

**Tata Institute of Social Sciences
School of Habitat Studies**

**National Consultative Workshop on the 'Project'
Laying Foundations of UIRO**
(With Focus on Small & Medium Towns in India)

November 19th and 20th, 2009

Summary Proceedings and Response

School of Habitat Studies (SoHS) of TISS has set up an in-house facility, viz., Urban India Reform Observatory (UIRO) in order to undertake more focused work on the on-going and prospective urban reforms in the country. It has been decided by SoHS to position UIRO as a long term facility and for that it has undertaken a Project aimed at laying its foundations. The Project activities involve quite a few innovative features like preparation of Knowledge Products, preparation of Templates and involvement of state and town level partners. In view of these innovative features it was thought prudent to present the Project proposal to a group of academicians, field activists, and representatives of civil society organizations, active in the field of urban sector and seek their feedback. Accordingly, a National Consultative Workshop (NCW) was convened on November 19th and 20th, 2009 in TISS, Mumbai.

The list of participants is enclosed at Annexure.

The Workshop was conducted over 5 different sessions: first an Overview of the Project, second, third and fourth on different products and activities envisaged under the Project and fifth an open discussion. Though the Workshop was structured product-wise, the Summary of Proceedings, given below have been organized differently, viz., Name of the facility, Scope of the Project, Approach and Methodology of the Project and discussions on Knowledge Products. The comments received from the participants were mulled over in detail by the Project Team and, wherever found feasible, incorporated in the approach, methodology of the Project. The gist of the discussions, given below, is organized in five groups followed by the response /proposed action by the Project Team.

Name of the Facility

Number of Participants observed that the name 'Observatory' indicates passive activities and do not fully catch the range of envisaged activities, viz., Research and Documentation, Advocacy, Networking with Partners, Build capabilities and Public Spirited Actions.

*It has been decided to change the name of the Facility from UIRO (Urban India Reforms Observatory) to UIRF (Urban India Reforms Facility)
Hereafter this document uses the term UIRF.*

Approach

1. It was suggested that there shall not be any prejudice against Reforms being implemented under JNNURM as prejudices will lead to unfairness in judgment. There are indeed few Reforms like introduction of Double Entry Accrual Based Accounting Reforms which need to be welcomed.

It was mentioned that UIRF team is aware that the present Reform proposals, in spite of their faulty implementation, do create some space for participation of citizens in the functioning of the ULBs, create possibility of organizing and sharing of information with the citizens and hence proposes to welcome them. But, simultaneously, it was shared with the Participants that the process adopted, in case of such welcomed Reform proposals, like Community Participation Law, are highly faulty, raising doubts about the genuineness of intentions behind such initiatives and hence need to be rejected.

2. It was suggested that UIRF shall not focus exclusively on reforms and bring out inter-linkages between Projects and Reforms. It was also pointed that no great significance shall be attached to the number 23, because there are going to be many other reforms in order to facilitate implementation of these 23 reforms.

The point was noted. It was pointed out that UIRF, to begin with, will concentrate on 23 reforms initiated under JNNURM as expanding scope would demand resources. It was further mentioned that there are some reforms which are process oriented like Accounting Reforms whereas some like Encouraging PPP cannot be conceived without Projects. Accordingly, the Knowledge Products will certainly cover Projects wherever applicable.

3. UIRF shall study outcomes of reforms; whether participation has actually increased or not, whether water availability has increased or not. If the study is confined only to macro level data / information it will lead to faulty conclusions.

It was agreed that there is a need to collect data at the town level which is not readily available either with State Government or with respective ULB. Accordingly, Town Level Reports, envisaged under the Project, are intended to collect need based data for that Town. As collection of data is extremely resource intensive, the long term solution lies in involving local level partners, which is part of Project Design.

4. The participants were of the view that the premise that nothing is working in urban sector is wrong. There are situations, organizational models and administrative processes which are delivering. There is a need to identify those models, case-studies and analyze the positive factors which have contributed to the welcome situations.

It was agreed in principle that the positive features of functioning of Urban Sectors need to be brought out. However, it is felt that it would necessary to pre-determine the parameters on which such 'positive features' can be assessed. For example, whether presentation of surplus ULB Budget will be termed as a positive feature is debatable when citizens of that town are demanding better urban services.

5. Participants felt that selecting JNNURM Regime as a frame for the Project is incorrect. It was pointed out that there are many initiatives taking place which technically fall outside the JNNURM Regime. Hence, it was suggested to select few sectors, e.g., housing, urban water and sanitation, and prepare Knowledge Products for these sectors, irrespective whether they fall in JNNURM Regime or not.

It was informed that the Project Team is aware that there are and there would be initiatives outside the JNNURM Regime. The Project essentially envisages Laying Foundation of UIRF by creation of Background Papers, Templates, testing of methodologies and identifying potential partners. Selection of JNNURM Regime as a frame for the Project is only a beginning and the abilities acquired during the foundation phase will be leveraged in future for much broader frame.

6. It was pointed out that the reforms initiated under JNNURM are yet to take off and it was apprehended whether there will be any adequate data gathered to draw any conclusions.

It was mentioned that UIRF is aware of the ground realities. However, 4 years is a considerable time after JNNURM has been initiated in December 2005. There is also a need to identify reasons for such a slow progress of reforms and feedback to be given to the administration so that mid-course correction, if any, can be taken by it.

7. It was suggested that among the reforms, those aimed at improving governance shall be given priority. It was further suggested that JNNURM has neglected need for reforms in Urban Spatial Planning and UIRF shall not neglect such important aspects.

The suggestion was noted.

8. It was pointed out that in practice the functioning of urban local bodies do not take place in a structured way. Whenever the projects demand engagement of some Consultants, the concerned Ministry will be directly working with the Consultant, bypassing the respective ULB. Further, it was pointed out that the influence of private sector and international financial institutions is also not insignificant. Participants expected that UIRF shall catch such aspects which do not adhere to a pre-conceived structure.

The suggestion was noted.

Methodology

9. It has been suggested that there is a need to collect information about most common issues on which the urban citizens are agitating in different towns and cities. It was felt that, as the Project expects to facilitate Public Spirited Action; such information will help setting right agenda for UIRF

The suggestion was deliberated upon internally and it was decided to keep track of the newspaper published in vernacular languages and the information to be used in preparation of knowledge products, particularly those like Town Level Reports. .

10. Some of the participants noted that the ongoing Consultative Workshop do not have political representatives, at state or ULB level as also administrators engaged in urban affairs. It was further emphasized that if the intention of UIRF is to lead to some fruitful results then UIRF shall engage with those agencies which are capable of implementation of those suggestions

It was clarified that, as a matter of principle, UIRF does believe in engaging administrators and political representatives and, in fact, had invited few political representatives as also administrators, but could not participate on account of other pre-occupations. It was to informed to the Participants that during the 8 dissemination workshop held in 8 different towns in the state of Maharashtra, elected councilors and administrators form the ULB, even a deputy mayor in one instance, did participate and the interaction was useful.

It may be added here that in the month of December and January senior faculty members associated with the UIRF had a detailed meeting each with Secretary, Urban Development, Government of Maharashtra and CEO, MHADA and also propose to have similar meetings with other IAS officers engaged with urban affairs.

11. The methodology shall take holistic approach and shall include critical as well as managerial point of view

The suggestion was noted.

12. The participants noted that over a period UIRF will be tracking urban issues in number of towns in the country and expressed concerns whether methodologies will permit comparison of situations prevailing in different cities/towns.

It has been noted that the situations, pertaining to different urban sectors, prevailing in different towns are heterogeneous and it would be a challenge to evolve a unified methodology which will cater to this heterogeneity. The project implementation processes does provide space and time for adaptation of the original 'Templates' to suit a particular situation.

13. Participants welcomed the idea of involving prospective users of Town Level Reports in its preparation.

The observation was noted.

Knowledge Products and Templates

14. It was pointed out that at present the vision of majority of elected political representatives is confined to their own political constituency and there are very few who think about the city in its entirety. The Knowledge Products prepared for the towns shall keep this reality in mind.

The observation was noted.

15. It was suggested that the observations gathered from the towns shall be used as an input for preparation of state and national level background papers.

In fact, the Project Team perceives all the Knowledge Products as members of 'family' with linkages with each other. The research officers are in touch with each other and even formal mechanism in the form of Internal Consultative Forum is in place to ensure such linkages.

16. It was felt that Template Based Approach may lead to building pressure from bottom which in turn may influence change in the administrative processes at the local level.

The observation has been noted.

17. There was debate on whether Town Level Reports shall be at the center among all other Knowledge Products or UIRF shall adopt participative or Institutional framework for preparation of these Knowledge Products.

It was confirmed that Town Level Reports will be at the center of range of Knowledge Products as it is expected to lead to some form of Public Spirited Action at some point of time; the main objectives of other KPs are largely to provide background to the users of Town Level Reports.

18. Participants sought to know who will be the users of the Templates and doubts were raised whether the prospective users will be able to wield it effectively.

To begin with UIRF expects the CSOs and Local Academic Institutions, willing to take up local urban issues, to be the prospective users of the 'Templates'. We would be willing to prepare a requisite Tool for ULB officials also, but not envisaged in immediate future. The process of preparation of Town Level Reports will provide them the time and space to understand the problems and even possible solutions or action points.

19. Participants felt that the approach being adopted for preparation of Template is rather abstract and it was suggested that Templates may be evolved only after completing requisite number of substantial studies. In this context, suggestion was given that the Templates need to be tested even before the Template Validation Workshop proposed in the Project.

It was clarified that that in the first phase of the Project, using the insights acquired, problems faced during the preparation of Knowledge Products for the state of Maharashtra, Templates will be prepared, partially applied, again refined in a iterative way. Such Templates will be extensively used in the second phase of the Project, when the Knowledge Products to be prepared will be mainly for four different states other than Maharashtra. The suggestion that templates be tested before Template Validation Program has been noted.

20. Participants felt that the concept of Templates and Tools, as presented, appeared too neutral which contradicts the premise of earlier presentation which argued that 'Reforms are not Neutral'

It was clarified that the concept of Template is mainly aimed at enhancing reusability of the Knowledge Products to other locations and reducing the demands on analytical skills of the partners. The Templates will certainly have to be modified and adapted to the local situations. UIRF does not expect Templates to be reduced to a format and table filling exercises.

Partners

21. It was pointed out that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are generally confined in some geographical boundaries or are focused on a particular urban sector. There are very few CSOs with comprehensive scope. Hence, it was

suggested that UIRF will have to be clearer on what kind of CSOs it intends to partner with.

The diversity of CSOs is indeed a challenge to be addressed. Over a period, UIRF will prepare a list of CSOs, mapping their geographical domain and sector specific interests, which will help in identifying right kind of CSO. However, in immediate future, it has been decided that UIRF will focus on three sectors, viz., water, housing and solid waste and try to identify CSOs working in these sectors. Keeping this feature of CSOs in mind, UIRF also proposes to interact with Local Academic Institutions (LAI) as partner organizations.

22. Participants raised concern about effectiveness of communication while reaching out to partners, collaborators particularly at the town level.

The UIRF, in addition to written documents, intends to resort even to audio and visual mode of communications while reaching out to the local level partners. Further, almost every product will be made available on the web-site which will take some time.

23. It was noted that the ultimate objective of Town Based Knowledge Products is Public Spirited Action. In this context it was emphasized that establishing right kind of relationship with right kind of organizations at the town level will be important.

The suggestion has been noted and will be catered to while selecting town level partners.

24. Participants cited the comparable experiments implemented in the state of Kerala where Panchayats were involved in preparation of development plans. It was also suggested that Transect Walk, Land Use Mapping and Socio-economic surveys would be useful techniques.

The suggestion has been noted. In fact, it was also felt that a visit with, requisite duration, to Kerala by a team of Research Officers working on the Project will be useful.

25. It was mentioned that different organizations are working on different issues, which, in turn are interconnected; for example the groups working on 'nutrition' and group working on 'sanitation'. It was suggested that there is a need to establish alignments among such organizations in an integrated manner. It was also cautioned that there is a competition among these groups and it will not be easy to bring them together.

The suggestion as also caution has been noted.

26. Participants sought to know whether the UIRF will be imparting training to its Partners.

The Project concept presupposes existence of CSOs/ Local Academic Institutions which are manned by individuals who have necessary analytical skills or have an access to such professional services within that city/ town. It is felt that training is a resource intensive activity and the present Project proposal do not envisage training of CSOs. One of criterion for selecting the town will be availability of a suitable CSO/ LAI with requisite knowledge base/ skill set preempting the need of training in immediate future.

27. Participants sought to know criterion for selection of partners.

The Project, in its first phase, is covering the state of Maharashtra. The reason to select the state of Maharashtra is that UIRF has already acquired some insights about this state and also have established contacts with some prospective partners. The insights acquired during this phase and methodologies tested it is proposed to identify a set of four states based on certain criteria like regional distribution of assistance of Central Government, beneficiary states and status of implementation of reforms. However, it has also been decided that the process of detailed interaction with the prospective state level partner, before formalization relationship, will also be an important input for such selection.

Annexure

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List of Participants

1. Mr. D.M.Sukthankar
2. Dr. Partha Mukhopadhyay
3. Dr. Darshini Mahadevia
4. Dr. Kaustuv Bandopadhyay
5. Mr. Dunu Roy
6. Mr. Shrinivas Kowligi
7. Ms. Shraddha Kumar
8. Ms. Kathyayini Chamaraj
9. Mr. Prasad Shetty
10. Mr. Arvind Adarkar
11. Ms. Rupali Gupte
12. Prof. N.C.Narayanan
13. Prof. Neera Adarkar
14. Dr. Sudha Mohan
15. Ms. Sulakshana Mahajan
16. Ms. K.B. Navtej
17. Ms. Kalpana Sharma
18. Mr. V.K. Phatak
19. Dr. Medha Somaiya
20. Mr. Matias Sendoa Echanove
21. Mr. Rahul Shrivastava