

NGOs and Urban Planning in India: The Case of Pune's Development Plan

Newspapers in India occasionally indicate the role played by local NGOs in implementation of urban plans of various cities in India. Pune is one such city where NGOs have been found to be active in this sphere. Yet their role in plan implementation has not been adequately explored. This is not surprising given the fact that there are very few studies on implementation of urban plans in India as a whole. The present study seeks to fill in this gap by examining the performance of local NGOs in the implementation of the development plan of Pune.

Municipal governments in India are usually entrusted with the responsibility to implement city's plans. Although local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are not formally responsible for implementing plans they are often found to be actively involved in the implementation process. Which plan proposals are most likely to invite intervention of NGOs? What factors influence their performance? What are the strategies pursued by them? What is the outcome of their efforts on plan implementation? These are some of the questions probed in this paper while taking up the current development plan of Pune as the case study.

Pune, located near Mumbai is a major software industrial centre of India. The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) is the body responsible for implementing the city's plan. While PMC is expected to prepare the plan, it sends the plan for approval to the State Government of Maharashtra. It is only after the latter approves the plan that PMC implements it.

1. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on the PhD thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, UK in 2000. It has used data from documents and studies, newspaper articles, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and observation. A total of 114 key informants were interviewed mainly in Pune, Mumbai, and Delhi. Informants included NGOs, planners, commercial developers, citizens, politicians, bureaucrats, academics, media, architects, engineers, landowners, bank employees, and industrialists.

PMC has taken up very few plan proposals for implementation. In order to examine the role of NGOs in the implementation process it is necessary to focus on proposals where at least some action has been taken towards implementation. The *Survey area number 44* (part of hill ranges in Pune) and the proposal regarding *hills* of Pune are two such plan proposals. Both these proposals have been reserved in the plan for afforestation and recreation and construction has been barred on them. Hills are a prominent feature of Pune. Temples adorn some of them. Apart from the pleasure of being on such sites, these are popular with citizens also on account of religious sentiments.

Local NGOs have been active in the implementation of both proposals – *Survey area no 44* and *hills*. This gives an opportunity to examine and analyze the role of NGOs in the field of plan implementation. An analytical framework has been developed to help in the analysis which has been discussed in the following paragraphs.

2. Analytical Framework

The following issues (figure.1) explain why and when NGOs are likely to intervene in the implementation process of the plan. The framework also helps to analyze factors that influence the impact of NGO's intervention in the implementation process.

Concerns

NGOs may be involved in the implementation of particular proposals and not in others. This may be explained in terms of the mission and concerns of these NGOs. For instance, an organization that is concerned primarily with green belts is likely to be involved in proposals related to them than in proposals related to issues like mass transport.

Availability of Resources

Resources may include finance, skills, time, information, contacts, and rapport with different sections of the society. It is not uncommon for resources to be inadequate and this limitation may restrain the intervention of NGOs in plan implementation. Not only are resources likely to determine the selection of proposals but also the manner and the duration with which NGOs would participate in the implementation process. After achieving their immediate objective in relation to a proposal, a NGO may turn to other issues. After NGOs withdraw from the scene, events may take a direction very different from that desired by NGOs.

Time span of proposals

Along with resources, the time span of projects also influence whether NGOs may intervene in implementation. If implementation of a proposal is to take a long time, then it is likely that NGOs might not be keen in getting involved in the proposal.

Interests

Moreover, there might be certain proposals that directly affect a NGO or its constituency. A proposal to build a highway running close to the location of a NGO is most likely to evoke an immediate response from the organization.

Actions of other actors

Implementing a plan is the responsibility of the municipal body. Yet, NGOs might intervene in the implementation process not because they see it as their responsibility but because they disagree with actions of the municipal body. For instance, a municipal body might seek to modify a plan proposal and this may be resented by NGOs. The latter then might try to stop the municipal body from taking the action.

Benefits offered by plan proposals

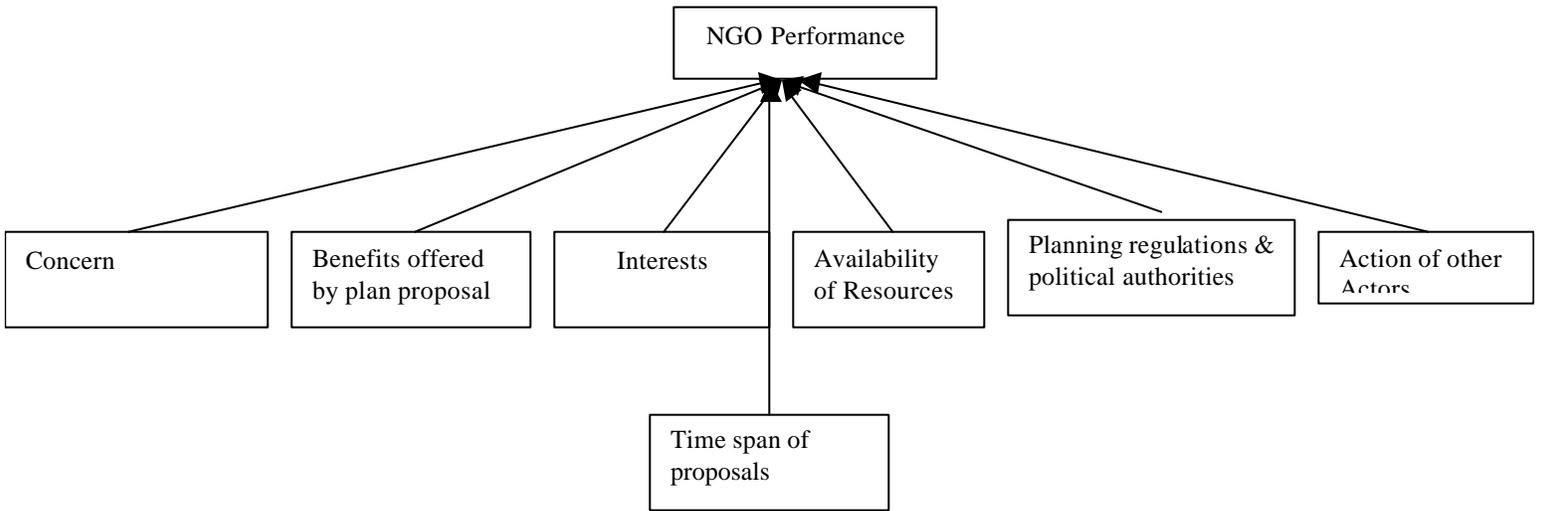
The strength of NGOs lies in its mobilization efforts. This no doubt would depend on the resources available with NGOs but also on how convincing is the argument put forth by NGOs. The argument in turn would depend on the kind and extent of benefits offered by the proposal. If a proposal promises benefits to a large number of people and if this is

threatened by change proposed by some actors, then NGOs have a strong argument while mobilizing citizens against the change.

Planning regulations and political authorities

The role of NGOs also depends on relevant planning legislation. If a planning legislation provides for the participation of the public in the preparing and implementation of a plan, then NGOs are likely to take this opportunity. However, much depends on whether a planning legislation is followed in spirit. Moreover, in order that NGOs and individuals participate effectively in the process it is important that they receive the relevant information in time from the political authorities.

Fig 1: Factors influencing NGOs Performance in Plan Implementation



3. Pune

Pune a city of 2.5 million as per 1991 census (MASHAL 1996: 24) is located 115 miles south east from Mumbai. It is a major software industrial city of India. Pune is a city where presence of numerous NGOs have been felt, and NGOs here have been active in fields ranging from child care to urban development. This paper focuses on NGOs that are active in city's development and environmental issues.

Pune's proximity to Mumbai, pleasant climate, rich historical past and culture, and growing industrial base has attracted people from several parts of the country to the city. Planning for this ever expanding city has become a challenge. Getting an urban plan implemented is probably an even greater challenge as seen from the implementation records of past and the present plan of Pune. Very few proposals of the current development plan (1987-2007) have been taken up for implementation. While the plan came into effect in 1987, the process of preparing the plan began in 1976. The draft plan prepared by the Directorate of Town Planning (DTP) on the behalf of PMC was published in 1982 and objections were invited from citizens. DTP submitted the plan to the State Government in 1984 for approval, and the State Government approved the plan in 1987.

The plan reserved sites for public purposes. Reservation in the context of Indian urban planning is an instrument by which sites are reserved for public purposes like hospitals. Such sites cannot be developed or sold by owners. They are taken into possession by the planning authority which is PMC in the case of Pune. Reservation is usually not viewed

favorably by land owners. Although owners receive compensation from the PMC at the market value, given the property tax structure, owners often prefer to sell land to a private party than to the PMC. Consequently, owners seek to get their lands de-reserved as would be seen while examining the two proposals selected for this paper.

4. Survey area number 44

This site is part of a range of hills in Pune. The draft plan had reserved the site for afforestation and recreation. In spite of this reservation, a transaction took place wherein the land was sold by a Public Trust to a developer. Critics alleged that parties involved knew about this reservation and that the developer had got the land at a very low price (Citizens, 1990; *Kesari*, 23 January 1990; Mali, 1994; *Sakal*, 27 March 1990).

The developer proposed to the PMC that reservation on the land be deleted and he be allowed to construct luxurious commercial residential apartments on the site (Citizens, 1990). Along with PMC the State Government was also mobilized. There were indicators that the developer's efforts were successful. PMC moved a proposal in 1982 that the reservation on the site be deleted, and the State Government recommended the same in 1984 (Kesar, unpublished a; *Loksatta*, 14 January 1990; Mali, 1994). In November 1988, the State Government went to the extent of sending a directive to the PMC recommending that the reservation be deleted.

While attempts to delete reservation began since 1982, they caught the attention of a few local newspapers (*Maharashtra Herald*, *The Indian Express*, *Kesari*, *Sakal*) only after the

State Government sent its directive to the PMC in 1988. These reports inspired some NGOs (Parisar, Vanarai, Social Civic & Environmental Forum, Lokavidnyan Sanghatana, Poona Save Committee, etc) to oppose attempts at deleting the reservation on Survey area no 44. It were the newspapers then that were the source of information of NGOs about these planning related events.

These NGOs are Pune based and are concerned primarily with environmental and developmental issues. Convenors of these organizations are highly educated, vocal, and well-known personalities in the city. These NGOs had been earlier involved in similar development issues in Pune. For instance, they had previously successfully stalled PMC's move to allow construction on Hanuman Hill, and the construction of a 100ft road in Pune. In the case of the 100ft road, NGOs had successfully sought the intervention of the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi. This intervention had helped in stalling the construction of the 100ft road. NGOs used this strategy once again in Survey area number 44.

NGOs began holding press conferences, signature campaigns, public rallies, and workshops to inform the public and mobilize it against the attempts by the State Government and the PMC to delete the reservation. They were joined by the Express Citizens Forum, a forum of the Pune edition of the English daily *The Indian Express*. This forum has the resident editor of the Pune edition of the newspaper as its convenor, and its membership includes environmentalists, academics, planners, artists, film-makers, industrialists, and retired senior bureaucrats. The convenors of several NGOs mentioned

earlier are members of this forum. *The Indian Express* covered arguments both for and against the reservation, and also NGOs efforts to stop deleting the reservation. This coverage in the newspapers helped the cause of NGOs since citizens got to know about their activities in this case and also helped NGOs to mobilize citizens.

The main argument of NGOs against reservation was that it would limit the general public's access to the site, and benefit the developer at the cost of the city's environment. In other words, while the original proposal brought *collective benefits* to the citizens, the modification would usher in *individual benefits*. Fears were expressed that if this change in the status of Survey area no 44 was allowed, other commercial developers would be inspired to solicit similar alterations in other parts of the city.

Just as the developer mobilized the PMC and the State Government, the opposing forces lobbied these two institutions by sending representations, and petitions¹. In addition, NGOs also wrote to the Prime Minister, and a few ministries² at the Center. This is interesting since Pune's planning is clearly beyond the jurisdiction of the Center. However, as mentioned earlier NGOs had successfully utilized this strategy earlier in an another case.

¹ Petitions were sent to the following: Chief Minister, Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly, Minister of Urban Development of Government of Maharashtra, Minister of Environment and Forests Government of Maharashtra, Chief Secretary to Government of Maharashtra, Lok Ayukta, Government of Maharashtra, Divisional Commissioner of Pune; Municipal Commissioner of Pune, Collector (Pune), Urban Land Ceiling Department (Pune), and Charity Commissioner's office (Pune) (Citizens, 1990).

² Petitions were sent to the Finance Minister, the Minister of State for Environment, and the Minister for Urban Development.

Several activities took place prior to 28 March 1990, when the proposal was to be voted upon in the General Assembly of the PMC. Political parties held meetings to discuss their respective stand on the proposal. There were different opinions among parties as in the case of the Bharatiya Janata Party. It was reported in the newspapers that during discussions among party members, broadly two views had emerged within the Bharatiya Janata Party. One group was reluctant to support the proposal, since it was against the interests of the citizens. The other group argued that the party ought to vote in favor of the proposal for the sake of the developer, who had helped the party in the past. Eventually, party members (excepting a few) voted for the proposal.

Meanwhile, the Centre had responded favourably to the petitions from NGOs³. One day prior to March 28 when the matter was to come up for discussion and vote, NGOs published a petition in the newspapers thanking the Central Government for taking interest in the matter and applauded the few councillors who were against the proposal to delete the reservation. The petition appealed to councillors of all parties to oppose the move of deleting the reservation and requested citizens to assemble in large numbers in the PMC the next day (Citizens, 1990).

Heated discussions and exchange of allegations took place when the matter was discussed on 28 March 1990. Councillors in support of the deletion were accused of having

³ The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India wrote to the convenor of one of the NGOs that the Ministry had asked the State Government to submit a report on the matter. The State Government in its report had pointed out that in view of the expenditure (Rs 30 million) involved in acquiring and developing the site as a park, the PMC had decided to delete the reservation. The Ministry added that after considering the facts it had advised the State

received percentages from the developer, and the developer was accused of buying the councillors and the officials. The vote however went in favour of the proposal.

The proposal was now sent to the State Government for its approval. However, in an interesting turn of events, the State Government announced that it did not approve of the proposal and would not sanction it. The Central Government's intervention appears to have influenced the State Government to change its mind. NGOs had once again successfully mobilized the Central Government.

The reservation on Survey area no 44 still holds good. More than ten years have now passed and PMC is yet to take any step towards implementing the original proposal. NGOs that had been active in stopping the deletion of the reservation have moved on to other issues. The number of slums on the site has gone up over the years. A convenor of one of the NGOs that was involved in stopping authorities from changing the proposal told this author that in one way they had failed in Survey area no 44. While it was true that they had succeeded in stopping the modification of the proposal, they had failed in getting the original proposal implemented. He added that many people living in the vicinity of Survey area no 44 who had earlier supported the NGOs now blamed them for the large number of slums on the site. These people complained that had the NGOs allowed the developer to go ahead with his scheme of constructing residential apartments on Survey area no 44, at least there would not have been so many slums on the site today.

Government to retain the reservation for the park. It had advised the State Government that if this was indeed beyond its capacity then it should keep it as a green belt or an open space.

5. Hills

Hills are a central characteristic of Pune, and cover an area of 913.70 hectares of land within the jurisdiction of PMC. Around 41% of these hills are privately owned (Kardaley, 1998; MASHAL, 1996:89). Planners have reserved hills for recreation and afforestation and construction is not allowed on them.

Hill owners have repeatedly requested PMC and the State Government to get the reservation deleted. As in Survey area no 44, mobilization seems to have made an impact on the authority. In 1993, PMC claimed that it did not have the funds to acquire hills, neither the capacity to prevent slums from encroaching upon them. PMC proposed to the State Government that construction not beyond 4% Floor Space Index (this is the “ratio of the combined gross floor to the total area of the plot”) be allowed on the hills for recreational purposes like “swimming pools, sports and games centres, health clubs, cafeteria, canteens and amusement parks” on the hills. The State Government approved the proposal on 5 June 1997 - four years after receiving it.

However, the State Government soon revised its decision. Just three weeks after sanctioning PMC’s proposal, the State Government directed PMC to permit not 5% but 20% construction upon hills for residential purposes. According to this directive, PMC had to publish the notification (inviting citizens’ views on the subject under section 37 of the MRTP Act) within sixty days of the directive being issued. The PMC Commissioner was reported to have opposed the directive of the State Government (*The Indian Express*, Oct 7, 1998). On observing delay on the part of the PMC to implement the directive, the

State Government invoked section 37 (1A) of the MRTP Act and published the notification itself.

This decision of the State Government to permit 20% residential construction was vehemently opposed by NGOs (ECONET, Parisar, Social Civic & Environmental Forum, Vanarai, etc). These organizations are concerned with environmental issues and several of them were involved in the Survey area no 44 case discussed earlier. As in Survey area no 44, the move of the authorities to modify the plan proposal evoked strong response from NGOs. They argued that permitting such a large percentage of construction upon hills amounted to violating planners' recommendations. While planners had preserved the hills for the benefit of citizens in general, the State Government's proposed change would further the interests of developers and landowners at the cost of the city's environment. Moreover, there were slums on some of the hills. What was to happen to them if residential construction were to be allowed on these hills? (Apte, 1998; Brahme, 1998; Brahme, unpublished; *The Indian Express*, 12 May, 1998; *Kesari*, 22 April, 1998).

NGOs also resented the manner in which the State Government had proposed higher construction on the hills. On such a vital issue, the State Government had not thought it necessary to consult citizens. Nor did it think necessary to explain its position by holding a press conference. Instead, the State Government had gone ahead with the procedure of inviting objections from the public without clarifying why it had proposed 20% residential construction. Moreover, newspapers had merely mentioned that citizens were expected to file in their objections within one month of the publication of the notification

in the Gazette. The date of the Gazette had not been specified in the newspaper. How was the common man to know which Gazette to look for? This only showed that the State Government was not really interested in getting feedback from the citizens (Kardaley, 1998).

NGOs mobilised the PMC and citizens against the notification sought by State Government. They wrote articles in the newspapers, held workshops to inform people about the repercussions of permitting construction, and mobilised people to file their objections to the modification of the proposal. The NGO-media partnership that had developed in *Survey area no 44* reappeared in this case. The Express Citizens Forum was actively involved in opposing the attempt to allow 20% residential construction on the hills.

The Express Citizens Forum took the State Government to Court in 1998, challenging State Government's notification while the officer concerned was receiving objections and suggestions from the public. The counsel for this forum argued that the State Government was proceeding towards permitting construction on the hills without telling people why it was needed and what public interest it pursued. In response, the Counsel for the State Government was reported to have stated that it was not required of the Government to make such clarifications while inviting objections and suggestion. The above petition was rejected by the Court on the ground that it was premature, since the period of receiving objections and suggestions from the public was not yet over (*The Indian Express*, 21 April, 1998).

The proposal also came under criticism in the Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra. The Chief Minister stated that the State Government would not go ahead with the decision if the citizens of Pune were against it (*Kesari*, 23 April, 1998). On 7 October, 1998 the Chief Minister announced that the proposed modification to allow development on the hills of Pune for residential use had been stalled. The Chief Minister told newspaper reporters that the State Government had arrived at this decision “after taking serious note of the objections filed by citizens and environmentalists in the city” (*The Indian Express*, October 7, 1998). NGOs had therefore once more succeeded in stopping changes to proposals. Respondents have mentioned that probably this is more of a temporary gesture on part of the State Government which has come under severe criticism for its actions in the recent past to delete reservations. The Government probably thought it better to keep a low profile for some time.

6. Analysis

NGOs involved both in Survey area no 44 and Hills are interested in environmental issues. The *concerns* of these organizations partly explain why they got themselves involved in the two cases examined in this paper. :Survey area no 44 and hills. The proposals in Survey area no 44 and Hill slopes lay on paper for decades. Yet, NGOs intervened only after original proposals were threatened by modifications. NGOs had probably thought that it would take them a long time to get PMC initiate implementation on proposals that have been lying on paper for years. By contrast, stopping attempts of

the PMC and the State Government to alter proposals was probably thought not to take all that time. The *time span of plan proposal* may be said to have influenced the response of NGOs.

Moreover, in both the cases involvement of NGOs was largely inspired by *action of other actors* (developers, landlords, PMC, State Government) - actions that were related to the proposal. These actors were trying to change the proposal and NGOs intervened to stop them.

NGOs had succeeded in their initiative and that was possible on account of its mobilization efforts. They had successfully convinced citizens to participate and oppose the authorities who were trying to change the proposal. The organizations were helped in their endeavour by the type of benefits offered by the proposal viz. *collective benefits* offered by original proposals. Collective benefits helped NGOs to convincingly argue that modification of proposals would deprive these benefits to the citizens and adversely affect their health, recreation, and environment. This in turn helped NGOs in mobilising support of citizens and seek cooperation of the media.

Media emerged as an important actor. It no doubt provided information to NGOs about attempts at modification, but more than that NGOs emerged as a key partner of these organizations. The Indian Express particularly its development forum, the Express Citizens' Forum had teamed with the NGOs against the attempts to change the proposal. This partnership proved particularly beneficial for NGOs. It is uncommon for

newspapers to persistently cover a particular news item for long. However, in this case the Indian Express had covered the two cases on a prolonged basis. This coverage in turn helped NGOs to reach out to the masses.

In its mobilization efforts, NGOs were also helped by the reputation of their respective *leadership*. Leaders of these organizations are well known names in the city. Moreover, these NGOs have been active in Pune for quite some time and people have seen them perform. The *past experience* of NGOs helped them in choosing their strategies. Mobilizing the Central Government although city planning is beyond its jurisdiction is a case in point. The past experience of NGOs also seemed to have influenced State Government's decision to withdraw from 20% FSI construction on hills. *Leadership* and *past experience of NGOs* that have influenced the response of NGOs need to be incorporated into the framework.

7. Conclusions

Local NGOs have actively participated in the implementation of Pune's urban plan even though planning was not their responsibility but that of the municipal body. The intervention of NGOs however was found to occur in relation to specific proposals and in a particular manner. The framework developed by this study helped to understand the response of NGOs towards plan proposals. Two issues that were found to influence the intervention of NGOs and had not been considered in the framework are: *leadership* and *past experience*. These need to be incorporated in the framework. NGOs had succeeded

in both the cases in stopping the authorities from changing the proposals. The media-NGO partnership proved effective in reaching the objective of the NGOs – a point for practitioners and academics to consider while studying the role of NGOs in various fields.

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