community to prevent losing power or to ensure more support from the ‘bottom’ to address those ‘above’. Lacking appropriate information or commonly having odd news, slum dwellers may be hesitant to participate. Local politicians play sometimes the role of brokers or middlemen (slum leaders may also be members of a supportive political party) to spread opportunistic information and announcements. The gradual role of political interest in slum population is further described in examination of slum improvement programmes and in Chennai’s case in particular.

### *Selective slum memory*

As De Wit shows political representatives ‘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’ (1997: 19). These promises are rarely fulfilled and fleeting politicians’ willingness threatens slum dweller participation. Rarely satisfied expectations decrease a readiness to participate (Botes and Rensburg, 2000: 51). Slum dwellers’ memories count and as noted before, the synergy between participation as a ‘tool’ and an ‘empowerment’ is needed. Remembering ‘process without product (that) leaves communities feeling that nothing is really happening other than a lot of talking, and that time, money and social energy is lost’ (ibid).

## 2.3 Conceptualizing slum upgrading

The word *upgrading* usually refers to an effort to improve living conditions in particular urban areas characterized by poor-quality housing and inadequate infrastructure and service delivery (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001: 222). The global emphasis on the upgrading programmes and self-help housing emerged broadly in the 1970s when the World Bank searching for an alternative to widespread slum clearances and evictions started to stress a new ‘paradigm’ for the urbanizing world. The Bank’s initiative was considerably affected by John Turner, the English architect, who advocated slum improvements free of government intervention to allow their residents to change their living conditions by themselves (Werlin, 1999). Berner describes the prevailing recognition as follows:

‘In the last four decades it (self-help housing) is increasingly recognized as the only means available to fulfil the immense demand for mass housing in the cities... Housing economists declared squatting to be a solution rather than a problem, and saw it as evidence for the superiority of market-based solutions over ‘distorting’ government interventions’ (Berner, 2007: 2).

Influenced by Turner’s work the urban poor have been gradually perceived as the best developers (or survivors) to secure a shelter for almost nothing.

Aside from upgrading programmes sites-and-services schemes were designed to be executed. ‘Between 1972 and 1990 the Bank helped finance a total of 116 sites-and-services and/or slum upgrading schemes in 55 nations’ (Pugh in Davis, 2007: 70). Turner ‘stressed a ‘sites-and-services’ (provision of basic ‘wet’ infrastructure and civil engineering) approach to help rationalize and upgrade self-help housing’ (Davis, 2007: 71). In reality it meant a clearance of land where an illegal settlement had been located in favour of self-help constructions. The implications were rather disappointing. Berner reports that one of the failures of sites-and-services schemes was the quickly increased land prices and the fact that wealthier groups who purchase and control the land benefited (2007: 9). Access to secure tenure for the lowest-income households was endangered.



Both, upgrading programmes in temporary settlements and sites-and-services projects face large criticism because of their effects on the most marginalized slum residents. A reproof for the self-help loans under the sites-and-services/upgrading schemes is partly based on the estimation that in the 1980s the bottom 30 to 60 per cent of the urban population (depending on the country) was unable to meet the financial obligations (Peattie in Davis, 2007: 73). Obviously, a limited number of low-income urban households together with lower middle-income households access the loans more easily than the poorest slum families. An example from Mumbai shows that only 9 per cent of loan recipients belonged to lowest-income groups (Davis, 2007: 74). Although many slum dwellers benefited from the programmes in early years, most of them were exposed to greater exploitation and housing related problems in the long term. Frequently asked full cost recovery affected especially the poorest through ‘mechanisms include self-selection in group-credit schemes, incentives for well-endowed people in entrepreneurship development and benefits for homeowners in upgrading’ (Bernier and Phillips, 2005: 22). The early faithful beliefs in Turner’s idea of ‘development from below’ (Werlin, 1999: 1533) had been replaced by doubts and disbelief to address increasing urban crisis without greater government involvement.

Werlin (1999) describes four principal fundamentals for slum improvements which were not stressed enough in the first programmes between the 1970s and 1980s. Being underestimated, he states, maintenance, land acquisition, tenure and community participation have contributed to make upgrading a ‘myth’ . First there has been a clash between quality of improvements and scale of the programme while the instalment was inadequate (for instance not enough water hand pumps for the total slum population or no provision of improved sanitation) and of poor quality (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001, Werlin, 1999). The problem of maintenance appears to be acute in upgrading programmes providing facilities to be shared (for example toilets or water hand pumps). These are used more intensively than if such facilities are provided to each house and the maintenance has to be institutionalized (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001: 222); secondly the everybody/nobody ownership dichotomy constrains adequate maintenance as well.

Although secure land tenure was recognized as important in the programmes, the early Bank’s loans did not fully integrate it as a pre-condition for an intervention to be successful (Werlin, 1999: 1524). Unlike Turner, the advocate of a moderate role for government, his Peruvian counterpart Hernando de Soto argues for government’s responsibility for stronger engagement. More recently upgrading programmes have stressed

De Soto's perception to stimulate people's activity ensuring secure land tenure first. In spite of this, much evidence contesting the approach has emerged.

Secure housing as a prerequisite for an informal settlement improvement to be sustainable and to avoid further erosion of slum dwellers' assets has been recognized as one of the pillars of slum upgrading. Payne states that titling became a mainstream development approach when the World Bank started to run revised upgrading initiatives in the 1990s: '*World Bank Housing Policy Paper* (1993) recommends developing market-oriented systems of property rights and allocates priority to upgrading systems of land titling and regularizing tenure in squatter settlements' (2001: 420). These recommendations were based on clearly visible profits of the slum regularization which stimulate slum dwellers' investments in their 'capital' and enhance participation of the urban poorest in theory.

'However, the titling approach has already achieved considerable momentum, which recent studies suggest needs to be challenged' (Payne, 2001: 421). If the slum residents realize the value of the land, the higher price of a plot may attract them to sell it and move to dwell somewhere else. Payne follows that 'such actions may therefore actually result in an increase in informal settlements rather than a decrease' (2005: 136). In addition the 'full property' stimulates unauthorised constructions or improvements in a settlement as it is witnessed in Chennai slums. Davis (2007) sums up that titling also impose higher prices and value of land and building materials in general.

Becoming suddenly 'legalized' slum dwellers have to follow 'new rules' and pay proper taxes and services. Payne argues that 'high standards impose higher costs, and complex bureaucratic procedures impose delays that require informal payments to facilitate progress' (2005:137). New regulations, administrative processes and bureaucracy make slum residents' housing and livelihood more complicated. Slum dwellers have to move from 'living from one day to another' to thinking about their future and regular payments and duties. Most of them find it difficult, more expensive and less convenient than before and are eager to move to illegality again.

In fact, mainstreaming slum legalization has empowered informal land subdivision to become a widespread phenomenon. Research from different countries proved that the illegal rent in slums have increased notably for last two decades and more surprisingly it is even much higher than in the formal market (Davis, 2007). In other words, social differentiation has become one of the significant characteristics of an 'informal' settlement today. The promotion of slumlordism have not changed much for the urban poorest to reach appropriate shelter legally. Davis (2007) simply concludes that the World Bank's initiatives generally failed to address the challenging urban crises in the developing

and transitioning countries. Being a little bit more optimistic, the failures have definitely brought some lessons learnt for seeking alternative solutions.

Since the 1970s the ‘participatory rhetoric’ has appeared in the Bank’s upgrading programmes. The role of beneficiaries’ participation was recognized, although mostly it has been much developed on paper rather than in reality lacking donor and government eagerness (Werlin, 1999, Berner and Phillips, 2005). Apart from the difficulties for community participation outlined in the previous part, to sustain political power is often the target. Governments show no real interest in involving slum dwellers in planning or decision-making processes before a programme or policy is implemented. Slum dweller participation has been more likely perceived as a tool to control them and to legitimize a government policy (Botes and Rensburg, 2000: 45). The odd understandings of ‘participation’ have become the common practice.

The slum population represents an increasingly significant *vote bank* (Werlin, 2006, De Wit, 1996 and 1997, Baken, 2003). The large scale upgrading implementation was influenced by the recognition of slum dwellers as an important electoral base for a politician to be (re) elected (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001: 221). Interest about urban poor had increased while they had been eligible to vote for a candidate in return for food, more secure housing or service provision. Davis concludes that upgrading and site-and-services schemes are attractive to governments for simple reasons: promise of stability, votes and taxes (2007: 81). In many cases slum dwellers are easily seen as a tool instead of a target for policies.

In India those living in ‘irregular’ settlements lobbied hard to be labelled as ‘slums’ to ensure the ‘advantages’ of an upgrading programme (Mitlin, Patel, 2004: 219). Moreover, politicians themselves were keen to support a formation of an informal settlement to enlarge their vote banks (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001: 222). In a simplified way, slum upgrading has been perceived advantageous for both local government and slum dwellers. Globally ‘a fifth of the study households (involved in upgrading) reported that their economic circumstances have improved’ (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001: 220). Increased housing stability, regular electricity and the basic sanitation enabled slum dwellers to generate an income through home-based and self-employment activities.

### **3. Slum policies in Chennai: myths and reality**

Before starting to analyse the role of political and social contacts for community participation in upgrading programmes, this chapter briefly introduces facts about the population of Chennai, with a special focus on slums, and provides an overview of the local government structure. In addition, the chapter describes Chennai informal settlements with respect to the history of slum improvement policies listed later.

#### **3.1 Metropolitan and population growth**

In India, one of the most overpopulated countries in the world, the portion of its urban inhabitants in 2002 covered 10 per cent of the world population (Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2004: 6). Chakrabarti notes that at the time of Independence in 1947, 60 million people lived in cities whereas in 2001 300 million Indians lived in its almost 3 700 towns and cities (2001: 260). Overcrowded metropolises have become synonymous to India today and the recent trends of migration from rural to urban areas presents a difficult issue for the foreseeable future. The prognosis shows that the number of people in urban centres will overtake the number of their counterparts in rural areas soon. According to *India: Urban Poverty Report 2009*, released by the Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation Ministry, 50 per cent of India's population is estimated to live in urban areas today (The Hindu, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2009). The considerable number of new comers and those already born in slums in previous decades forms the slum population in Indian cities.

Chennai (formerly Madras) is the fourth biggest Indian metropolis and is one of the most rapidly growing urban centres in India (Chakrabarti, 2001: 262). Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) constitutes a huge and diverse urbanized region more simply called Chennai. The area is divided into Chennai city itself or better, the Chennai Municipal Corporation, plus 16 municipalities, 20 town panchayats, one cantonment and 214 villages. Tamil Nadu is the fifth most urbanized state in India and the Chennai Corporation is the biggest and most populated city in the state. In total, the CMA covers a surface of 1 189 sq. km in contrast to the Corporation's surface of 176 sq. km (CMDA, 2008). Due to increasing economic activity, migration and intensive industrialization, it is estimated that the Corporation will cover the area of 426 sq. km including two more districts by 2026 (ibid)

For more than 60 years the city has attracted increasing numbers of Tamil migrants from rural areas, and after independence became the fastest-growing urban centre in Tamil Nadu. Between 1941 and 1971 Chennai experienced around 50 per cent population growth. In total in the period from 1921 to 1978 the city recorded a net influx of over 1.6 million people (De Wit, 1996: 101). Recently Chennai is becoming a target destination also for middle income workers from other surrounding Indian states. . According to the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB or Slum Board), the population of CMA numbered 7.41 million inhabitants in 2001 and the projection for 2011 is 8.42 million inhabitants (TNSCB, 2009). The majority of the population lives in Chennai city which numbered 4.3 million inhabitants in 2001 (CMDA, 2008). It is thought that the city comprises around 5.4 million people today (Corporation of Chennai office, 2008).

In terms of investment, together with Bengaluru it was the top destination for domestic migrants in 2007 in comparison to the leading urban business centre Mumbai (The Hindu, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2009). The reasons have been its intensive commercial and industrial growth for the past 20 years and the accelerated expansion of outsourced IT and IT-enabled services in the region (TNSCB, 2009). According to the CMDA Second Master development plan, Tamil Nadu is the second-largest software exporter in India; 90 per cent of the software exports come from Chennai alone (CMDA, 2006). The urban area is also a major transportation hub for roads, railways, air travel and naval transportation in the region of South Asia.

Increasing migration, limited land for housing and lack of long-term urban planning make the city highly populated. Rising land prices together with growing housing demand pose many difficulties to new comers as well as to those settled already in overcrowded slums. So far the largest slum population in Tamil Nadu has been in Chennai city (Chandramouli, 2003: 83). De Wit further indicates that in 1996 the slum population 'appears to grow faster than the Madras population as a whole' (1996: 109). Observing population growth in Chennai slums, the highest rate of their residents within the city population was almost 40 per cent in 1981 (ibid). In comparison, in 2001 slum dwellers formed 26 per cent of the Chennai population (Chandramouli, 2003: 83). It is an even smaller proportion than in 1971 when slum population made up 30 per cent of the city's inhabitants (De Wit, 1996: 108). However, in comparison to the total number of 181 slums in 1932, in 1986 the number of them increased to 1 413 settlements counting more than 170 000 families (TNSCB, 2009)

The implementation of various programmes and policies towards the informal settlements reduced the number of slums in the city to only 444 in 2004 (TNSCB, 2009). It reflects an effort of the Slum Board to decrease their amount from that of previous decades; on the other hand the absolute number of slum dwellers has been continuously increasing. In 2004 almost 105 000 households lived in slums (ibid). The figures above provide a simple calculation: instead of an average 120 households per settlement in 1986, the average number of households per settlement in 2004 was almost 240 households. The decreasing absolute number of slums as well as the falling relative portion of slum inhabitants in total does not automatically mean fewer slum dwellers in absolute terms. Chandramouli reports that more than a million slum dwellers lived in the Chennai city in 2001 (2003: 82).

### **3.2 A housing provision: the reality in slums**

Looking more closely at the overall situation in Chennai slums, it is significant to note that growing demand for a place to live and constantly increasing land prices primarily affect low-income households, especially the urban poorest (often new comers and those who rent a room in a slum). According to Chandramouli, 67 per cent of the slum households lived in one-room houses, whereas only 2 per cent of the households had more than three rooms in 2003 (2003: 85). The urban space became very limited, making legal housing almost inaccessible for the poorest. Between 1976 and the 1990's, the land prices increased more than about 30 per cent (de Wit, 1996: 106). Nowadays Chennai newspapers almost regularly run articles about skyrocketing land prices in the metropolitan area. Apart from the population growth and migration, intensifying investment is another reason. It affects middle income households as well and causes an illegal land submarket to develop within Chennai slums to meet the growing housing demand.

In 1996 De Wit reports that in comparison to the 1960s and perhaps the 1970s, when a new comer could occupy vacant land in the city, this is not possible anymore except encroachment at the urban fringe (1996: 108). Since the 1980s the existing informal settlements have started to expand and grow. The Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board established in 1971 and the traditional role of Tamil politics contribute significantly to the process as is described later in this chapter. Space in slums has become limited, which has caused slum dwellers' intra-city migration between informal settlements; in addition, the development of illegal land subdivisions across Chennai slums has been intensified.

In 2001, '40 per cent of the houses in slums were rented and 3 per cent neither rented nor owned. This clearly indicates the presence of slumlords, who own more than one house and are in position to rent out houses to others,' writes Chandramouli (2003: 85). De Wit describes almost the same portion of renting slum households in 1996, but the average rent is different: it was Rs 76 per month then (1996: 110). Recently, tenants from the selected slums quoted an informal monthly rent roughly from Rs 800 to 1 200 without electricity. Surprisingly, the illegal rent is sometimes higher than in the formal market. Still many low-income households prefer to pay a rent informally, moreover the poorest of the poor struggle to afford the illegal rent. Without the help of relatives and other contacts, people are forced to move to another 'cheaper' settlement (usually more distant and less advantageous), or even to squat in a pavement and/or end up in permanent indebtedness.

In spite of the evident presence of slumowners, most of their houses are 'owned' illegally. In 2006 '78 per cent of (slum) families owned the houses, but most of the owners (85 per cent) do not have *pattas* (title deeds or documents)' (CMDA, 2006: 8). This indicates double instability for the poorest. Their vulnerability is even higher than simply 'having their own built hut' in an informal settlement. Their powerlessness is greater, since they often lack a ration card<sup>1</sup>, and sometimes even a vote card – their capital can be seen and heard in a case of an emergency. Therefore, since the 1970s the nature of slums has changed a lot. The presence of slum leaders, powerful slumlords, owners and poor tenants within a limited urban settlement has catalyzed its social and economic fragmentation.

Another feature of Chennai slums is the gradual modification of housing constructions. De Wit reports that 'the vast majority of slum shelter units are *kucha* (thatched) huts (67 per cent); 13 per cent are *pucca* (built or durable materials)' (1996: 110). On the other hand, for the last few decades many informal settlements have experienced a shift from sprawling hutments with predominantly thatched houses to settlements with growing numbers of pucca or semi-pucca houses. The main reason for this change was the slum policies initiated in 1971.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitlin and Satterthwaite describe ration cards as a 'kind of permission which provides access to subsidized food and fuel for registered citizens in India' (2004: 219). The ration cards are distributed per household.

In general if a settlement is not seriously threaten by eviction or relocation and/or is or used to be recognized for improvement under a certain government scheme, the common strategy to get more space for its growing population in the overcrowded settlement is (other than moving to another slum) construct a better house, more recently even build up another floor. It also allowed making a profit through illegal renting. Not evicted settlements have changed their face significantly since they were founded in the 1960s and 1970s. The metamorphosis has been fast because of the process of gentrification as well (Marudachalam, 1991: 242). 'Notified' or 'declared' slums (using the early language of the Tamil Nadu government) appeared to be built up and crowded still lacking adequate public services and infrastructure.

### **3.3 Lack of amenities**

Apart from the lack of living space and problems which illegal land subdivision imposes, slum dwellers suffer from inadequate water and power supply, lack of drainage, poor toilet facilities and open defecation areas, absence of drinking water and high level environmental risk in general. In 2001, 'only 26 per cent of the slum population had access to drinking water' (Chandramouli, 2003: 85). According to his study most slum residents use hand pumps (42 per cent), followed by tap water provision (31 per cent) and the rest use other sources (ibid: 86). The quality of water and the distribution system are inadequate, groundwater is often contaminated. The portion of 71 per cent of slum dwellers in 2006 purchased drinking water from outside which again put a burden on their cost of living (CMDA, 2006: 8). Respondents and other resources refer to slum dwellers' health problems and diseases like malaria, cholera, pneumonia, typhoid or diarrhoea, fever and chicken guniya.

Slums themselves contribute to the continuing pollution of groundwater, rivers and other waterways in the city. Not much has changed since 1996 when De Wit wrote that 'raw sewage flows freely into the rivers and channels of Madras at many points. This is especially so near many slums which generally lack even toilets' (1996: 104). In 2006, a shocking 68 per cent of houses in the Chennai city were without sewer connection and almost the same portion of households threw their wastes in the open spaces drains (CMDA, 2006: 8). Among all, the most polluted waterways are Cooum and Adyar Rivers together with the constructed Buckingham canal. These are also the waterways along which the majority of informal settlements are or used to be located. An effort of the Tamil Nadu



government and national or international agencies to improve river conditions partly influence slum policies in Chennai.

In slums an illegal electricity provision is a widespread practice. If a settlement was notified and upgraded in the past, its growing population imposes higher demand for the power. It is commonly practiced to share electricity informally among neighbours or from an owner to his renters. After all, tenants pay not only the rent, but also electricity which is illegally subsidized. In official numbers, 79 per cent of slum population has access to electricity (Chandramouli, 2003: 86). Illegal electricity distribution is a threat; particularly settlements with thatched houses are susceptible to fires, sometimes fatal for the majority of shelters in a slum.

Lack of physical assets and secure tenure contribute a lot to slum residents' vulnerability. In spite of the land and infrastructure limitations, slum dwellers' human capital as identified in the first chapter plays important role in their daily living. Although, primary education and public health care are for free, public schools are in very poor conditions with low quality of teaching. The 80 per cent literacy rate (Chandramouli, 2003: 84) seems optimistic, but it may include even those who were in schools for only one year (De Wit, 1996: 110). The youngest slum generation often attends a public primary school; their chance to get a higher education is less probable. For example except one case none of the respondents or their children had achieved a higher level of education than the ninth standard maximum. The level of health care is obviously very poor as well. Government hospitals do not guarantee professional medical treatment, mostly they are crowded and low-income patients have to wait for long hours to get basic medical care.

Pre-condition to improve slum dwellers' living conditions is to ensure a stable income. Slum residents' financial capital is limited because of lack of appropriate skills and education, poor health and insecure housing. In the 1990s more than 70 per cent of all Chennai slum workers worked in the informal sector or were self-employed mostly as low skilled or un-skilled workers (De Wit, 1996: 111). Slum dwellers present low-paid public servants to clean streets and collect garbage; small or middle enterprises located in the vicinity of a slum such as steel, plastic, prawn or fish companies provide job opportunities for their residents. A Chennai slum is possible to recognize according to major income activities of its inhabitants as auto-rickshaw and rickshaw drivers, fishermen colonies as well as housekeeping or construction-workers communities. In fact 'services slums' form a significant part of cheap service delivery in the city (De Wit, 1996: 111). Some Chennai informal settlements have a tradition of providing housekeeping services

to the neighbouring richer household. Apart from these informal income generating activities, government and non-governmental sector emphasize implementation of diverse employment schemes and projects to encourage slum dwellers' economic empowerment.

Unlike the variety of options to ensure an income, slum dwellers face always financial difficulties because of instability and irregularity of earnings. First of all, most earnings are less predictable and come from one day to another; secondly some jobs are insecure because of their informal character or increasing workers' competition. For example, several female respondents indicated that they had lost a job as a housekeeper being easily replaced by another woman, when they could not come at work due to health or family problems. The financial instability is the biggest threat for the poorest slum dwellers without access to savings, being heavily indebted and paying rent, in turn one of the income sources for richer households in slums.

Insuring access to cheaper adequate and secure housing, developed infrastructure, improved facilities and delivery of public services together with quality health care and education remain necessary requirements to stimulate financial and human capital in slums. The lack of these amenities influences slum dwellers' participation in a programme or their willingness to only be involved. Moreover, access to less tangible 'services' as provision of information, civic and political rights or safety social nets present important elements to be taken into account speaking about community participation. The scope of the study does not provide space to analyse all factors more deeply, the further analysis is focused on social and political capital and its role in participation. Promotion of social and political capital is sometimes excluded from a programme being underestimated.

### **3.4 Tamil politics: myth of governance**

Politics and policies play a major role in urban poverty alleviation in Chennai. Initiating in 1971 (before there was no proper slum policy), the popular Tamil political party 'Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam' (DMK) won again the state election for Lok Sabha (Central federal parliament). The newly formed government enacted 'Tamil Nadu Slum Areas (Improvement & Clearance) Act' (further Act 1971) and established a new government agency called Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) responsible exclusively for slum clearance and improvement. The DMK with a traditionally strong urban backing had won the election on promises of 'bread and butter' to the poor Tamil masses, including the urban poor (De Wit, 1996: 112). Perceiving the Act 1971 as a milestone for the evolution of slum policies in Tamil Nadu, it shows also the importance of informal settlements for a ruling party.

The DMK grew out of the Dravidian movement asking for a separate Tamil nation in oath India in the 1950s and the 1960s. After beginning with only a few seats it swept the election in 1967 winning more than half of the seats in the Tamil Nadu assembly when the traditionally strong all Indian Congress party was defeated (Guha: 2008: 420). The present DMK leader C. N. Annadurai, known as 'Anna', became the chief minister of Tamil Nadu. Anna started the tradition of skilful and distinctive orators of the party who have contributed a lot to the increasing popularity of the DMK over the past decades.

Apart from the early DMK dominant role in promoting the Tamil language within the whole-Indian anti-Hindi movement in the 1950s and in the beginning of the 1960s, its popularity rose from a strong link with the popular Tamil film industry. The film hero M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) was a long-term supporter of the DMK in the 1970s and the 1980s, both on the level of financing and public representation (Guha, 2008: 421). MGR represented the hero recognized by many illiterate poor Tamil men and women in urban and rural areas (De Wit, 1992: 13). His particular resistant portrait can still be found painted on walls of several slum entrances.

The popularity of the DMK among the urban poor explains a little more about the role of politics in slum dwellers' lives. Following the DMK practice so-called 'assertive and paternalist populism' together with the focus on actions leading to immediate support (for example increasing the number of jobs reserved to backward castes or promised food subsidies to urban poor) MGR managed to address many low-income voters

(Guha, 2008: 421). The Act 1971 followed the same rhetoric to reach greater electoral support providing only the vast definition of a 'slum':

'Any area is or may be a source of danger to the health, safety or convenience of public of that area or of its neighbourhood, by reason of the area being low-lying, in-sanitary, squalid, or overcrowded or otherwise, or the buildings in any area, used or intended to be used for human habitation are in any respect, unfit for human habitation by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement and design of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangement of streets, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors, detrimental to safety, health or morals, they may by notification, declare such area to be a slum area' (Declaration of Slum Area Act 1971, Chapter II. TNSCB, 2009).

It says nothing about illegal land tenure and classifies slums only according to alarming living conditions in general. The definition opens space for multiple interpretations of what the 'slum area' is supposed to be in reality. De Wit argues, that the Act 1971 allows odd interpretation to justify either slum clearance or protection (1996: 113). In fact, the TNSCB was given legal status to 'notify' or 'declare' an informal settlement to be improved or clear up for further housing development. 'The latter areas would be eligible for (future) improvement' (ibid). In theory, the Act 1971 protected most slums on public land against eviction with the exception of some cases which could be justified (in the interest of improvements) when government ensure an alternative site for slum residents. Obviously, if slum dwellers did not vote for the DMK in 1971, they would definitely do it in the upcoming elections.

At the time the number of 'declared' slums in the city was 1 202 settlements (TNSCB, 2009). According to the Act 1971, these slums were supposed to be cleared up for improved housing or to be recognized (same as notified) for upgrading programmes. Unfortunately the declaration remains unclear and decisions about a slum status and following intervention on negotiations among involved government agencies persist. 'Besides, the government, or more precisely ruling party politicians, may impede an effective or equitable slum policy implementation. Their personal, political interests are brought to bear on Slum Board activities, with a view to influencing the slums that are seen as a vote bank' (De Wit, 1996: 98). While chief public officials were members of the ruling party or opposition, slum policies have become a political issue. Coordination problems together with corruption and clientelism have marked government interventions toward informal settlements from the very beginning.

Competition and struggles between a ruling party and its opposition have always played a role in slum policy implementation. Basically, the two strongest parties in Tamil Nadu are the DMK and the ADMK. After a disagreement with the DMK ruling chief minister in the 1970s, MGR formed its own political party called 'All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam' (AIADMK or more recently ADMK) which won the state election in 1977 and ruled Tamil Nadu till 1987 when MGR died (De Wit, 1992: 13). His death meant the loss of a strong and charismatic Tamil leader who was difficult to replace. Since the late 1980s the political struggle between the DMK and the ADMK has been continuing which imposes mainly short-term, election-based projects backed by populist speeches and promises.

In general, slums in urbanizing India are commonly recognized as vote banks for local politicians. Guha in his large study of political history of India quotes Yadav who points out an interesting observation: 'India is perhaps the only large democracy in the world today where the turnout of the lower orders (of poor and marginalized social groups) is well above that of the most privileged groups' (In Guha: 2008: 736). Tamil political practice provides an example for all. Based on his experience from Chennai slums, Kumaran (2008) even refuses the wide-spread perception of slums as powerless settlements. In fact, Chennai slums present important electoral bases for both the DMK and ADMK parties. Informal settlements in Chennai can be distinguished according to what party their inhabitants vote for and belong to. It is possible to find DMK or ADMK slums marked by the appropriate party signs, paintings or flags. Although some other parties are introduced in Chennai slums as well, none is influential enough to threaten the positions of the DMK or the ADMK. Furthermore, as politicians are able to easily shift from one attractive promise to another in election time (to insure their votes), slum communities also move from support for one party to another (in the hopes of getting more support from the respective party).

Regarding the significant role of Tamil politics in practice, community participation under different programmes is considered to be quite challenging. If the widespread word 'governance' means effective relationship and cooperation between all involved stakeholders as government and its agencies, subject of civil society and slum communities, then it seems to be a myth in Chennai. The slum dwellers' participation is clearly being used as a tool to gather and sustain political power instead of the process of seeking a solution. Although the more privileged position and political contacts of richer slum residents and slum leaders question the concept of urban poor powerlessness, the voice of the poorest slum dwellers lacking contacts and even interest remain unheard. They simply follow

the major direction (mostly imposed by a few influential slum inhabitants) and stay excluded from the slum politics anyway.

### **3.5 Objectionable versus unobjectionable**

To understand the role of social and political contacts for slum dwellers' participation in upgrading programmes in Chennai, the introduction into the division of executive power in Chennai follows. Relations and negotiations among Chennai government bodies have been crucial for slum policy implementation in the region. Although policies often exist clearly defined on paper, in reality there is a lack of cooperative and sustainable solutions. As it is argued above, opposing political and other interests of local politicians, bureaucrats and slum leaders negatively impact both policy implementations and community participation.

The Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) itself compounds different administrative units in the sense of regional development and planning. Administration and service provision belong to appropriate municipal governments within the region. The Corporation of Chennai (COC) is further divided into 10 Zones and each Zone is headed by a Zonal Officer in the local corporation office. Those are responsible for services in their areas, but they are fully financially dependent on the central Chennai office: the Council Department headed by the Mayor, the Council Secretary and standing committees. The departments of the central office accountable for service provision in slums are Revenue Department (tax collection and distribution of ration cards), Electrical Department, Solid Waste Management Department and Health and Education Departments. Apart from the corporation departments other boards are responsible for public service provision in the region. Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewage Board (CMWSSB), simply called Metrowater, provide water supply and sewage disposal. Chennai Metropolitan Solid Waste Board (CMSWB) is responsible for solid waste management.

In general, the service delivery in Chennai slums is restricted according to their status. Given no slum classification in the Act 1971, the Corporation, one of the land owners in the city, divides informal settlements in Chennai city into *objectionable* and *unobjectionable* slums. The categorization is used by other Tamil Nadu government bodies as well (those who own the land and the Slum Board), although there is no legislatively fixed formula. Objectionable slum are basically understood as those located on waterways, road or railway margins and seashore, simply places inappropriate for housing purposes, and are allowed to be evicted or relocated to alternative sites.

According to EG and TCG Survey of 2004, the number of objectionable slums in Chennai city was 212 in total and more than half of them were located along water bodies (TNSCB, 2009).

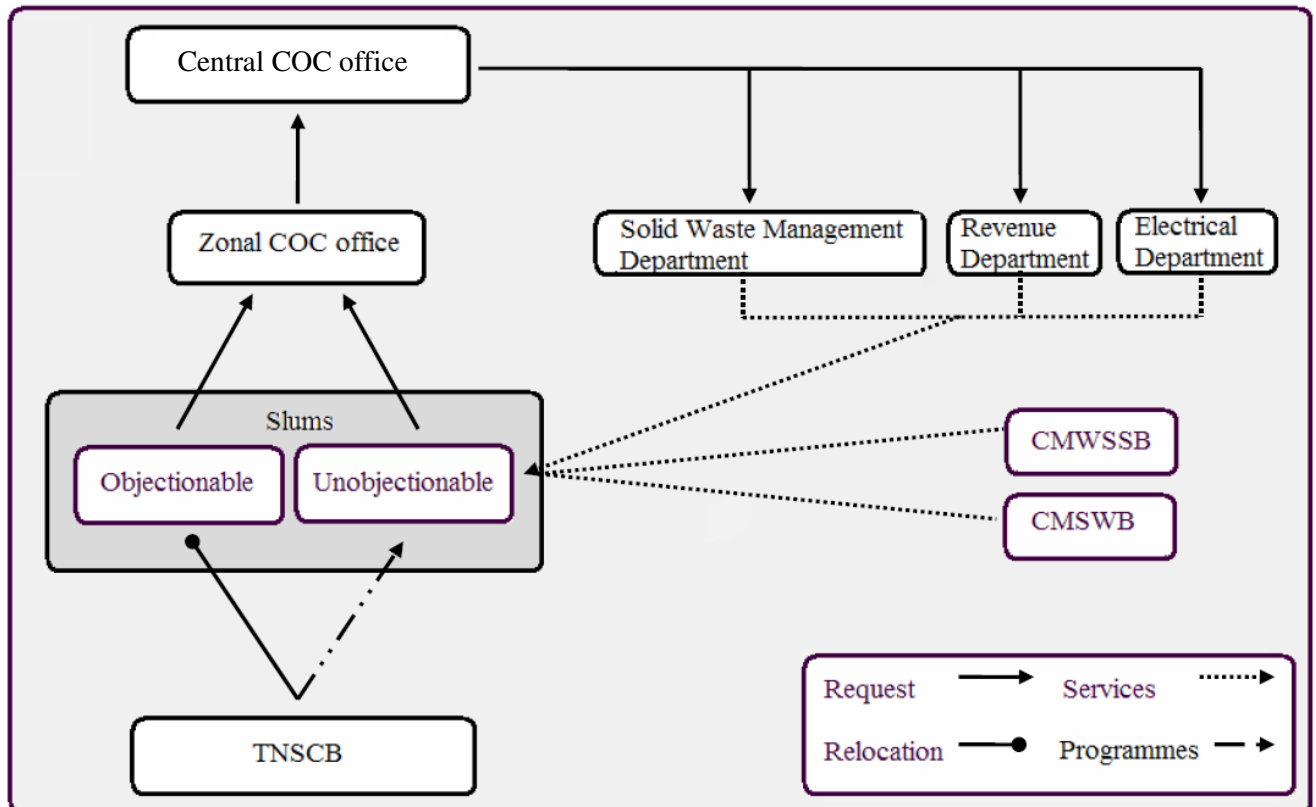
Unobjectionable slums on public land are either tolerated or (in) formally recognized. The same survey indicates 232 unobjectionable settlements covering almost 50 000 households in total in 2004 in the city (TNSCB, 2009). Respective zonal offices are permitted to grant their residents access to the corporation services and the Slum Board runs a range of improvement and livelihood programmes providing their residents property documents in limited number of cases. It is organized similarly in other metropolitan units. Figure 2.1 shows in a simplified way the scheme for service delivery and the role of Slum Board in the region. To complain about poor maintenance or lack of service delivery slum dwellers mostly address their local representatives or even zonal officers without regards to the categorization of the settlement (basically they lack information about such a classification). All of them have similar needs and requests for basic services. The scheme explains how the government intervention is defined theoretically; focus on selected slums further provides the real picture of the issue.

Next to corporation and private land, slums occupy land belonging to Tamil Nadu Housing Board (TNHB or Housing Board) and Public Works Department (PWD), agencies of the Tamil Nadu government operating around the state. The Housing Board manages land for housing purposes, especially for middle- and higher-income housing in Tamil Nadu. The PWD is responsible for maintenance, development and protection of water bodies, waterways and reservoirs across the state. In fact, river banks and lakes in the metropolitan area (affected by illegal settlements the most) are property of the PWD. In general, its land is not suitable for housing purposes and 'its' slums are automatically classified as objectionable. The PWD can provide a 'no-objectionable certificate' to slums in a limited number of cases (if they do not obstruct its interests). Again, the certificate rather presents another tool for bureaucrats and politicians in need to ensure their votes.

The Slum Board have an uneasy position to negotiate land issues with the TNHB (land for relocation sites) and the PWD (clearance of objectionable slums). It usually causes difficult and long-term negotiations among the agencies, often imposing significant delay in a policy/programme implementation. The modern history of Indian bureaucracy explains the deeply rooted problem of non-cooperation and large-scale corruption at the government level (Das, 2007). Apart from promotion of political and private interests, clientelism and corruption obstructing cooperation and compliance necessary to run a sustainable solution, unclear power division complicates the process in certain cases. In practice,

the different character of the institutions leads to less evident division of roles and responsibilities which again allow for the misuse of one's power. It most affects the beneficiaries in slums who are often defrauded by unorganized intervention or never fulfilled political promises.

**Figure 2.1** Service delivery in Chennai slums



(Sobotová, 2009)



### 3.6 The role of decentralization

Illegal housing has a long tradition in India and slum dwellers have been part of its urban population for almost a century. The government's perception to recognize them and to target them in policies and politics makes a difference. Since independence, India has followed a long tradition of Five-Year plans which have constituted Indian development policies from 1947, but the need to focus more on urban development was not recognized until the 1990s. The challenges related to urbanization were firstly emphasized in 1992 when the Indian national parliament passed the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment (further 74<sup>th</sup> CAA) (Gnaneshwar, 1995). The Amendment established a new level of urban bodies for implementation of national policies at the local level. According to Chakrabarti 'the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment incorporated some revolutionary changes in the organisation, powers, functions, and jurisdictions of the urban local bodies' (2001: 264). It brought new insight on urban development.

The 74<sup>th</sup> CAA known also as Nagarapalika Act was quite challenging. The decentralization imposed the distribution of roles into the local context. In theory, the task of local government and municipal institutions has been to work together fulfilling objectives of national or state policies. Local authorities are supposed to be more interested in their citizen's needs and to stress the importance of a framework for urban governance to alleviate housing poverty in Indian cities. For instance, Edelman and Mitra show that the total number of slums in India has decreased from 56 311 in 1993 to 51 688 in 2002 (2006: 28). It seems to be a result of an effort focused on slum clearance and resettlement. Notification of informal settlements has been often carried out in India in the last two decades. 'Overall, 51 per cent of India's slums were officially recognized by the respective municipalities, corporations, local bodies or development authorities in 2002, up from 36 per cent in 1993' (ibid: 34). Unfortunately, these interventions sometimes stay unclear because of incoherent policies, lack of cooperation among local government bodies and wide-spread practices of political interferences and patronage.

The 74<sup>th</sup> CAA initiated restructuring of municipal government and newly formed so-called 'Ward Committees' (WCs), bodies formed by directly elected representatives at the lowest administrative level. In Chennai, each zone is divided in 10 WCs in average. The total number of them in Chennai city is 155 (Corporation of Chennai office, 2009) with approximately 40 – 50 000 people per ward (De Wit, 1997: 9). The members of Ward Committees called Municipal Councillors (MCs) are elected every five years by the ward

population. Councillors present the closest 'enabler' for population of its district to public services and assist them in a case of an emergency. As a connector the MC should encourage citizen participation and facilitate dialog between citizens and the central office or other government agencies.

Slum dwellers often address their MC to get access to services, to complain about possible relocation, lack of maintenance or in an emergency of a fever epidemic during rainy season, etc. Clearly, councillors' membership in a ruling or opposing political party influences the slum dwellers' membership and his favour to execute an order from above or hear the request from below. MCs largely profit from their positions being active especially to ensure 'their' slum dwellers' votes. If a councillor is powerful enough (having higher contacts, being member of a ruling party and ensuring 'appreciable' number of votes, or occasionally bribing counterparts) the slum status is less important in reality. Although, patronage against relocation of an objectionable settlement or to insure better services for an unobjectionable slum provides only short-term stability, it may work for several election periods. On the other hand, promises of help have become councillors' wide-spread strategy before upcoming elections, meanwhile nothing changes after he is re-elected. The councillors' presence and (mostly virtual) help in slums are identified as one element for Chennai slum dwellers' living strategy. Its role in slum dwellers' participation in a programme is further described in the next chapter.

## **4. Participation in Chennai slums: the analysis**

The chapter aims to answer the main research question *What are challenges for successful participation in Chennai slum upgrading programmes?* As noted before, the analysis of all factors influencing slum dwellers' participation is out of scope of this study. The following chapter focuses primarily on the role of social and political contacts in participatory development. Listing the most important slum improvement programmes in Chennai at the beginning, it consists of describing the selected Chennai informal settlements demonstrating conditions for participatory development in particular. The analysis itself consists of critical assessment of councillors' role in community participation.

### **4.1 Chennai slum improvement programmes**

At the beginning, the newly built agency (TNSCB) in charge of implementation of slum policies and coordination with other government bodies started to enact slum clearances and improvements which were broadly defined by the Act 1971. Before the World Bank's loans, the main task of the TNSCB was to demolish of all the existing illegal settlements and resettle their residents into government tenements constructed at the cleared sites. It was supposed to be achieved in an ambitious seven-year plan between 1971 and 1987. In fact, it was not possible to reach the target and about 2 500 tenements units were constructed per year till 1990 (De Wit, 1996: 116).

The first upgrading programmes emerged at that time. In 1972 the five-year Environmental Improvement Scheme (EIS) started and was continued by the Accelerated Slum Improvement Scheme (ASIS) afterward. Both schemes were free of cost, being fully granted by the Government of India (De Wit, 1996). In 1974 the Madras Metropolitan Development Authority was established (MMDA, more recently CMDA – Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority), presenting an entry point for the Bank's loans. Between the years 1977 and 1988, large-scale upgrading programmes and sites-and-services schemes were implemented. Thus, the Community Development Wing (CDW) was created in 1978 initially within the MMDA structure. The key task of the wing was to ensure community participation in the Bank's programmes from planning to execution and to empower slum dwellers' income generating activities through employment trainings (TNSCB, 2009). As the MMDA became especially the planning body and the TNSCB the implementing agency, the Community Development Wing was transferred to the Slum Board in the early 1980s.

Madras Urban Development Project-I (MUDP-I) represented the first generation of upgrading programmes co-financed by the World Bank. At the inception there was a considerable policy change. Instead of government constructed tenements, the self-help housing was emphasized together with service provision and infrastructure improvements. In contrast to the initial slum policies, the MUDP-I stressed cost recovery and legalization of the 'irregular' settlements, so eligible households obtained the provisional title deeds known as *pattas* (De Wit, 1996: 118). The Madras Urban Development Project-II (MUDP-II) logically built on the completed MUDP-I between the years 1983 and 1988. The 'improvement loans' to low-income households were provided under the scheme (ibid).

In 1988 the Tamil Nadu Urban Development Project (TNUDP) was begun and was intended to operate with a similar design as the MUDP-I/II, which entailed the private land as well (De Wit, 1996: 119). A selected private slum was supposed to be improved under the land readjustment method, whereby the land owners were supposed to share its property with the encroachers (TNSCB, 2009). The Slum Board negotiated the purchase and transfer of the land, but the owners were unwilling to sell their property at the low price. Illegal settlers were also reluctant to move to rear side of the slum in the readjustment scheme. The land sharing failed to succeed and the slum board dropped the programme.

Apart from the programmes co-funded by the World Bank, there have been a number of improvement schemes through years financed by the Tamil Nadu government, Housing and Urban Development Corporation and international agencies such as UNICEF, Asian Development Bank or others. A decade ago the Tamil government adopted the Second Master Development Plan for Chennai Metropolitan Area under an Indian-wide policy called the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). The Resettlement and Rehabilitation programme was adopted as part of the Master plan (CMDA, 2008). The Slum Board has developed five rehabilitation schemes to resettle households living in river margins, low lying areas, or on road or railway margins - in short, those living in objectionable settlements. Since 2004, thousands of tsunami victims have been included in the scheme. So far, more than 23 000 families were relocated and rehabilitated in 2008 (TNSCB, 2009). The Community Development Wing has also been active in the process.

While the TNSCB as a whole is responsible for facilitating the development, the mission of the CDW is to announce and negotiate the resettlement with slum residents at community meetings and to coordinate between concerned government departments and NGOs to provide livelihood support and basic amenities, to raise awareness, form women's self-help groups and others. These programmes are carried out for the benefit

of the resettled families. The self-help groups represent an entry point for community workers. Unfortunately, the CDW staff often faces a lack of understanding for such effort from other government agencies and is perceived to be the less useful or meaningful department. In addition the CDW struggles for funds, political support and enough experienced social workers.

For the last four decades Tamil slum policies have been balancing between resettlement, clearance and improvement programmes. Many slums were resettled to sometimes incomplete alternative tenements in the same area or, what is worst, far from the city also lacking basic amenities. Its residents often sold a housing unit illegally and either returned to the place which used to be their home or joined in a 'more stable' settlement, informally renting a room or constructing their own house. Inadequate maintenance remains issues both in upgraded settlements and in relocation sites.

## **4.2 Profiles of selected slums**

### **4.1.1 Brindha Vanam**

The settlement is located along railway tracks close to the Chetpet railway station in the Chennai Central, Zone VII. The Chetpet district belongs to 104<sup>th</sup> Ward. It is an unobjectionable slum with well settled community of an estimated 400 families. The first huts emerged here more than 50 years ago. In the 1980s the area was involved in the government sites-and-services scheme. At that time sites were provided to contemporary residents and their poor shelters were demolished for new self-help constructions. Slum dwellers received pattas for their new constructed pucca houses and got legal electricity access. For decades the settlement has grown and the growing population has led to a higher housing demand.

More recently the slum has started to obstruct the PWD property while more thatched or semi-thatched houses are built closer to the railway. In spite of it, the dwelling area is limited and does not allow larger thatched hut constructions. The 'first settlers' having documented their houses built up additional storeys of the pucca houses to rent mostly a one-room ground floor informally to new comers or to their own descendants. Some families even moved out from the slum making profit from renting. Nowadays two- or three-storey houses dominate to the settlement. Their owners (living in or out of the slum) share electricity illegally with their tenants (also in thatched houses). Besides widespread gentrification, it has become common slumlord practice to increase their income from the shared power. Renters mostly do not know the real price of the service, paying

from Rs 100 to even Rs 400 per month. The rent itself oscillates between Rs 800 and Rs 1500.

Apart from developed self-help housing, the service delivery remains poor. Sanitation facilities are inadequate with only two water hand pumps for the whole settlement. There are toilet and washroom constructed by the Slum Board, but no drinking water. The most improved pucca houses have their own toilets to share, but the poorest living in the thatched houses lack facilities the most. Although there is a regular garbage collection, the environment is extremely polluted (mainly railway side) which causes underwater contamination and promotes an increasing rat population. The main problem is no drainage, especially in the rainy season when the area is flooded. There are four public schools in the vicinity which are for local residents and slum dwellers' children from surrounding settlements. Schools are in very poor condition both regarding the quality of teaching and sanitation. Moreover, government announced the intention to close two of them soon. There is a public tuition centre for children who cannot go to school (mainly for those who work).

Residents also complain about the distant location of a ration shop with limited capacity to ensure enough rations for all households from large slum area around Chetpet station. It seems impossible to cover all of them. The shop is open ten days per month and remains crowded all the days; occasionally it is even possible to spend couple of hours waiting for a ration. Some respondents are afraid of losing their jobs because of waiting and families buy food from outside anyway. It burdens primarily the poorest again.

On the other hand, the growing housing stability allowed local residents to develop self-employment activities. The community is considered to be the housekeeping colony. Local women work for their owners and other households outside the settlement as housekeepers, servants, charladies, nannies or cleaners. Some workers also come from neighbourhood slums.

#### **4.1.2 V.O.C. road slums**

‘V.O.C. road slums’ are located between the Buckingham Canal and the V.O.C. road (former the Walltax road) on the west border of George Town, the oldest and one of the most populated neighbourhoods in the city (see Annex 4). The area still belongs to the Chennai Central, precisely to 48<sup>th</sup> Ward in Zone III. Unlike the majority of the Chennai wards who constitutes a strong representation of the DMK in the Assembly of Tamil Nadu (for example Brindhavanam is predominantly the DMK area, membership in the ADMK is very rare), the settlements represent the vote bank for the ADMK councillors.

The slums are situated close to the Chennai Central railway station, bus terminus and government hospital. In the vicinity there are various employment opportunities in local companies or to work for middle income merchants and households. Because of the location close to the station male slum residents traditionally work as rickshaw or auto-rickshaw drivers. Women are mostly self-employed as housekeepers, soap/flower sellers, and rarely construction workers. A steel dishes company is situated in one of the selected slums (see Opallam).

During the 1980s informal settlements behind the road were involved in the MUDP-I/II and related slum improvement programmes. Less commonly the government offered to provide ready-made tenements for the lowest-income groups, but the promises were not always fulfilled. Sites were mostly cleared up for self-help housing. The large scale slums regularization decreased partly their dwellers’ level of poverty (through development of income activities in particular), but the area started to attract more new comers which had led to a boom of slumlordism, gentrification and expansion of illegal housing market later on.

Temporary ‘V.O.C. road slums’ are made up of a mix of both owned documented and undocumented pucca houses, and owned (semi) thatched houses. The poorest often dwell in illegally rented one-room rooms on the ground floor of a pucca house, or the worst rent a hut on the canal or railway margins. Such the ‘mix of shelters’ is common for Chennai slums. Jaga Puram, Kalyana Puram and Opallam, the selected unobjectionable settlements described below, present the examples of the ‘informal’ housing reality in the city.

### *Kalyana Puram*

The first illegal shelters appeared here more than 40 years ago. There were a limited number of thatched houses, but the settlement grew fast. Illegal access to electricity, hot weather and unsafe jumper connections often exposed the settlement to fire. A serious fire affected the hutment 40 years ago (around 200 thatched houses at that time). The government then promised to provide tenements for the victims who left almost with nothing. The site was cleared up for the new houses which took more than two years.

Meanwhile the population doubled. The Slum Board could provide a place only to a limited number of households and the decision of who would get a flat was made by a lot. About half of the slum population moved to government-built tenements, and the others remained in their illegal shelters. The TNSCB assisted in constructing additional pucca houses at the cleared site of the previous hutment and providing self-help loans and pattas to the residents. Some tenants in newly built tenements still sold them out illegally and moved back to the slum.

The growing community with a constantly increasing number of pucca houses after the fire had poor sanitary conditions without water supply, drinking water or toilets. There was no drainage in their self-help built houses. Dirty water from washing or bathing ran out of houses directly to the space in-between and to the canal. In monsoon season all the mud and 'black' water contaminated the area. People had illegal electricity access and no street lights. The quickly growing settlement was deteriorating the canal pollution, limiting its flow; moreover it started slowly to affect canal banks.

The sanitary conditions started to improve ten years ago while the settlement was involved in a government upgrading programme. So far the slum has basic sanitary facilities including three washrooms with toilet blocks, an almost regular drinking water supply from a tank, close drainage and regular garbage collection. The main washroom close to the slum entrance has all facilities; the other two have only water hand pumps. Toilet and water supply are paid services, but the price is only symbolic which makes cost recovery more problematic. Both washrooms and toilets are crowded and people have to queue for water especially in the morning before going to work. In the majority of cases households do bath and washing at home anyway which is a more efficient and convenient way of living. Some women still refuse to use corporation toilets because of waiting, paying or other reasons.



Recently the slum has expanded and today it is estimated that almost 1 000 households live here. The declared security of tenure encouraged slum dwellers to build and to improve. Obviously, it has caused a larger development of the informal housing market within the settlement. There is a number of irregular built up pucca houses with a one-room ground floor to rent. Local residents indicate the presence of slumlords owning more than one house (including thatched huts built closer to the canal for rent as well). Slumowners moved to higher floor of their elevated pucca houses or more commonly moved out of the slum to let their house to a new tenant. Although the TNSCB arranged legal electricity access based on household needs, informally shared power supply is still common. An 'electricity bill' is usually paid to an owner together with the rent. Both, the rent and power costs are similar to Brindha Vanam prices.

### *Jaga Puram*

This settlement was involved in the sites-and-services scheme around 30 years ago. A hutment had been here for one or two decades previous to that. According to estimates the slum counts roughly 360 households today. In fact, the settlement has only one long street parallel with the V.O.C. road bordered by a sewerage pumping station on the south and the Elephant Gate Bridge street on the north. Similarly to other neighbouring slums there are two water hand pumps, a complex of three washrooms and block of toilets, all provided by the Corporation of Chennai. A private company (Metal Falanca) is in charge of the garbage collection. The company works in Zone III instead of the Corporation Solid Waste Management Department. Legal electricity is delivered as well (shared informally with tenants again).

### *Opallam*

This slum shares a similar history to those of the previous ones. Some residents remember that the first shelters appeared here more than 50 years ago. Since the late 1970s or the early 1980s it has been improved and started to grow quickly. The recent estimate number of households is approximately 1 200 families. Four main streets constitute the slum in general and well-developed elevated pucca houses prevail in the settlement. It is also possible to observe more pucca houses with two- or even three-rooms per floor which indicates less limited space for constructions in the past in comparison to the Kalyana Puram. In general, the main streets are larger as well. The internal informal housing market seems quite established. Many people report that the settlement is already quite over-populated. Residents move within the slum commonly to build new houses. In fact, the community does not welcome new comers much.

Only the more recently built fourth street has not been upgraded yet. Although the settlement does not affect the flow of the canal directly, it is situated on the railway margins in front of the canal. The street is located next to the railway tracks and counts roughly 400 households, itself obstructing the PWD property critically. Unlike rest of the slum, the street is full of thatched or semi-thatched houses with no document, legal electricity or drainage. The houses do not have any door numbers (in other street they do).

In the settlement the sanitation is poor with two or three corporation hand water pumps and a washroom with a toilet block per street. Except the fourth street there is closed drainage and Metal Falanca arranges garbage collection. The Corporation delivers a legal electricity supply and street lights were provided in the past. The worst sanitary conditions remain in the fourth street with an open defecation area backing the houses.

### 4.3 Councillor's omnipresent help

The slum dwellers' dependency on the Tamil Nadu government is considerable. The abuses at the lowest administrative level do not differ much from the state-wide practice: power as a mean for control and a goal itself determine slum policies. The authority of municipal councillors to influence slum residents' lives and decisions is substantial. In Brindha Vanam, perceiving the site-and-services programme as the milestone, government intervention and outsiders' unscrupulous interferences put its inhabitants at the mercy of help and in permanent expectation of something for free.

Most respondents from the settlement understand community action simply as approaching the councillor (or possibly another public official) to complain about a situation or poor sanitary conditions in the slum. The perception of participation has changed. Secure housing and decreasing vulnerability in general caused social and economic diversity to increase. Anything from what slum dwellers potentially make a profit, they desire to have or to be part of it. The government's more intensive and less considered support contributes to the erosion of slum dwellers' will to contribute money, time or other to achieve something.

Slum dwellers surprisingly may address their MC directly instead of talking to a slum leader first. The real role of community leaders is recognized as a representative for cultural or public events and political party assemblies. While their interest in community troubles does not make a difference, councillors have been identified as 'enablers' of government help. There are learnt effects of a councillors' position and of the role of informal political contacts in participatory development in slums:

#### *Vote bank's dichotomy*

Apart from the misuse of votes for a councillor to keep his post, slum dwellers understood their own power as a vote bank. The threat that the majority of a community would elect the ruling councillors' opponent in upcoming elections weakens his dominance. A councillor may become a hostage rather than a ruler. Commonly slum dwellers address both a ruling and opposing party for support, and this happens especially in a case of emergency as relocation or widespread health problems are. The danger of relocation increased the displeasure of both the slum residents and the MC. If a supportive settlement with a significant number of voters is resettled; it would be significant loss for a councillor.

Great effort can be expended to keep the slum in its place and endless negotiations between the Slum Board and other government agencies may be either the result or even the goal.

#### *Politics as livelihood strategy*

The residents of informal settlements in Chennai identify politics as a means to gain an advantage or profit. The argument of expected government help has become part of the living strategies. Furthermore election time offers additional income for slum dwellers who are popular ‘invisible and specialized agitators’ making flags, billboards or wall painting, leaflets and pamphlets together with their informal distribution and support at political rallies

#### *Limited access to information*

Slumlords and community leaders gain the most having informal contacts and better access to information. Marginalized community members especially lack appropriate and reliable sources of information: tenants depend often on an owner’s opinion, sometimes being afraid of losing his ‘home’ in a case of a possible disagreement; women are reliant on their husbands or on more powerful female counterparts in a self-help group; new comers having no relatives in the settlement remain under a powerful brokers’ influence. In a slum a number of odd stories and news circulate influencing people’s decisions and engagement in a programme.

Slum ‘elites’ and councillors often abuse the information channels when is needed in favour of their own objectives. Keeping proper information from others goes in hand with keeping the power. For instance, in Brindha Vanam residents trust in the government’s announcement that people educated up to tenth standard will receive a support of Rs 600 per month. Respondents referred to a Tamil Chief Minister’s statement; however, no one knew more details, a source of the news or when and where it has been released.

#### *Omnipresent councillor’s help*

In slums resilient beliefs in ‘omnipresent’ councillor’s help are domesticated, even if it is rather myth than reality. Slum dwellers vote a councillor with the prospect of putting into practice his attractive promises, but nothing much changes after the election. ‘Before the election, a political party came to promise whatever we ask and we voted for them, but nothing has happened until now,’ a woman from Jaga Puram reports. In other words, to control his electoral constituency an MC is eager to declare more power than he possesses.

If some improvements are arranged, it is not always based on the voters' needs. Apart from garbage collection, distribution of pesticides against mosquitoes or providing more ration cards, other 'necessities' are carried out such as distribution of coloured televisions or vote cards for illegal tenants which is not official practice. Clearly, these supplies target the councillor's power instead of beneficiaries' wishes. Basically the needs of the most vulnerable are ignored.

The trustworthy councillor's position gets resources partly from the past government support under the long term MGR's ruling (both in the DMK and the ADMK). In spite of the heterogeneous nature of the community shown in the previous chapter, the less divergent characteristic of an 'informal' settlement persists to favour the same political party. Then, owners of a vote card from those who have not must be distinguished. Moreover, slum dwellers often do not make a distinction from whom the care has come exactly and tend to understand help in a sense of the MC's intervention. Interestingly, non-governmental assistance has not been mentioned while asking about community participation.

#### *Exploitation of the poorest*

Tenants in illegally subsidized shelters are often new comers (poor peasants or resettled inhabitants of another informal settlement) or relatives of present residents of different social status. Hereby, the category *tenant* does not represent a harmonized subgroup. Some of them found a house through a broker, while some of them are descendants of owners. More recently people have tried to avoid a broker's assistance and use already established connections with slum dwellers through relatives, marriage or friends. Tenants are not able to get ration or vote cards, because their presence in the slum is not 'notified'. Owners watch carefully if the tenants approach the MC to be recognized. They might lose their property in a case of possible relocation. Tenants can hardly afford subsidized food from ration shops, except a distribution of ration cards is not arranged together with vote cards. In fact, the poorest tenants fall somewhere between the owners and slumlords will, politics and brokers' demands.

On one side political contacts and councillors' interferences restrict slum dwellers' participation, on the other side their hardly foreseen (non) interventions are noticed. In Kalyana Puram residents used to address the councillor through women from self-help groups. Asking either for information to clarify if relocation was threatening or for assistance to improve risky conditions, no answer was often received. Improvements were done through local self-help groups. Almost nothing has changed except that which was accomplished by the women groups and political parties in particular (next to the ruling one, others are occasionally interested to increase an influence through instant help). The witnessed strategy of a 'community' action in the slums has been to write or to go to the MC arguing for help; if nothing happened simply the status quo was maintained. In urgency, willing slum dwellers participated to tackle a problem.

#### **4.4 Voice and power of self-help groups**

The concept of self-help groups (SHGs) should be perceived as a tool for efficient and meaningful community action as well as a process of empowerment for those who are involved. Every member of a group deposits a reasonable amount of money regularly in a bank to be able get a loan later for an individual small-scale business. A group is supervised by the founding NGO which organizes meetings, checks if rules of the membership and lending are kept, and provides trainings and assistance. Although SHGs are predominantly women saving organizations, the mechanism encourages members to be more self-confident and empowered in general. In slums it contributes to environmental and housing improvements. In Opallam, besides loans and savings issues, community problems are discussed frequently at the meetings.

In Kalyana Puram most women joint SHGs and are gradually learning how to speak with officials and policemen or with other residents in an effort to reduce shared community problems such as prostitution or alcoholism. Basically they are empowered to help each other. Local women managed to clean drainage on their own before the settlement has been improved by the Corporation. Addressing the councillor via women leaders was mentioned above. They usually give notice about lack of maintenance or improper services such as insufficient garbage collection or broken street lights.

On the contrary, the long-standing concept of self-help groups is often overused, which threatens women's participation. In a settlement there is a variety of organizations running SHGs. Long term and established NGOs insist on keeping rules and regular meetings unlike recently developed private initiatives based primarily on savings and lending without clearly defined guidelines and/or restrictions. Increasing competition among the organizations pushes to cut conditions to get a loan, and attendance at trainings is not always required (if ever organized). Quick money has become easily accessible and women use credits increasingly for weddings and other family purposes, to pay medical care etc. They often do not know the name of the NGO who runs their group, or even the name of the group. It shows how much attention is paid to the model itself. To be a member of more than one group is not formally allowed, but slum women profess to do so to ensure greater profit.

Female respondents from Brindha Vanam show no interest in contributing to group savings because of a shared perception of the low credibility of the concept. It does not make sense for this idea to be unknown, since it has been used with the Indian poor for many decades. Widespread myths and a lack of proper information play a role again. Women also report a lack of time to join meetings, disagreement with their husbands over participation or no money to save regularly. Speaking further about reasons not to participate, it is important to be aware of simple labelling over. *Women* are members of the most disregarded households, privileged slum families and those in-between. Savings mostly attract the poorest; at the same time untrustworthy organizations are ready to exploit the most.

## 5. Conclusion

The challenges for participatory development in slums are principally based on the understanding of slum dwellers' reasons to either participate or not in a certain programme. This conclusion provides neither universal instruction to be applied nor judgement as to what should be considered *wrong* or *right* to promote participatory approaches in slums, even in the Indian context. The complexity of community structure and inter-connected determinants for an individual or community participation mentioned in the previous chapters explain in more detail some obstacles and opportunities for satisfactory and efficient participatory development. The objective of the final chapter is to support current efforts to integrate community participation in government programmes and to underline some successful practices in Chennai slums.

### 5.1 The role of social capital

Urban and rural poor share similar causes of their vulnerability. In urban areas insecure land tenure and risk of relocation, extremely high density of slum population, spatial, social and economic limits or competing social institutions are specifically to be taken into account. In comparison with their rural counterparts, slum dwellers face particular environmental hazards that often have serious impact upon their human and financial capital (Moser, 1998, Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001). Secure housing is a crucial pre-condition to generating an income; for instance, using it for home-based activities. Moser reports of the 'commoditized' nature of the urban livelihood (1998: 4). Labour is considered the most important asset, generating income either directly in terms of wages or indirectly through self-employment activities in the informal sector. Moser also emphasizes 'social fragmentation' contributing to reduction or progress of slum inhabitants' vulnerability (ibid). Social capital plays a significant role in urban poverty alleviation.

First, the importance of social capital for participatory development has to be recognized. Horizontal (networks, linkages) and vertical (social stratification) contacts are key to stimulating people's assets. 'In India, political contacts often play the role of reducing risks and uncertainties relating to land encroachment, and also help with access to basic amenities' (Edelman and Mitra, 2006: 25). On one hand, informal contacts with politicians, donors and other persons of influence sometimes contribute to decrease urban poverty, on the other hand there is a risk that the linkages are little analysed,



underestimated or even 'ill modelled' (Cleaver, 1999: 600). More influential groups in informal settlements often dominate a process of change and the most marginalized inhabitants are overshadowed.

However, there are limited positive impacts on the poorest in slums; these are mainly non-direct side effects, short-term and less sustainable in their nature. Slumlords, brokers, gate-keepers, community leaders and so-called 'slum elite' represent important voice in a community influencing the poorest. Thus, to avoid 'selective participatory practices' (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000), greater weight should be placed on recognizing different and conflicting interests in a community. If possible, outside interests and linkages should be taken into consideration for an assessment to be complete. As Chennai's case demonstrates, implications of local politics determine slum dwellers' participation and the voicelessness of the poorest.

'It remains one of the biggest challenges to ensure that the people, who neither have the capacity, nor the desire to participate, are involved in the development process' (Botes and Rensburg, 2000: 46). Non-participation and the acceptance of the status quo are often undesirable for development. As Cleaver notes, the reasons for that can differ from 'a 'rational strategy and unconscious practice embedded in routine to social norms' (Cleaver, 1999: 607). Motives of those who are not keen or eligible to participate should be investigated. It can be sometimes more beneficial for an individual to rationalize his choice saving time and energy and/or to demonstrate an opinion or even protest against certain 'top-down' solution or dominancy.

In other words, capital can be understood as *potential*. Social capital then presents potential to establish, participate in, influence or profit from social contacts, relationships, networks, social and political institutions, civil and political rights or provision of information; it also means an opportunity to transform one's religious, gender and traditions into personal (or communal) development. De Soto argues that poor masses in developing and transitioning countries do not lack capital itself. The capital which they possess, according to his study, could help the poor generate an income; but their poverty is primarily rooted in lack of opportunities to benefit from it and to transform 'dead capital' to active capital (De Soto: 2007). Although, his analysis is predominantly focused on promotion of financial and natural capital of the poor (in terms of Rakodi's framework from the first chapter), he partly address human, social and physical capital as well.

Considering social capital as a necessary pre-condition for successful participation may be helpful; however, the analogy with De Soto's observation is definitely limited. Social capital is not static 'stock' easily measured or detected; its function is often underestimated and overlooked in practise. More radically it can be 'dead social capital'. The poorest often lack information, political contacts, relationships of trust and reciprocity to those 'up to stream', being disregarded because of religion or gender, lack legal status and access to civil and political rights and legislation. In addition they suffer by the deficit of horizontal and/or vertical social stability and support, thus they have to be empowered in their way out of vulnerability and poverty.

## **5.2 The role of government**

De Soto's 'mystery of capital' explains that the poor are economically active, inventive and enterprising, but most of their activity happens in the informal sector. They are very resourceful in establishing and profiting from informal social and political contacts, less secure and more unpredictable contacts by their nature.

'The wealthy cannot withdraw from the lives of the poor, and the poor cannot withdraw from the lives of the wealthy – sustainable solutions will require either partnership or confrontation. Self-help approaches can and should be part of strategies to tackle exploitation and marginalization, but should be considered complements, not alternatives, to accessible public services and the redistribution of income and wealth' (Berner and Phillips, 2005: 28).

Participation and self-help do not sustain their achievement without formal recognition and support.

In addition, it might be helpful to promote horizontal collaboration. Forming a community-based organization may encourage the most impoverished. However, the danger of patronage, conflicting interests and of useless horizontal bureaucracy has been reported (Botes and Rensburg, 2000, Berner and Phillips, 2005 Davis, 2007). Grassroots organizations still present an entry point for the government to provide incentives for people, and slum dwellers' experience, knowledge and skills should be respected (Botes and Rensburg, 2000).

In Chennai the self-help groups are perceived not only as a mechanism as such, but they are also considered to be part of the local governance. For example, the Community Development Wing has recognized the necessity of consolidating small neighbourhood groups to join together. Local women and other volunteers were especially trained for this. Then, clusters of these groups were established, but still keeping a manageable number of households (around a hundred per cluster). These clusters formed a community-wide development council. The CDW was planning to train volunteers at all stages of the scheme. The pilot project was implemented in North Chennai covering around five thousands households, but unfortunately the funding agency (UNICEF) stopped financing it.

This experience supports the conclusion that a group (not necessarily a whole community) should be consolidated first based on *what people shared*: either the place where they live, or occupational, tenure or other status. Cleaver mentions that ‘concentration on boundaries highlights the need in development for clear administrative arrangements, more to do with delivery of goods and facilities than a reflection of any social arrangements’ (Cleaver, 1999: 603).

Similarly to De Soto’s recommendation to promote the role of government to stimulate the (financial and human) capital of the urban poor, stronger formal support should be designated to manage the social capital of the most vulnerable groups in slums. For instance, India has witnessed bureaucratic, politicised and corrupted practices in formal public institutions from the local to the federal level. Das (2007) describes authentically the difficulty of fulfilling all necessary government restrictions legally. To summarize his views, he points out how the Indian legislative system remains hugely time consuming, and uselessly complicated and ineffective, often forcing an applicant to bribe officials to even get through it (Das: 2007). The bureaucratic constrains and spoiled legal structure should be reformed first.

There is a strong need for capacity building at the government as well as community level. To sustain upgrading projects, both the institutional and individual capacity of slum dwellers and the local government should be developed. ‘The government should work continuously with the inhabitants of low-income settlements in upgrading the quality and extent of the infrastructure and service provision, and in regularizing land tenure’ (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001: 224). In Tamil Nadu the Community Development Wing gradually tries to gain skilful and experienced social workers, funding and internal trainings. Unfortunately the government often struggles to work continuously from one election time to another in partnership with a local community because newly elected politicians cannot stand to support what their predecessors started.

The funding of 'soft' programmes promoting participation is difficult. This is the case either because of an initial failure which discouraged beneficiaries, officials and donors to continue, or more generally because donors hesitate to provide funds to untrustworthy government institutions. Thus, only short term projects can expect increasing contributions from the government. But more than that, 'continuous support' is needed (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2004). On one hand, participatory development costs considerable time and energy, on the other 'once the momentum has been built up, one successful community-based action can lead to another and then to another' (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001: 335). In fact, this is far from the reality in many cases.

Apart from financial obstacles, grassroots initiatives may be further held back by delays and waiting for assistance - for example an approval or funding (Hardoy, Mitlin, Satterthwaite, 2001: 334). In addition, inter-migration of slum dwellers among settlements (partly due to relocation) contributes to less funding when no significant outcomes are realized. No funds and measurable achievements may lead to a lack of appreciation and support from the government itself as the experience of the Community Development Wing shows. To reach financial support and more acknowledgements, an implementing agency should emphasize the development of pilot projects, the dissemination of success stories and well-delivered convincing evidence to demonstrate a need for further support.

# Annex 1: Questionnaire for slum residents

## Basic information about the settlement:

Name:

Number of households/residents:

Infrastructure: *transport – school – hospital – other*

Public services: *drinking water – garbage collection – legal electricity – sanitation facilities – other*

Government intervention in the past: *relocation – government tenements – service provision – other*

## Basic information about respondent:

1. Name			
2. Gender			
3. Level of education (if any)			
4. Employment (if any)			
5. Number of family members in the household			
6. Type of housing (thatched or pucca)			
7. Type of tenure (own or rent)			
8. If own, do you have any documents?			
9. If rent, how much do you pay per month?			
10. Have you ever had a contact with: a. community leader b. broker c. councillor d. other government official  If yes, please explain.			
11. Have you ever been a member of a self-help group?  If yes: a. How long? b. Did you participate on training? c. Did you get a loan? d. Did you start your own business?			
12. If no, explain your reasons.			
13. Do you belong to any other: a. group b. club c. political party d. other			
14. Are there any particular individuals or groups you can turn to when you have problems?			
15. Have you ever taken a community action? If yes, explain what kind.			
16. Have you ever faced a threat of relocation? If yes, did you take an action to reduce this threat?			
17. Three most important things you want changed in your community			

## Notes and additional questions:

Date:

## **Annex 2: List of frequently asked open-ended questions**

### *Additional questions for slum dwellers:*

- When did the settlement appear? How many shelters had been here at the beginning?
- Did the government help you then? And how?
- Where did you live before? (if a resident has moved recently)
- Do you vote for your councillor?
- How many rooms do you have?
- Do people turn to you asking for help? Is there anyone else in the slum to turn to?

### *Open-ended questions for government officials/NGO workers:*

- What difficulties do you cope with in your work?
- Can you describe any obstacles for your work?
- Do you recognize any obstacles for slum dwellers' participation?
- What are your main funding resources?
- Do you struggle to get funds for your activities?
- What are the challenges for your work as social worker in slums?
- Describe please an example of best practice of community participation from your experience.
- Do you observe any difficulties/challenges of the concept of self-help groups?
- How do you work with them precisely?
- What programme/project based on participation do you run?
- Do you face any difficulties to implement it (funding, cooperation constrains etc.)?

## **Annex 3: Source of informants**

### *List of institutions*

Department of Geography, Madras University  
Community Development Wing, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board  
Public Works Department  
Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority  
Loyola College

### *List of settlements*

Brindha Vanam  
Kalyana Puram  
Jaga Puram  
Opallam

# Annex 4: Location of the selected slums



(IndiaMike, 2007)



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