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Inter-Organizational Coordination for Effective Urban Poverty Alleviation

– V. Gnaneshwar*

ABSTRACT

Urban Poverty in the country is increasing while rural poverty is decreasing. Urban poverty is a multidimensional issue, hence tackling the issue of urban poverty effectively warrants a coordinated effort by all actors. Inter-organizational coordination is the main basis for implementing urban poverty alleviation programmes in sincerely.

Introduction

A Development as Freedom. Sen defines poverty as the deprivation of basic capabilities that provide a person with the freedom to choose the life he or she has reason to value. These capabilities include good health, education, social networks, and command over economic resources, and influence on decision-making that affects one's life. Income is important because money allows a person to develop his or her capabilities, but it is only a means to live a

valuable life. From this perspective, poverty is a condition with many interdependent and closely related dimensions which can be summarized in three broad categories:

- Lack of regular income and employment, productive assets (such as land and housing), and access to social safety nets;
- Lack of access to services such as education, health care, information, credit, water supply and sanitation;

- Lack of political power, participation, dignity and respect.

It is estimated that rural poverty in Asia is declining significantly, while urban poverty has been increasing, from 136 million people in 1993 to 142 million in 2002. This is an indication of the emerging urban poverty scenario and its accompanied problems. The UN observes that unless urban poverty is addressed, continued urbanization will result in increases in urban poverty and inequality. This may have

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¹ United Nations Economic and Social Council, Economic and Social for Asia and the Pacific Committee on Poverty Reduction 12-14 December 2007, Bangkok.

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profound consequences for the city as a whole, as growing inequalities can strain its ability to prosper. It will affect relations between the different economic groups and may lead to rising levels of insecurity, which in turn could lead to conflict².

In short, urban poverty is a multidimensional issue in the development context. Urban poverty, urban informal sector and the squalid living are interrelated each leading to the other forming a vicious cycle. Urban poverty characterized by underemployment pushes people toward informal living patterns resulting in informal employment and formation of the slums and squatters. Informal sector employment featured with casualization of labor, lack of credit facilities and social security, legal threat, low productivity and low incomes forces people to live in squalid conditions cumulatively leading to deprivation and circling back to poverty as depicted below.

The issue of urban poverty cannot be tackled effectively, unless several measures are taken involving a host organizations- formal, informal, government, semi-government and non-governmental. Not only this, all these organizations should work in a good governance environment promoting accountability, transparency, participation and collaboration. Collaborative and coordinating mode of functioning is essential to achieve the common goal of eradicating poverty or poverty free urban settlements.

The poverty eradication or alleviation policies and strategies need to be developed to meet demands of different sectors and sections of the urban communities. As the poverty is a multidimensional problem, the policy approach also should a multi-pronged one rather than a single approach. Appropriate strategies need to be evolved to address the multiple

problems of urban poverty. The focus areas may be as below:

- Development of informal settlements or slums by providing access to basic civic services and amenities.
- Housing the urban poor by providing affordable housing.
- Employment generation either by self-employment or gainful wage employment.
- Entrepreneurship development for the poor to promote self-employment.
- Social organization of the urban poor through various community level organizations like neighborhood groups, self help groups and by active involvement of the voluntary sector organizations.
- Involvement of the private sector industries for employment generation, capacity building, cost sharing, etc.

² Ibid.

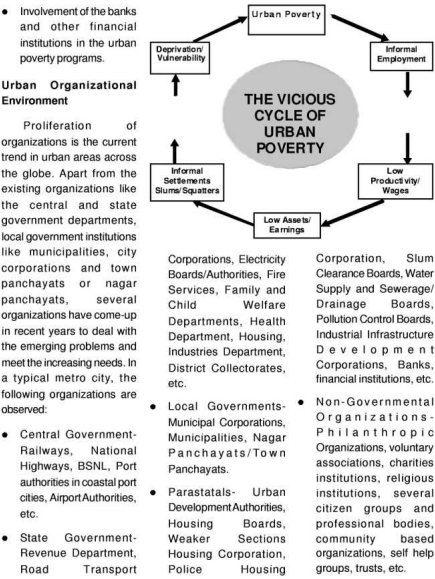
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The list provides only a broad view of the organizations. Working in a multi-organizational environment is a complex task. The complexity stems from each organization's specific approaches, objectives, strategies, styles, programs, priorities, specializations, motives, and jurisdictions. Many a time it creates competitive atmosphere. Conflicts are common in such an environment. Conflicts may be due to varying motives of the private and public sector or due to professional rivalries across the organizations or due to unhealthy competition among the organizations. In the public sector, conflicts arise due to pursuing of narrowly defined goals and overlapping functions. The inter-organizational problems are complex in nature due to interplay of these factors. Many a time each organization blames the other for delays, faults and disaster if, they occur.

The ill effects of the inter-organizational problems are abnormal delays in

project execution, wastage of scarce public funds, cost escalation all leading to non-realization of the set goals and objectives. The indifferent attitude of the organizations involved often puts people to unbearable troubles and sufferings inviting their wrath affecting the image and performance of the government ultimately.

The need is then to change the inter-organizational environment from negative to positive and conflicting to cooperative. This area is popularly termed as inter-agency coordination in public administration.

Inter-Organizational Coordination

Inter-organizational coordination plays significant role in urban poverty alleviation as it is a multidimensional area. It is much more important in the social management area like urban poverty alleviation. As the causes of urban poverty are multiple, the strategies and organizations involved also need to be multiple. This multiple organizational

environment naturally demands coordination across the organizations. The coordination should be both, at the policy and planning level and implementation level, more so at the cutting edge level.

The purpose of coordination across the organizations or inter-organizational coordination in brief is to address the multiple but interrelated problems, benefit from economics of scale when organizations join together and to reduce fragmentation and conflicts across the organizations. Having recognized importance of this, it is also necessary to know the obstacles for inter-organizational coordination. The most commonly perceived obstacles are: each organization, small or big, government or private seeks to preserve its autonomy and independence; each organization follows its own goals and specific procedures which are difficult to synchronize; and other organizations try to influence and bring pressures.

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Inter-organizational coordination depends mainly on three factors: comprehensive outlook, accessibility and compatibility among the organizations involved. Comprehensive outlook helps organizations to formulate strategies based on present and future needs in an open environment and it reduces uncertainty and risk level among the organizations. Accessibility factor reflects an organization's desire to be part of open environment and willingly part of a mega environmental or network goals. Compatibility factor needs each organization plan its short and long term priorities in relation to the network requirements.

The experiences across the countries bring out certain requirements and conditions which promote inter-organizational coordination as below³:

- Effective leadership.
- Flexibility and discretion.

- Building a common sense of purpose.
- Participation of clients.
- Bureaucratic culture of pragmatism.
- Negotiation and mediation skills.
- Minimum political disturbance.
- Small memberships.

Inter-organizational coordination, to be purposeful and effective, should be pursued at policy, planning and implementation stages. Urban poverty alleviation policies are generally formulated at the central and state government levels. In democratic countries like India, people's representatives and bureaucracy plays major role and the general public involvement may not be possible. But, the policies should be evolved through a wide consultation and deliberative process and they should give scope for

accommodating local needs. It is necessary in a diversified country like India. The past experiences show that policies and programs are made without giving much scope for changes either at the state level or local levels. The changes are made after prolonged durations and by that time, new programs are made as each government wishes to devise its own policies and programs even on subjects like urban poverty alleviation. The programs like UBSP, NRY, PMRY, EIU, SJSRY, IHSDP, etc. have same clientele or target groups, almost similar objectives and attack the same problem that is, poverty. If multiple programs are made to tackle the same problem, there arises much need for an integrated approach and coordinated efforts at different levels. Often, this is missing in India. As the purpose of all these programs is poverty alleviation, the organizations involved and the functionalities

³ Rodrigo Serrano, What Makes Inter-Agency Coordination Work? Insights from the Literature and Two Case Studies, Inter-American Development Bank, Sustainable Development Department, Social Development Division, August 2003

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responsible must share the common purpose in spirit and action. There is, therefore, need for evolving mega goals of poverty alleviation which should be shared by all the organizations involved and each organization's goal should not conflict with these mega goals.

At the implementation level, each organization should develop a comprehensive approach in dealing with other participating organizations. Shared purposes and subordinating to mega goals promote this. At the implementation level, each organization frames its program based on its priorities, rules and procedures and budget flow. In doing so, organizations should ensure that conflicts are avoided or minimized to the possible extent. For this purpose, different methods of coordination could be adopted across the organizations based on local needs and circumstances. The methods may be formal or informal depending on the situation. Informal methods may be

personal level contacts, professional meetings, etc. Formal methods include:

- Collaborative or joint planning
- Inter-departmental Meetings
- Involving other organizations in decision making
- Setting-up interagency task forces
- Using common definitions and quantifiable targets.
- Sharing information services
- Sharing staff

In poverty alleviation programs, community organizations play significant role. These organizations should be small comprising of similarly placed persons in terms of location, needs, etc. Involving the urban poor in the poverty alleviation programs requires enormous efforts. The government and non-governmental organizations should work together with the common purpose of poverty alleviation. If the government

bureaucracy needs orientation and sensitization to the needs of urban poor, the NGOs should learn to work with government bureaucracy instead of criticizing its working methods.

Making Good Governance Work for the Poor

Good governance has received much attention in recent years. The dysfunctional trends of public bureaucracy, excessive focus on procedures, dated rules, secrecy and indifference to the people's problems which have crept into the modern governments led to distancing of the governed from government and movements against the functioning governments. In spite of excellent pronounced policies for development, the implementation failed because of these negative factors. In order to overcome the difficulties being faced by the governments, the concept of good governance has emerged. In simple terms, good governance works with all democratic values for the

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- welfare and development of the people. Basically, government should be accessible to the people. Following factors make the governance citizen friendly and at the same effective in realizing the goals in a multi-organizational environment:
- Sensitizing bureaucracy to inter-organizational working environment through integrated or interrelated planning, commitment for common or mega goals of the poverty alleviation and functional coordination across the organizations.
 - Making governance more accountable and transparent in operations.
 - Citizen's friendly practices viz., promotion of community based organizations, sensitivity to the problems of the poor, involving the communities in the decision making process and developing ownership responsibility among the poor on public assets.
 - Taking necessary safeguards against misuse of administrative liberalization.
 - Developing proper guidelines for functionaries.
 - Flexible legal and administrative frame which gives scope for participation and involvement for multiple stakeholders leading to inclusive governance.

