



# Empowering women as agents of change

Decentralization of powers and decision-making is critical to deepening democratic governance, and improving efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. Empowering local communities to mobilize their resources and capacities to take collective action and participate in decision-making is an important aspect of democratic decentralization. Despite the 74th Amendment, spaces for participation by citizens in local governance in India are limited. Urban planning and decision-making processes remain largely inaccessible to citizens. The poor, especially those living in informal settlements are worst affected by this trend. Not only do they lack a forum to raise their voices and concerns, but city development plans are often indifferent towards their rights, and tend to overlook their very presence in the city. It is thus important that urban poor, particularly women, have a voice in local governance.

Mobilizing communities (especially women), and empowering them to address the social, physical, and environmental issues they face, and take charge of their own improvement process, is thus central to MHT's work. It facilitates formation of Community Based Organizations (CBO) and Community Action Groups (CAG) at slum level. The CBOs coalesce under a umbrella body called Vikasini, a city level federation of slum dwellers.

MHT believes that increased participation of the poor (women in particular) in urban planning & governance will lead to more inclusive and pro-poor urban policies and programs, that will in turn lead to the poor benefitting from the overall growth and development of the city, and being able to improve their standard of living.





## Promoting Community Based Organization (CBO) and Community Action Groups (CAGs)

The Community Based Organisation (CBO) is a membership based group which aims to cover all the families residing in a slum. For ease of engagement, for bigger slums are often divided area-wise to form multiple CBOs in the same slum. Each CBO thus consists of 200 to 250 families. The CBO members are then encouraged to identify women leaders from among themselves as members of the Community Action Group (CAG). Each CAG develops as a team of 10 to 15 women leaders get together to work for their own communities. This process of leadership development is a combination of emergence, iteration and facilitation. Recently, MHT has also introduced the concept to promoting adolescents girls as part of the CAGs. The whole process goes through four stages before the CBO and CAG is stabilized at the slum level:

**Stage 1- Forming:** The initial entry stage mobilization of the residents to facilitate their coming together as CBOs.

**Stage 2- Norming:** Emergence of leadership from the community and better understanding of need for collective action.

**Stage 3- Storming:** Leadership change and CAG strengthening as women take charge of making change in their communities and realize the efforts it takes. This stage is also a test of their commitment to local action.

**Stage 4- Performing:** With increased capacities of the leaders and their devotion to change in their habitats, they begin action for enabling services within their areas.

STAGE	MOBILIZATION	TRAINING	OUTPUT INDICATOR
<b>Forming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Area Meetings</li> <li>Video Shows on MHT</li> <li>Individual Household Contacts</li> <li>Slum Profiling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MHT and its approaches (including project approaches if applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CBO listing process (getting consent of CBO members on the project)</li> </ul>
<b>Norming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Area Meetings</li> <li>Leadership identification</li> <li>Mobilization by select leaders</li> <li>Observation by staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vulnerability Context and Need for Collective Action</li> <li>Enabling leadership through CAGs</li> <li>Visit to local Municipal Corporation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAG formation with 10 to 15 members (including 2 adolescents)</li> </ul>
<b>Storming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAG Meeting</li> <li>CAG-led participatory games, drives and video shows</li> <li>Liaison with Municipal Corporation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urban Local Governance Structure</li> <li>Mapping people's entitlements and mechanisms for access to services</li> <li>Basic Orientation on Services/ Climate Change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reorganizing of CAG</li> <li>Emergence of Vikasini representatives</li> </ul>
<b>Performing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vulnerability Assessment and Planning</li> <li>Active contact with local officials/ corporation</li> <li>Enabling access to service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical trainings on water, heat, sanitation, vectors, housing, etc</li> <li>Participatory Planning and Action Plan Development</li> <li>Implementation and Monitoring of Services</li> <li>Operation and Maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10-15 percent slum residents have got access to basic services</li> <li>CAG representation in Vikasini</li> </ul>



## *From Slum to City Level*

The CAG leaders are then capacitated to promote equitable partnerships between them and the local government bodies and service providers. MHT facilitates them to form their own city level federation called “Vikasini”- which is led, managed and owned by the women leaders themselves.

The Vikasini federation is conceived to foster higher-level, city-wide interventions by being a vital link between the government and the urban slum dwellers, serving to give the urban poor a voice and a say in the way matters affecting them are designed and implemented. The objective is that the poor women are empowered and collectivized to strengthen their influence on development plans and policies, to deliver sustainable habitat development solutions to their communities and to decision makers, and to help them realize their basic rights and entitlements.

There is no hierarchical structure and each Vikasini member represents their own CAG or additionally a neighbourhood CAG. The representative maintains constant contact with the CAG and CBO to bring forth their issues and concerns to the Vikasini fora. These members meet every month to update each other about community developments and plan the course of action. They also serve as a community change agent by acting generally as the first port of call wherever there is a problem in the community especially related to basic civic services, land and housing.

The Vikasini members also bridge the important gap of passing on relevant government information- be it on new policies, surveys or schemes to their communities. They are also a key link between technical experts and the community issues- demystifying the technical aspects of the community concerns and also working towards joint solution design with experts.



Area Meetings at Slum level



CAG training at MHT office



CAG leaders at Municipal Corporation



CAG leader enabling action on ground



## ***Vikasini- Ahmedabad: Moving beyond service delivery***

When MHT began work on the Slum Networking Project (SNP) in 1997, it realized that the key to enabling basic services was the promoting of a slum level community based organization (CBO). These CBOs are membership based covering 150 to 250 families in a slum. Gradually, with capacity building support, we saw the development of grassroots women leaders group, who led the action at community level, especially for participatory needs assessment, liaising with the municipal corporation and ensuring quality infrastructure through monitoring the contractors. Through this strong grassroots women-led approach, MHT enabled access of core public services like water, sanitation and energy, to more than 10,000 families in Ahmedabad. By 2008, the women leaders from all slums had become a strong force at slum level and were envisioning a larger role in influencing city governments. With the understanding that there were numerous plans and programmes being made for the poor and that they needed to have a voice and stake in the process, the agenda for the CBOs to collectivize into a city level federation of CBOs- Vikasini was conceptualised.

Today, Vikasini, Ahmedabad, is empowered to work as an equal partner with local government bodies and service providers. Vikasini is officially represented in Ahmedabad City Development Plan 2020, City Sanitation Plan and Zero Waste Management Plan. Vikasini, Ahmedabad was also engaged by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to undertake biometric surveys under Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) and Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). Over the years, Vikasini has independently supported more than 2352 women, for benefits of other government welfare schemes, especially subsidised electricity schemes, getting a house under JNNURM/Slum Clearance Board schemes, updating their land records and other documents like election cards, BPL cards, income certificates and tax bills. Vikasini leaders have also developed a unique identity in their areas and are being independently approached for various works.

*As Kokilaben, the Vikasini leader from Rajivnagar of Vasna area proudly shares, "Now I am recognised as a gram sevak of my area. Even Government officials respect me and refer women to me for support."*



Vikasini leaders discussing Climate Vulnerabilities

Vikasini Leaders interacting with Climate Specialist