

## **PUBLIC TOILETS in DELHI**

### *An emphasis on the facilities for Women in Slum/Resettlement Areas*

Seeing a man urinating in the open is a 'normal' sight anywhere in Delhi (or rather, anywhere in India) and during the morning hours, one can easily spot a man carrying a bottle or a jerry can of water to the bushes. But most of us would have never seen a woman "going to the toilet" in the open; women doing so would be considered "uncultured" or there might be a reaction like: "she is not supposed to be seen doing 'it' in the day time". Though men do have an option if there is no toilet facility, do women really have one? It is ironical that even though the two most politically influential women in Delhi – the Chief Minister and the Mayor are women who often talk about 'women's empowerment' and the present 'celebration' of International Year of Sanitation; we do not address the issue of toilets for the poorest of poor women.

To probe answers to questions concerning public toilets for women in slum and resettlement colonies, players involved in this issue: Central Government officials, officials from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), officials from Sulabh International and the women from slum areas (Sanjay Colony, Kusumpur and Basti areas of Jhilmil Colony) and Jhuggi-Jhopri (JJ) resettlement colonies (Bawana, Savda Ghevra and Madanpur Khader) were interviewed. National policy documents on toilets for the urban poor and affidavits of senior officials from the MCD were also analysed.

On the basis of the findings the key points that arise concern the norms for building toilets, involvement of private contractors, implementation agencies involved, possibility of Build Operate Transfer (BOT), public urinals for women, the MCD - Sulabh International relationship, payment to use the toilets, awareness among women on how to use the toilet and the urgent need for a lobby for this issue.

#### *Norms:*

At the National level, most documents and policy schemes note the norm for public toilets to be 1 latrine seat for 50 people. The City Development Plan, 2006, of Delhi states that the norm according to the Environmental Improvement Scheme of JJ clusters is 1 latrine seat for 20-25 people. The Chief Engineer, Engineering Department, MCD, stated that 1 latrine seat is installed if there are 20 users to use it in one day. The officials from the Slum and JJ Department, MCD, said that the norm in slum areas is 1 latrine seat for 150 people and a 20-20 Community Toilet Complex (a 20-20 CTC – means a toilet complex which has 20 latrine seats for men and 20 latrine seats for women) for a plot meant for 500 households. If it is assumed that there are 5 members in each household, 500 households would mean 2500 people, and assuming there is an equal number of males and females, then there are 1250 males and 1250 females. Hence, it works out that there is 1 latrine seat for 62.5 people; or 2 latrine seats for 125 people of each sex. The Sanitary Inspectors, DEMS (Department of Environmental Management Services), MCD, said that the norm for public toilets in JJ colonies is that a 20-20 CTC should be built for 200 *jhuggis* (households). If it is assumed that there are 5 members in each household, 200 *jhuggis* would have 1000 people, approximately equal number of males

and females. Now, there are 20 latrine seats for each sex in the 20-20 CTC, which translates into 1 latrine seat for 25 people of the same sex.

At the ground level, the ratios work out to be in the range of 0 (Sanjay Colony, A Block Basti area in Jhilmil Colony and Bawana JJ resettlement colony – new blocks) to 1 latrine seat for 20 women (B Block Balmiki Basti in Jhilmil Colony) to 1 latrine seat for 100-150 women (Rajiv Camp in Jhilmil Colony and Bawana JJ resettlement colony – old blocks) and in some cases 1 latrine seat for 250 women (Savda Ghevra and Madanpur Khader JJ resettlement colonies) or, even worse, 1 latrine seat for 500 women (Kusumpur).

Hence, the ratios are very different from the norms suggested. Typically, out of the 20 latrine seats in a Women's Block in a CTC, 4 are reserved for children; the ones for children are without a door. Due to this, the ratio is actually even more skewed in the case of women.

The MCD officials believe that the latrine seats for children are mostly used by women. But, they probably do not understand that there is clear difference between 'going to the toilet' in a closed cubicle and in one without a door.

It is suggested that the policy makers clearly define the norms for the number of latrine seats to users, the infrastructural requirements for CTCs and the placement of CTCs. The implementation agencies must follow these norms.

#### *Involvement of Private Contractors:*

The Sanitary Inspectors, DEMS, said that there are three ways in which maintenance of the CTCs in slum and resettlement areas is done: (i) by the DEMS (free for users), (ii) by NGOs – other than Sulabh International (pay and use), (iii) private contractors - where in these contractors pay a certain amount per latrine seat to the MCD e.g. Rs 2000 per seat per year (pay and use). Yet, all other officials from the MCD (during interviews and in their affidavits) stated that there are only two ways in which the maintenance of the CTCs in the slum and resettlement areas is done: by the DEMS (free for use) and by NGOs – other than Sulabh International on a 30 year lease (pay and use) and that no private contractors are involved.

Except for the CTC at Rajiv Camp (in Jhilmil Colony) which had two MCD officials, all others had private contractors ("*thekedaars*").

My guess is that private contractors provide some kind of documents to show that they run an NGO. Once they have the 30-year contract to run the CTCs, they can do so on a pay-and-use basis. To maintain the fact, that the private contractor is not an NGO person undercover, the private contractor pays the MCD Slum and JJ Department.

#### *A focused implementation agency:*

Presently, the construction and maintenance of CTCs in the slum and resettlement areas of Delhi is largely under the MCD. Within the MCD, there are three different departments (Engineering Department, Slum and JJ Department and DEMS) involved in the issue. The three departments appear to be playing a blame game and not taking the problems regarding public toilet facilities for the women of slum and resettlement colonies seriously.

A Chief Engineer from the MCD said that according to the figures for last year, the expenditure made on cleaning of public toilets, public urinals, roads, drains was Rs 450

crore, another Rs 100 crore was spent on repair and maintenance of public toilets, public urinals, roads and drains. He did not know the estimates of the money spent on public toilets and public urinals, per say. If the Sanitary Inspectors, DEMS, claimed that even if they see a broken tap, we have no funds under their power to expense for such small, cheap repairs. Despite the fact that DEMS has an annual budget of more than Rs 500 crore, it is not under the jurisdiction of these Inspectors (those at the grassroot level) to spend even Rs 50 or Rs 100. Unblocking of the sewer line can take up to 15 - 20 days since the application has to follow a long path and only someone from the Engineering Department can come and unblock the sewer.

DEMS is in-charge of maintaining 1544 out of 1737 CTCs; but it seems that a majority of the resources are being diverted towards solid waste management at the cost of something as basic as maintenance of public toilets. There is, thus, a need for a dedicated department and clearly demarcated funds to deal with this issue.

*Possibility of BOT:*

There are slums in the NDMC area where public toilets have been constructed and are being maintained on BOT basis by private agencies which also has the advertising rights. MCD has also started giving out public toilets on a BOT basis (however none of these are in slum or resettlement areas). There are few takers for advertisements in the lesser known areas and so it is financially difficult for the companies to successfully and hygienically run the CTCs in slum and resettlement areas

It is proposed that the following model be considered: MCD make it mandatory for companies who show an interest in constructing, repairing and maintaining CTCs on a BOT basis in lucrative areas to also do the same in the slum and resettlement areas within a certain ratio that would benefit the latter. The income from the advertising rights in the up-market areas can be used by the company to cross subsidize the maintenance and repair of the CTCs in the 'less lucrative' areas.

*MCD and Sulabh International:*

In May 2006, MCD took back all the toilet complexes (in slum and resettlement areas) from Sulabh International. While the CTCs were being maintained by Sulabh International, the condition of the same may have not been up-to-the-mark but unfortunately, the situation has only worsened ever since the CTCs have been taken over by MCD. Amidst, this changing relationship between MCD and Sulabh, the people who suffer the most are the women from slum and resettlement colonies.

*Public Urinals for Women:*

There is a clear distinction between public urinals and CTCs, as public urinals are only for urination, whereas CTCs would not only have facility for urination, they would also have facilities for bathing, washing clothes. Though the importance of CTCs in case of slum and resettlement colonies is very high as people do not have toilets in their houses, but more than often; people make some kind of cubicle inside/outside their houses – which they use for having a bath; they don't have the money to build toilets at home, so the importance of public urinals for them increases; further, the provision of public urinals is more so for women since a man can 'do it' in the open.

According to an inspection carried out by a Delhi High Court committee comprising A.S. Chandihoke, Bar Council President and Mr. Ashok Agrawal, advocate and the subsequent case filed on 5 December 2007; out of 3192 urinals in Delhi, only 132 are for women; which is a mere 4%. It is essential that this percentage is enhanced, so that women, even from the lower economic strata have access to a proper enclosed cubicle as a toilet.

*Payment to use the toilet:*

After finding out the average monthly income of a household and the charges of using the CTC in Bawana JJ Resettlement Colony, I estimated the expenditure of each family on the usage of a CTC. On an average a household has five members, the man of the house being the only earning member of the family. So, there is the husband, wife and 3 children. Daily, each of them would use the toilet about 5 times, paying Re 1 for each usage; bathing at least once a day entails paying Rs 2 each. The woman of the house has to pay an extra Rs 2 for washing clothes. So, the total expenditure on usage of the CTC, by the family, works out to about Rs 25 + Rs 10 + Rs 2 = Rs 37. Assuming that the man is a daily wage worker and gets the legal minimum wage of Rs 100; 37% of the earnings are being spent solely on the use of a CTC by the family – this is a large proportion of the total income.

Having been to slums and resettlement colonies of Delhi and talked to the women in these areas, I feel it is not correct to have a 'blanket' policy regarding payment for toilet usage by women for all slums and resettlement areas. The women in slums are, generally willing to pay for public toilets, since they have a source of livelihood and their place of work is close-by. However, in resettlement colonies, women are often not working, as they are skilled only in housework and find it difficult to get suitable employment in the neighbourhood. If women travel to far off areas for work, it increases the opportunity cost of work – in terms of the time and money that they have to spend to commute. Once they are resettled/relocated to far off places (in an effort to make Delhi slum-free), the sources of income for women decrease drastically and hence they are unable and unwilling to pay for toilet usage each time.

*Awareness on how to use a toilet:*

The issue of awareness about using a toilet was brought up many times during my research. The Sanitary Inspectors, DEMS, felt that many women do not know how to use the toilet. Even within the areas visited, there were women who felt that the 'other women' do not know how to use the toilet and therefore, the maintenance levels are poor. Along with providing public toilets for women in slum and resettlement area, awareness camps need to be organized in slum and resettlement areas to educate people on 'how to use the toilet' and the consequences of communicable diseases especially urinary tract and reproductive tract infections. This is particularly important for women, as they throw their dirty cloth/sanitary napkins in the toilets – leading to blockages and clogging; if left carelessly, there is an increased risk of communicable diseases. NGOs working in slum and resettlement areas can organize camps every few months so that the message of personal hygiene and clean toilets (especially for women) spreads.

It is surprising that none of the CTCs, I visited, had a dustbin. This means that even those women who do know 'how to use' and 'how to dispose' their dirty cloth/ sanitary

napkins would have to wonder 'where to dispose'. Probably those (mostly men) who have constructed and are maintaining the toilets do not understand this basic requirement of women in a toilet complex. One set of caretakers laughed at me when I asked them where the dustbin was. Given the importance that the MCD is giving to solid waste management, they do not seem understand that emphasis needs to be given to the 'management' of the waste created by women too.

*Need for a lobby:*

The first priority for people from slum and resettlement colonies is to have food for themselves and their family members. Though public toilets are an issue, it is often overlooked by the people, especially women. To raise any issue and fight for it involves time, energy and money; this is more prevalent in the context of the present problem.

There is a vocal lobby fighting against sexual harassment of women, but it fails to understand that the non-provision of something as basic as safe, hygienic public toilets for women is leading to many cases of sexual harassment in slum and resettlement colonies. Many women and girls from these areas are forced to go to the toilet in close by forest areas or railway lines as the toilet facilities for them are either not enough, not there or not affordable. In most areas, there is no end to the number of cases of women and girls being sexually harassed while they go to the toilet. It is extremely sad that there is a constant fear about something as personal as 'answering the call of nature'. Going alone to the toilet is not even an option for women and girls from the lower economic strata.

We hear a lot about "women's empowerment" and "feminism" but what is the worth of all this talk if there is no provision of something as basic as clean toilet facilities for the poorest of poor women?

*(The above article is written by Shahana Sheikh who worked on a research paper titled: "Public Toilets in Delhi: an emphasis on the facilities for Women in Slum and Resettlement Colonies" during her Summer Research Internship 2008 at Centre for Civil Society, New Delhi)*