Institutionalizing women impacts governance and planning processes

Responsible Urbanization through Women’s participation, a webinar series was organized by MHT to celebrate its Silver Jubilee.

The webinar series brought together activists, grass roots women leaders, policy makers, researchers, international organisations and many others to discuss and debate about making cities more people friendly and especially gender friendly.

The series aimed to arrive at a larger strategic understanding of interaction between city development priorities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like gender equality and empowerment, clean water and sanitation, climate action, clean energy and eliminating poverty across policy and governance levels.

It provided a diverse and inclusive platform for leaders to assemble and share leading practices, insights and experiences to ramp up efforts towards responsible, climate-conscious urbanization.

In order to empower women to provide them housing services, MHT has been institutionalizing them in to Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Community Action Groups (CAGs) and city-level Vikasini platform. MHT has formed 897 CBOS with membership of 170768 women and 15320 CAG leaders. They have been responsible, participative and active to bring about socio-economic change, awareness in health issues, improved habitat and have a voice in governance, and urban planning and policies.

For 30000 people living in Odhav area in Ahmedabad city, the BRTS bus stop is more than one kms away. There is no other means of transportation. Public transportation is lifeline for urban poor and it directly impacts their livelihood, women’s safety, security, mobility, and girl child’s education.

To resolve this issue, the Vikasini manch conducted a ward level meeting with the members of CBOs and representatives of several slums/chalis/societies located in intervention area. With the help of technical experts and satellite image, the Vikasini Manch collected the GPS co-ordinates of 17 locations to create stronger evidence, spatial analyse the data as well as proposed a route and viable solution. They submitted the application to Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) about their problems along with the proposed solution to get public transportation service in their area.

Mr J. T. Mehta shared his experience in the webinar during his tenure in the AMC. He learnt about MHT, its activities and objectives. Today, AMC is operating the bus service in Odhav. “The two vikasini sisters met me continuous for two years.” He acknowledged their tenacity and efforts. “They submitted their presentation with GPS coordinates with the consent of local people.” He continued further, based on that application, he instructed AMTS to visit anticipated bus route survey. These two Vikasinis accompanied AMTS survey team and pinpointed accurate locations. He expressed optimism that these Vikasinis should work beyond Odhav ward and participate in the development of an entire city. He also expressed his commitment to support for such participation. He suggested that Vikasinis should also work in the healthcare sector in urban areas.

- Lalita Krishnaswami
To build resilience against COVID-19

In collaboration with HCL Foundation and MHT, 62 master trainers of Ahmedabad and Surat were trained in Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). The training was imparted by Urban Health and Climate Resilience Centre for Excellence (UHCRCE), Surat, to generate awareness and explain its occurrence and ways to prevent it. This training was percolated down to the Community Action Groups (CAGs) of 110 slums by the master trainers. 1665 CAG members, which included adolescent girls, further monitored the health of the community members. Health monitoring kit was provided by MHT to all 110 slums. They are actively involved in supporting the community members for provision of vaccines against COVID-19 in various cities.

Jagrutiben Makcwan, President of the CAG at Ignas Park is a master trainer, who has been imparting training on NCDs in eight areas in Ahmedabad. During the Covid-19 pandemic, she learnt that people with existing conditions such as diabetes, blood pressure, heart issues and other diseases are more vulnerable to COVID-19. The residents of her community consulted her regarding their health issues and diseases.

She mobilized the communities to take preventive action and imparted training to CAG members in monitoring the health of the community. Due to illiteracy in the community, she faced several hurdles. They were reluctant to participate in the health-monitoring programme, and unwilling to learn and measure the blood pressure and NCD indicators. Restriction in mobility due to closure of public transport within the city added to the problem. They were encouraged to specially monitor the elderly and the vulnerable population.

Jagrutiben observed that the women in the communities are careless and ignorant about their health and focus more on catering to the basic needs of their families. The adolescent girls were more enthusiastic and participated in the trainings. The women were made aware to take medicines regularly, exercise, check-up and healthy diet to control weight, high blood pressure and other health issues. They were encouraged to consult the doctors in Community Health Centres (CHC) and not to go for home remedies like salted lemon juice, as it aggravates the issues. They were not able to understand the meaning of blood pressure, high or low and the risk it entails to health if not controlled.

Jagrutiben has a feeling of accomplishment, becoming a medium to disseminate the message of healthcare in the communities. Post the training the people in the community are regularly going for health check-ups.

SHELTER AND HOUSING

Own House

MHT has been supporting in housing development Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY) 2016-2017, vertical - Beneficiary Led Construction (BLC). MHT provides technical support including sharing standard maps, material information, layout, sizing and allocating space for kitchen, bedroom, toilets etc. MHT reinforces the beneficiaries to start construction of their houses after receiving the first trench. If they do not construct the house, they will have to return the subsidy received, back to the government. MHT has helped 1250 families in 33 slums. 304 families have constructed their houses and 224 families have received their fourth and final subsidy.

Legal land title

MHT with support from Comic Relief assists the slum dwellers to understand the process of Urban Land Ceiling Act (ULC). Often the application of the individuals have been rejected due to their inability to pay the pre-defined amount to legalize their land parcel. MHT assists the beneficiaries for re-appeal to revive the ULC application and the follow up with different government officials. The scheme has been designed to give legal land (titles) or tenure to the individuals living there since before 1999. The act is applicable only for land parcels with residential use.

40 legal land tenures have been received for people of Radhakrishna colony and Nava Ambapura slums in Ahmedabad. Earlier the parcel of land which was in the name of the state government have now a document addressing proof of legal tenure received by beneficiary after the process of application under ULC.

Renbasera for Homeless

MHT is working with homeless population to assist them to avail benefits of SUHs (temporary Shelter for Urban Migrants and Homeless). It helps the homeless to get identity cards to avail the benefits of the existing schemes in health and social security.

23 individuals received ‘Shram Yogi’ identity cards as a proof of the daily wage earner in construction industry. This will be beneficial to them for insurance, health benefits and pension. 82 individuals have been shifted to SUH – ‘renbasera’, facilitated by Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

Training for ward councillors

MHT in collaboration of Janagrah organized a training for capacity building for ward councillors in Jaipur. 19 ward councillors participated. It focussed on governance of the ward committee as mentioned 74th amendment of Indian constitution.

Clean-up at parks in Delhi!

Mahila Housing Trust, along with the officers of North Delhi Municipal Corporation, Disha Residents Welfare
It was a collective effort by Mr. Vir Pal Singh from Horticulture Department, NDMC with eight of his team members, thirty members of Community Based Organization (CBO) and Community Action Group (CAG), MHT staff. This was followed by plantation of trees and a pledge to care and maintain the park. Community people were not only encouraged to access both these parks but were sensitised to participate in its maintenance and make it sustainable activity.

WATSAN

MHT in Uttar Pradesh
In collaboration with HCL Foundation, MHT has initiated its interventions in Lucknow for “Sustainable Sanitation and Behaviour Change”. It is facilitating formation of CBO/CAGs, water surveillance, and awareness campaigns regarding open defecation, COVID-19, menstrual hygiene, solid waste management.

Rain Water harvesting
MHT launched “Revitalization of Dhal ni Pol” initiative about 5 years back with the objective of improving the environmental, cultural, social and economic wellbeing of the Dhal ni Pol community and in the process, conserving the rich heritage of Dhal ni Pol and our city. Under this initiative, MHT has conducted several workshops as well as training programs with Dhal ni Pol community for spreading greater awareness for heritage value of Dhal ni Pol. Dhal ni Pol had “open wells” almost every 100 meters. The “kuvo” (open wells) and “tanku” (underground tanks for rainwater harvesting) found in these Pols of Ahmedabad stand as a testimony of importance of water conservation in culture of our Pols. This well was sealed from above.

It was decided to collect only rainwater as surface run-off had very high changes of contamination from overflow of sewage line and presence of cow dung in the surroundings. Houses with larger terrace areas were identified as catchment areas and a network of PVC pipes was laid out. These pipes have valves put in place to not only control the flow to the well, but they also work as first-flush system. The collected water then goes through compact modular filtration tank system is then diverted into the well. Metal grill along with mosquito net was added for extra security for kids. After its completion, the well was given back to the community. Rainwater will be diverted into the well every monsoon.

Maharashtra is facing water scarcity. There is not enough water in Tapi river. Amalner city in Jalgaon, Maharashtra faces water scarcity issues. There is not enough water in the Tapi river, hence regions around the river are not able to get adequate supply of water. Community can avail merely two hours of water supply on every tenth day.

After a holistic survey, a technical report was made which emphasized on the 3R model: Recharge, Retention and Reuse as a solution to the water scarcity problem. One of a technique discussed was Rain Roof Water harvesting.

Fakirwada constitutes the community of beggars. The slum is on the upper land, due to which, water supply is once in 8-15 days. The community has no practice of any storage system. MHT chose this area precisely for this reason as a pilot project in Rain Roof Harvesting System.

A non-functional well was identified in the community to be re-constructed. The community was made aware of the process of collecting rainwater, flowing from the rooftops of the houses. Several meetings, workshops and awareness camps were held with the community to give them a sense of ownership, contribute a token amount, time and source the contractors and labourers and to maintain the well in the future. No Objection Certificate (NOC) from Amalner Nagar Palika was avoided and Shobha Bhaviskar, Chief Officer accompanied with councillors visited the site.

This work was recognized and appreciated by ‘Majhi Vasundhara’- an initiative by Environment and Climate Change Department, Government of Maharashtra.

WEBINARS/WORKSHOPS
Climate Resilient Slums
A systems approach for inclusive climate impact assessment

MHT believes women are the leaders to drive progress in their under-served communities. Through grassroots programs in habitat development, climate change, and participatory governance, it empowers women to exercise their rights and uplift living conditions for their families and communities.

Mahila Housing Trust, in collaboration with Heriot-Watt University and King’s College London, led a research study funded by Royal Academy of Engineering. Questionnaires were administered across five slums of Jaipur city, India, exploring residents’ experience of water scarcity, heat stress, and floods. This data was then used in the Urban Systems Abstraction Hierarchy (USAH) model. The
USAH explores the interdependencies of social, technical, and natural activities in cities—e.g., transportation, energy provision, and recreation—and how their functionality is impacted by hazards. This webinar presented questionnaire findings and an initial application of the USAH—to explore how climate-related hazards have impacted the ability of slums to function and to be resilient in the future. The discussion is of interest for not-for-profits, universities, donors, philanthropic organizations, research institutions, students, and government bodies.

MHT Webinar Series: Mahila Housing Trust (MHT), on its silver jubilee organized a Webinar Series: Responsible Urbanization through Women’s participation.

A quality habitat provides a sturdy home and all the basic services like clean water, toilets, electricity, adequate light, and ventilation. It is a key financial asset that supports livelihoods and makes the people more resilient to heat stress, disease, and other hazards of climate change.

The webinar series brought together activists, grass roots women, policy makers, researchers, international organisations and many others to discuss and debate about making cities more people friendly and especially gender friendly.

The series aimed to arrive at a larger strategic understanding of interaction between city development priorities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like gender equality and empowerment, clean water and sanitation, climate action, clean energy and eliminating poverty across policy and governance levels.

It provided a diverse and inclusive platform for leaders to assemble and share leading practices, insights, and experiences to ramp up efforts towards responsible, climate-conscious urbanization.

Most importantly, it brought grassroots women and their experiences to the forefront of discussions and decision-making processes in cities. It identified barriers, and facilitators for translating policies into meaningful action. It explored building strategic, long-lasting partnerships and instituting ‘feedback loops’ to create a culture of learning, sharing, and accountability for government and citizens.

Take away:
- The issue of equality and equity has to be addressed at the planning stage to ensure most vulnerable are not left behind because they require these services the most.
- Water conservation is going to be a big issue in the coming years and it is essential that we address these issues by developing local and sustainable solutions.
- We need to encourage the use of tools like PAS to ensure the equitable delivery of the essential services. Huge resources are allocated; therefore, it is extremely important that we measure the impact. Such kind of measurement system helps us to understand where are the gaps, identifying them and to plan next phase of the project. This will be helpful not only for the administration, but also for funding agencies who are forthcoming to investing in water, sanitation, and basic services.
- Resources need to be mobilised in tier II and III cities so that the development can keep pace with the rapid urbanisation.

Bijal Brahmbhatt, Director of MHT, shared her experiences of implementing the In-Situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR) component of ‘Housing for All’ mission.

“In implementation of ISSR, MHT always proposed for the representation of at least 50% constituents women in the RWA [Resident Welfare Association] which was absent. Slum Rehabilitation Committee (SRC) meeting held on 6th Sep 2019, a Resolution was passed for mandatory presence of at least 50% constituent women in the RWA,” shared Bijal Brahmbhatt.

Somesh Tewari, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Sitara [a SEWA initiative] shared insights on work done by SITARA, in the field of Affordable Housing Finance to the under-served low income households in the urban and peri-urban locations. “Different kind of property titles need to be converted into a more progressive or a formal title so that we can create mortgages”, said Somesh Tewari.

Need assessment workshop
A workshop was organized with 37 women leaders of the Community Action Groups (CAGs) of Surat city to identify their city and ward level needs. Tools like fish-bowl method, Aha moment, group activity, etc. were used.

Women’s safety and participation in governance, non-functioning streetlights, uneven roads, non-existent or overflowing sewer-lines, lack of gardens, play areas, ICDS [Integrated Child Development Schemes] centres and schools were identified by them. The women collectively planned and pledged to learn and share their issues and take actions to rectify them.

World Water Day
IRCWASH, Water for People, WaterAid and the SuSanA India Chapter organized a webinar on World Water Day. MHT’s field organiser Neeruben Bhadoriya, a WASH [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene] champion narrated her story where she advocated construction of individual household toilets for 54 homes during the pandemic last year at Rajivnagar, Ramol in Ahmedabad.

Media
Abhiyan Magazine’s March 2021 covers the stories of two women leaders as a part of women’s day!

Krishnaben Yadav, a home-based worker, feared death by electric shock. She never imagined that one day she will take up electric work as traditionally it is a gender-specific job. Through several trainings with MHT on consumption, reduction and renewable energy, she is an energy auditor and an entrepreneur today. She has conducted energy audits for over 20,000 homes and suggests the consumers how and where to use, and regulate energy consumption. She is financially independent and lives in her own apartment.

Jagrutiben Macwan, who along with other CAG members at ward level, ensured better public transport accessibility for her ward.

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