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Progressive patronage? NGOs, community-based organizations, and the limits to slum dwellers' empowerment

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1. PARTNERS, LEADERS, PATRONS AND BROKERS: IDEAL AND REALITY OF CBOS

Initiatives for urban poverty reduction are held to critically depend on slum dwellers' collective agency. After all, faced with numerous livelihood problems including shortcomings of income, shelter and social services, it is arguably only through the power of organized numbers that the urban poor stand any chance for a structural and broad-based improvement of their living conditions. NGOs working with and for the urban poor consider community-based organizations (CBOs) their natural partners. Increasingly, also municipalities recognize the potential of communities to (help) implement policies or provide services, and there is increasing experience with so-called public-community partnerships. For practical reasons alone, not all slum residents can and will actively engage in such a partnership; the search is then for CBOs. Ideally, the latter act as representatives of slum or squatter communities, they articulate needs and priorities vis-à-vis intervening agencies, organize contributions in kind and/or labour, and monitor implementation and outcomes. In some cases CBOs play a crucial role in strategies for empowering the urban poor. They may be united into citywide, national and even international federations, and join NGOs in (or at least provide credibility for) lobbying and advocacy campaigns for shelter, livelihoods and political representation. Grassroots-led urban development is seen as having much potential, starting from the notion of 'community capacity' with a view to slum upgrading and service delivery.

However, in the complex and opaque conditions in which the urban poor have to survive, things may not be that easy. The idea of mobilizing and organizing people collectively on the basis of horizontal ties and common interests does not appear to work well in most places, and, even more fatal, it appears to work less the poorer and more dependent people are. One issue concerns the actual representativeness of the CBO in giving a voice and/or facilitating the participation of all urban poor people, especially the poorest and most excluded ones. Attention for the nature of CBOs is critical here – who are actually the members, do they include all ethnic, gender political or caste groups in a community? Attention is also required for the CBO leadership that may be more self-interested than oriented at community welfare. No doubt leaders come in many forms and shades, and we

need to make a distinction between genuine grassroots leaders who are actively involved in organising the urban poor locally, and those leaders who are also patrons or brokers providing vertical links to actors and institutions beyond the limits of a slum.

There is evidence indicating that the urban poor are not 'naturally' inclined to engage in horizontal organizations and get involved in collective actions. Often they prefer to rely on vertical patronage-like relations or on intermediaries to safeguard livelihoods and to obtain (individual) access to persons and institutions of value to them: the municipality, the police, employers, credit institutions, and even schools and hospitals. This *logic of patronage* is based on the experience that investing in collective action is problematic, time-consuming and fraught with free rider problems. In contrast, using an intermediary or broker is perceived to increase the chance to obtain a service or gain protection against a threat. This calculation is obviously valid in case of private needs and services such as shelter, jobs, credit etc. But even in the case of 'public goods' and collective services (paved alleys, piped water, public toilets, street lights) the poor usually have more faith in contacting intermediaries and politicians than in rallies to voice their demands, or organizing collective works to fulfil them themselves. There may also be an element of tradition or culture, it may be just the common thing to do to contact a chief, leader, trusted person or authority.

The urban poor's scepticism with regard to collective action is confirmed by the glaring mismatch between the supply and demand of services critical to them, in many cities exacerbated by new demands created by rural-urban migration. NGOs are attempting to augment the supply side, but the impact of their efforts remains limited at least in quantitative terms. The poor are very much aware that urban authorities and NGOs could never meet all their needs any time soon. For every slum that is upgraded and provided with services, there are dozens where the situation remains unchanged (and several that are evicted and demolished). Severe scarcity inevitably creates a situation of competition between urban poor communities, a critical stumbling stone for attempts to organize collective action on a supra-community level. Positioning for patronage is the main if not only strategy to be successful in this desperate competition.

An important issue here is that brokers or patrons are more effective if they are linked to higher political levels such as local councillors or (through these to) members of parliament. Political channels are more effective to obtain access to critical services than purely administrative ones (Lavalle et al., 2005). Nair confirms that it is the poorest in the cities who consider politics as critical to their survival, 'as politics is often the only resource in a system which may deny the benefits of policy decisions or legal remedies to the poor' (in Harris, 2005: 27). It also needs to be emphasized that the poor need the state much more than the urban middle classes or the rich do, which may consume state services if it so suits them, or (increasingly) rely on private services (cf. Landy & Ruby, 2005: 2).

In contrast to Benjamin who urges to move away from a conceptualization of poverty focused only on 'a patron-client perspective of local politics' (2000:56), we are postulating that the urban poor – and especially the very poor – are indeed and still depending predominantly on patronage-like relations. We are certainly not saying that collective action in CBOs never happens, or that temporary alliances of different groupings inside or beyond slums never occur. The urban poor are careful managers of their limited assets and opportunities, and if they see scope for advancement by joining a CBO, NGO-driven organization or alliance they will do so, if only not to miss some benefit that may accrue to them. More generally, the urban poor live in a context of 'plurality'; they do have choices and gamble on any chance available. We do however say that collective action and slum-wide organizations are inherently problematic, usually controlled by local elites, and rarely sustainable. We need to be sceptical about 'grassroots-led urban development', slum federations or CBO alliances if the benchmark is the actual participation by and benefit to all or a significant majority of slum residents. We will show that in many cases the CBO label is used by a clique of a few

shrewd entrepreneurs to obtain benefits which are not widely shared – be it in terms of money or information.

All this becomes relevant when we then consider the dynamics of relations between the urban poor, their CBOs, as well as the municipalities and NGOs that work with them. If it is true that CBOs are often organizing or representing only part of a community, and that relations between CBO members and the outside world may be mediated by brokers or patrons, what does that mean for the relations between CBOs and NGOs/municipalities? Can we truly speak of a 'partnerships', such a popular notion these days, and are municipal and NGO relations with CBOs truly balanced and symmetrical in terms of power, money and accountability? Are NGOs able to stimulate CBOs to be more effective, and to be more representative of slum communities at large? Or do NGOs have little option but to accept the informal and more vertically organized realities, and sooner or later also have to work through patronage-like relations – in other words, is there such a thing as 'progressive patronage'? Of course we need to keep in mind here that the demand for support from the urban poor by far exceeds NGOs' capacities in any city, so that they can and have to select beneficiary communities, creating dependency that compounds obvious differences in expertise and access.

Based on cases from India, we will problematize the relation between NGOs, municipalities and CBOs on the one hand, and CBO-community relationship on the other. We postulate that such alliances are asymmetrical, uneasy and normally unsustainable as they are based on personalistic, vertical and informal relations that are often politicized, rather than on horizontal, collective relations rooted broadly in communities. We warn against the risk that notions of community capacity, community participation and community empowerment are taken too optimistically, and that they may start from romantic misconceptions and poorly understood dynamics operating between poor men and women. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the debates on the problems of community development, or 'the tyranny of participation' (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Cleaver, 2001; Botes & van Rensburg, 2000; Berner & Phillips, 2005), this paper is obviously addressing these issues, while focusing on the role and implications of patronage and brokerage.

2. GENERAL PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS, PATRONAGE AND POLITICAL CLIENTELISM

The present focus on 'local communities' in many writings on urban livelihoods and social capital runs the risk of ignoring the diverse linkages of households to the wider city context, especially political relations, or 'political capital' as one of the critical assets of the urban poor. We refer to the classic relationship of patronage, the informal, personal and face-to-face relationships between actors of unequal status and power that persist over time, and involve the exchange of valued resources. Patronage is a good example of a very important, widely prevalent informal, indigenous relationship, an institution in itself which predates industrialisation and democracy. It is culturally rooted, endogenously enforced and upheld by mutual agreement among the social actors involved, even though the relationship can be exploitative. It is fundamentally based on, but also sustains a difference of power, as it is governed by norms and actions and norms which lead to the widespread construction and sustaining of social inequality.

One way to explain the prevalence of patronage is that the poor face severe problems in getting access to government agencies and establishing institutional links when in need of employment, a housing plot, a loan or emergency support. Since demand for most of these benefits at any given time is much larger than supply, there will be shortages, leading to bureaucratic ways to manage and control distribution through waiting lists, queues, lotteries etc. There are three possibilities: direct access by the poor to relevant agencies which is most problematic due to illiteracy, lack of information and confidence (de Wit, 1996); access

mediated by intermediaries, brokers, leaders (either political or non-political); and access mediated by NGOs. Despite increasing efforts of the latter to bridge institutional gaps between government and the poor there is no indication that the power and influence of informal intermediaries is on the decline.

Not all poor people have access to patronage as a resource. As the relation should be one of reciprocity, even the client has to offer something, and this may not be possible for the very poor. Today's politicians base their popularity much more on an image projected through the media than on the allegiance of a herd of dedicated followers. Patrons may be becoming scarce − but it can be assumed that at lower levels of government and administration, and in peripheral areas of poorer countries such 'vintage' relations remain still important (e.g. Gay, 1998). However, it seems also certain that such long-term linkages are no longer the dominant relationship. For example, it was shown that in urban India, relations between patrons and clients become more fluid and flexible, giving way to an army of brokers and intermediaries who cater to the needs of anyone who contacts them for a fee (de Wit, 1996, 2002).

Mediating can be done on an incidental basis, but more often regular patterns develop depending on locality, price, loyalty, and perceived efficacy which is often related to political affiliation. Permanence in brokerage may exist or develop, depending on trust, on 'trusted' or 'known' people who hold the promise of being reliable even while they may be exploitative. The broker is normally a well-connected local leader or strongman (in India, we have not encountered women in this role) who helps meeting multiple needs: He may facilitate entrance to a slum for newcomers, sell building materials, lend money, organize a permit, or obtain information on a possibly imminent eviction. So dependency of the poor on brokers is evident especially in conditions of insecurity, need and crisis. In all, institutionalized mediation is very important for the poor in patronage relationships (see also Rakodi, 2004:260; Devas 2005: 357). The scope for patronage and brokerage is a function of a lack of resources or services; access problems to agencies and institutions; and finally a lack of enforced impersonal rules for the allocation of resources. This perception is confirmed by Landy & Ruby:

> '…if one is poor and one is fortunate enough to know someone with power, there is no choice: for any public service, water supply or PDS (public distribution system) or whatever, this powerful one will be approached since he is the only one who can be used as a broker. The poor hardly visit the various specific line department offices, they go to meet the same broker each time' (2005: 25).

Brokers are more effective if they are part of the political machinery; indeed, a broker outside a party is probably highly ineffective as he will not have access to decision making regarding public services (housing, land, the police etc). There is much evidence from Indian cities that councillors, once they lose an election will find it very hard to still provide support and services to their party followers, as the political machinery is now controlled by another party (de Wit, 1996). It happens frequently that councillors who lose an election will join the now ruling party in due time, especially in the case of independents and members of small parties. Manor (2004: 65, 67, 81) creates the false impression that what he calls 'political fixers' can operate outside the party machinery. He has an almost romantic notion of rural intermediaries who supposedly genuinely seek to serve the people and support the democratic process. We postulate that they are rather local political entrepreneurs, balancing the need to make money with the need to remain popular, reliable and well-connected. They are best seen to have a Janus face: They take the old and handicapped to the polling booth but expect them to vote for their party; they organise a temple festival but also ruthlessly extract rent payments from poor slum households (de Wit, 1996). Contrary to Manor's (2004: 68) belief, fixers' role is critical precisely in conditions where people are extremely poor and inequalities severe.

Patronage and clientelism relate to the concept of the 'political machine', where political parties apply institutionalized approaches to attract and bind voters through the large-scale dispending of material inducements (Scott, 1978). Scott indicates that machine politics involve a three-cornered relationship, in which machine politicians can be seen as brokers. In exchange for payment by business elites, they promote the latter's political interests while passing on a part of the gain to the voters from whom they 'rent' their authority. A good example of the shifts from patronage relations to machine politics can be found in Rocamora's account on the Philippines:

> 'What they [local politicians] do for their constituents is required for political survival and the social demands of patron-client relationships. In recent times, as these relationships got eroded by the commercialization of agriculture and urbanization, politician-patrons paid less attention to social obligations and more to organizational needs of political machines that gradually replaced patron-client ties' (1998: 20).

Electoral clientelism is a cornerstone of many emerging or fledgling democracies, and there are plenty examples where politicians in higher or lesser degree unduly influence or even coerce voters (which has been reported in Mumbai where the stakes in elections are exceptionally high), as well as 'buy' votes with a dazzling variety of 'incentives' and 'presents'. In Mexico these are reported to include: money, caps, t-shirts, pencils, lighters, dictionaries, basic foodstuffs, breakfasts, beer, fruits, vegetables, hoses, seeds, chicken, cows and sheep (Schedler in Brinkerhoff, 2002: 3). For India, Sastry notes:

> 'The importance of money has also skyrocketed, and it is widely accepted that at least Rs. 1 crore (10 million or $ 250,000) if not more is required per [MLA] candidate in an urban constituency and perhaps half that in a rural one. Officers on election duty routinely say that money and liquor are distributed during the nights in large quantities in working class areas. The problem with extravagant spending is that the winner spends all his or her time recovering the money spent and in returning favours to those who funded him or her, rather than focusing on real issues of governance' (2004:1391-2).

In India the common list of items to be distributed before elections include cash, liquor, buckets, cheap jewellery, men and women dress. In this country, the concept of 'vote bank' is often used, referring to a group of voters with common characteristics (caste, language and ethnicity). Mathew and Mathew make the following statement:

> 'Clientelism, which has taken new forms after the introduction of modern democracy. needs to be discussed in this context. Political leaders today desire to keep what may be called 'vote banks'. Favours are granted to those within that vote bank and clientage becomes the most important relationship. (….) The patrons then use their political influence to extend favours, bypassing or even violating laws, rules and norms and even resorting to extra-constitutional means. For many, beginning with the submission of their nomination papers as candidates in the elections, democracy is a convenient instrument for sustaining and perpetuating clientelism' (2004: 22).

That democracy is eroded by clientelism is demonstrated by Benjamin (2000: 51) who states that 25-30% of construction funds are routinely diverted through the party system, greatly enhancing the latter's hegemony. Gupta (2000) agrees that there is pervasive political corruption and that the claim that India is a vibrant and functioning democracy rings hollow. The reason for the massive corruption is 'because we, in India, do not elect representatives but patrons' (Gupta, 200:154). Hence, patronage and clientelism may have positive functions for the poor as they provide some access opportunities (as recognized by Benjamin, 2000: 44), but they also sustain dependency, exploitation and inequality, and slowly undermine democracy.

It is also critical to note that patronage becomes politicized especially for the working classes and the urban poor who are seen as vote banks by the political parties. This works like an incentive to keep relying on patrons and politicians, as the urban poor know from experience that the presents and services provided before elections are often the only benefits they will get from politicians. As Varshney (2004: 217) correctly notes, it is not surprising that the poor prefer direct transfers over indirect or long term poverty alleviation measures and vote on the basis of identity, not class: '…multiple selves drive a wedge between the poor as a class and the poor as a political collectivity, significantly reducing, if not eliminating, pressure on the government to act on behalf of the poor'.

Landy and Ruby go on to question the very notion of CBO in India:

> ´Contrary to NGOs which often are exogenous, CBOs were born inside the local population. It is a paradox that in India (as elsewhere), the general narrative showers praise upon the CBOs which are usually considered as key possible actors for a decentralized and participatory development, while on the other hand "community" is often used as a euphemism for "religion" or "caste". On one hand, CBO means democracy and equity; on the other, it may mean communalism and segmentation. On which side is the situation in our area? (…) All in all, there is no local identity at levels above the block, the street or the close neighbourhood. Sultan Shahi is divided into segmented areas, rather homogenous, along religious – and even caste – lines. One's closer representative is not always the Corporator, but the one who belongs to one's community, whatever the level of the constituency. The representative is elected by a community rather than a constituency, and will openly favour this community. The voters are divided into religious and caste communities which organise themselves into associations in order to reach power. That there is no resident welfare association, only community-based organisations, seems to prove that people are unable to think of organisations based on locality. Above the level of the neighbourhood, spatial identity gives place to communal identity' (2005, 3-4).

Three points can me made to summarize. First, the incidence of brokerage and patronage appears ubiquitous in India, but certainly not only there as plenty sources from other countries indicate (on African states cf. Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Devas, 2005; Blundo, 2005). Secondly, they reinforce vertical divisions within what may be seen as 'communities' that are already heterogeneous, divided, and with multiple identities which again relate to representation, mediation and politics. And thirdly, relations between the urban poor and the world beyond their households and slums are inherently politicized. We will now assess the validity of these general perspectives for a few cases which bring out the role of NGOs and CBOs vis-à-vis the urban poor.

3. PARTNERSHIPS, PARTICIPATION AND PATRONAGE IN A BANGALORE SLUM PROJECT[1]

Between 1993 and 1999 the Bangalore Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme (BUPP) was implemented in the south Indian metropolis of Bangalore. The Dutch funded pilot programme aimed at poverty reduction through empowering slum inhabitants and by creating an enabling institutional framework to facilitate participation and co-operation between government agencies, NGOs and community organisations. The vehicle for participation and empowerment at the local slum level was the 'Slum Development Team' (SDT), consisting of elected representatives of each of the programme slums on the basis of 50% men and 50% women. Each SDT was expected to consult the slum community and subsequently draft a Slum Development Plan (SDP), reflecting the prioritised needs of the community.

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[1] This section is based on de Wit (2001).

One of the key issues in BUPP was there was a pattern that members of the new SDTs were often the leaders of pre-existing organisations (or their wives) who managed to capture the new positions or actually got elected to them. Some leaders of slums taken up under BUPP turned out to be an obstacle to the functioning of SDTs as they were striving to serve their personal interests; for instance, powerful moneylenders obstructed the setting up of savings groups in their slums. Another example was an autocratic slum leader who did not want an SDT to be formed as it would undermine his own dominant position. He was the only male person to participate in a women's awareness programme, but due to his overpowering presence the women present were generally too shy to participate actively. However, the picture was not that gloomy everywhere. In some BUPP slums, such already established leaders proved to be very effective, well-connected, respected by their communities and reliable. Fact is that if leaders oppose a project or initiative, there is a serious problem. If, in contrast, leaders support it, a possible formidable ally has been secured (the same applies to politicians, albeit at another level). Apart from the slum leaders, there were certainly several enterprising men and women who never had been very active in any organisation, who now were elected to an SDT and played very useful roles. SDTs then could and did also function as springboards for leadership positions, in which process aspiring individuals were supported and guided by the project and the NGOs.

Overall, however, BUPP has been unable to effectively deal with the dilemma of being expected to form new SDTs whereas in all slums some form of community organization already existed. This of course is not a new problem, and it is safe to say that no slum-focused programme has been able to present the ultimate solution. After all, the dilemma is based on the nature of existing organisations itself: Even though rooted in and, in principle, owned by the people, they are not at all egalitarian, democratic and gender-sensitive and cannot be (fully) trusted to play the developmental role that governments, NGOs and donors expect. The organizational innovations and participatory approaches introduced by BUPP were chiefly seen by the people and SDTs alike as venues to gain access to resources in terms of funds, and to assistance from BUPP to get access to government services and more secure land tenure. Seen this way, the implementing staff (the Programme Support Unit or PSU) gradually became more like a useful patron, handing out favours and helping people to link with government agencies. This would mean that BUPP could not achieve its – admittedly over-ambitious – objective of addressing the root causes of urban poverty, and to empower people to tackle these themselves. BUPP, like many programmes before it, was important and fairly effective in terms of alleviating poverty and assisting people, but only in a limited way. It did not succeed to provide an effective and sustainable model of GO-NGO-CBO partnerships for dealing with urban poverty and its underlying causes and dynamics.

4. SELF-HELP GROUPS IN CHENNAI

A small survey amongst 25 self-help groups (SHGs) in Chennai (de Wit and Padmavatti, 2007) found that there were two NGOs which were actively and sincerely supporting poor women to start groups which mostly had the nature of saving groups. The savings were deposited at a formal bank, and collective businesses and employment schemes were started (small shops, food stall, rice trade, *saree* (dress) business, telephone booth etc). There was another, smaller NGO that had also been active in organizing SHGs, but it was mistrusted by the local people as it was mostly functioning as a money-lending organization charging a high interest rate. With few exceptions, the SHGs were all-women groups, and by and large they managed without the support or interference of the men/husbands, even while in some cases husbands had laid a claim on their wives' SHG savings. In the case of one SHG, the very strong and enterprising women leader indicated that they did not get any support from the municipal corporation, and not any longer from the NGO which helped start the SHG, but that the men were supporting them. Some groups have a mixed membership,

but the men are less active. One reason may simply be time, one man saying: 'We only have one day off in the week, how can we come to the SHG meetings?'

Out of the 25 groups present and former groups studied, seven had been dissolved for various reasons, including machinations by a SHG leader who was also a money lender. Some of the groups had only been formed just before local elections as vote banks for electoral purposes, and collapsed after elections (and after a local politician had distributed 700 sewing machines as well as sewing training amongst SHG group members, probably financed from Tsunami aid funds). One group fell apart when some women members received pre-election gifts (*sarees* and money) from one party and other women did not. This created jealousies and confusion in the group and caused the breakup. It may be noted that politics is often part of the interview statements, indicating the politicization of the SHG approach in Tamil Nadu. The former Chief Minister Jayalalitha had actively promoted the formation of SHGs, some say in a sincere effort to empower the women of the state amongst whom she is very popular; others, in contrast, see the party-supported SHGs as simple vehicles to tie women voters to Jayalalitha's party.

Some SHG groups have a mixed membership in terms of caste, but there is a pattern that the *Dalit* (former untouchable/scheduled caste) women SHGs found it harder to be successful financially and in terms of creating employment. This can be explained by the lower literacy levels and the absence of a tradition of self-employment. Yet even such less financially effective groups can still be very important for the women, and there is definitely a sense of empowerment in members of those SHGs that have persisted over two years. Indicators include most of all a sense or solidarity amongst women, a sense that women are not alone and that other women can be relied upon in case of crisis or emergency. Most often mentioned was domestic violence where SHG members intervened in marital quarrels, mostly of wife beating by husbands (often alcoholics). Most groups reported an increased sense of awareness, of having more self-confidence and more skills:

> 'Before, when we went with complaints individually we were not taken seriously, but now that is no longer the case…. The local people approach us for any of their problems and that is the kind of respect we have.'

SHGs also engaged in common social issues such as support in during floods, keeping a watch against child labour and motivating illiterate children to go to school. SHG members may contact the City Corporation in cases of emergencies and check on the quality of drinking water. This a case where women – often supported only initially by an NGO – succeed in organizing successfully with common and shared benefits for all members. Interestingly, and contradicting the argument put forward in this paper, there is horizontal solidarity, there is collective action, these women do not run to a broker as a first impulse.

5. THE ROLE OF CBOS IN THE SLUM ADOPTION PROGRAMME IN MUMBAI[2]

Faced with a steadily increasing volume of solid waste, restrictions to hire additional collection staff, and long existing problems to clean the numerous slums of the city, the City Corporation of Mumbai (MCGM) initiated the so called Slum Adoption Programme (SAP). As the name suggests, SAP was envisioned as a community-led programme. All the tasks

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[2] This section is based on a field study of the SAP program in six selected Mumbai slums, where a detailed and thorough investigation was carried out on aspects such as - the nature and size of the slum area; systems in place for SAP implementation, actors that were involved in various stages; implementation processes and their impact on the program. Data were collected via informal discussions and open ended interviews with key informants like local political leaders, slum leaders, CBO founders, health workers, officials at the ward office and residents of slums.

related to solid waste management in a slum would be handled by a CBO representing the slum community without too much dependence on the city administration. It was hoped that slum dwellers could be '… sensitized to become responsible citizens so that they take a lead in handling their day to day garbage in co-ordination with their local Community Based Organization (CBO) and MCGM" (MCGM, SAP Official leaflet, undated). Based on the rationale that the slum residents had a direct stake in keeping their surroundings clean, SAP attempted to 'organize, motivate and involve the slum population to arrest the garbage at the generation stage' (MCGM, SAP Official leaflet, undated). The SAP was to be implemented by the SWM Department of the MCGM though it's 24 wards offices in a decentralized implementation structure. Ward office tasks included the tasks of identifying slums/CBOs ready to become involved in SAP; helping them drafting sanitation plans; estimating total expenditures; guiding CBOs on procedural requirements; and finally sensitizing and motivating slum dwellers to participate in SAP.

In terms of finance, the MCGM was to extend monthly financial assistance to selected CBOs in the form of a subsidy of Rs.1500 per 1000 population covered by one CBO. This financial support was to taper off by the third year, by which time SAP was expected to be working smoothly in the locality and the CBO fully self-sufficient. CBOs were expected to raise a matching monthly contribution of Rs.10 per household and Rs.20 per shop/commercial establishment in their slum. Apart from leading SAP activities in the program slums, the expected responsibilities of CBOs also included the organization of street meetings, also involving the city officers and local representatives; to mobilize local support and create awareness on cleanliness and health, to involve community volunteers and pay their wages. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide details of the six cases studies we carried out of CBOs which were or had been implementing SAP in their slums (cf. Desai et al., 2007).

We found that the SAP programme, considered a success by the City Corporation in terms of coverage, number of CBOs involved and increased slum cleanliness, is a plain failure in terms of participation and representation. There was some improvement in all slums, however limited and temporary, in terms of cleanliness and more effective local SWM. Yet the level of cleanliness of slums reached under SAP was clearly related to their respective socioeconomic status, i.e. the programme performed much better in the more established, incrementally improved slums where people were more literate and demanding. Participation was restricted to those households which actually paid Rs. 10 monthly and put their household garbage outside the house/hut prior to the collection by the waste collectors employed by the CBO. In almost half the cases, these collectors and the slum sweepers were not from the slum itself, another indication that the CBO saw the collection work rather as an technical job that provided officers with some extra income. In none of our six study areas the CBO became active in organizing slum meetings, awareness programmes, or beautification and tree planting.

One core finding of our study is the complete division between the CBO leadership on the one hand, and the slum community at large in terms of participation or even mutual interest. In all cases the key relationship of SAP was the one between the CBO leader, the City Corporation ward officials and the ward councillor (the local political representative elected to the City Corporation by the residents of each of the 227 Mumbai Wards). That comes in here may be surprising in that formally he/she. The councillor had no formal role to play but became the most vital link between the CBO leader and the ward officials. Accessibility to other important 'contacts' in the ward office as well as to information entirely depended on the councillor. It was through him/her that the ward office apparatus could be activated and decisions swung in favour of the CBO. The program was therefore considerably politicized, and was based on a close and closed network of powerful individuals. The councillor performed as the initiator, mediator and patron. The resulting informal interference of political parties via their councillors had, according to some officials, turned SAP into a 'money

making programme'. We may note here that the financial gain for a CBO could be Rs. 30.000 to Rs. 70,000 per month depending on the slum population, and that ward officials normally received 10% of the funds that were passed on to the CBO as bribes.

In all cases studied, the lead taken by the CBO leaders was noteworthy. Well established in their slums, they were versed with community dynamics as well as slum problems, and had acquired the necessary skills to handle internal and external demands. For instance, they had intervened in community squabbles; helped residents get basic services; initiated welfare schemes in the locality; started SHGs etc. In almost all the cases, CBO leaders were or had been implementing local government programs. This implied repeated interaction with the ward officials that had created a foundation for future interactions − or in other words, the development of personal, time-tested relationships of trust, of mutual acceptance, of having proven not to cheat (too much) etc. There is no doubt that the councillor-CBO leader linkage was one of the most critical ones in SAP. This was characterized by a relationship of mutual dependence. Councillors viewed SAP as a means of securing their political turf and therefore helped those CBOs whose allegiance they could rely on. Often, the CBO leader himself/herself was a local political functionary belonging to the same party as the councillor. Thus, this relationship of mutual dependence created the possibility of benefit for all the parties involved. However, if a councillor was opposed to a CBO leader, the latter's slum was excluded from SAP implementation.

It may be concluded that the communities were silent spectators to the wheeling and dealing of these three stakeholder groups. They did modestly benefit as in most slums some improvement in SWM was noticeable, and at most (if they paid) it cost them Rs. 10 per month. The bad news is the misuse of public funds which are appropriated by cleverly operating and well-connected slum entrepreneurs and brokers masquerading as CBOs, by ward officers who receive bribes, and by local councillors who benefit both financially and in terms of building political capital. All this happens in the name of the poor, in the name of participation and empowerment, but it underlines and actually enforces existing inequalities in and around the slums. And, as in previous cases, the basis of operation is formed by informal, highly personalistic relationships, which are heavily influenced politically – even if politicians were not at all expected to play a role.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Based on evidence presented from several cases from large Indian cities we have shown that the importance of personalistic, vertical patronage-like relations is very high in the day-to-day life of the urban poor. They may join collective actions when seen as useful and urgent but mostly in exceptional situations such as an eviction, a sudden loss of water supply, or another disaster that affects all. But even during these exceptional events the process is marked by accentuating slum divisions, people relying on leaders and brokers, and people basically fending for themselves (de Wit, 1996).The grassroots image of CBOs as expressions of horizontal ties and instruments of collective action does, in most cases, not withstand critical scrutiny. Initiated from above by governments and NGOs in order to give credibility to 'participatory development', they remain under the firm control of established local leaders and serve as disguise for political entrepreneurs eager to appropriate public funds.

Unsurprisingly, the concept of community itself was once more shown to be problematic, with heterogeneous groups of people living together (accidentally and often temporarily) on a given land area. But there are divisions, certainly in India, of incomes and assets, ethnicity, religion, gender, caste, and between tenants and owners. The very concept of community is problematic in India as it may refer to a group of people but also to a religious group (Landy & Ruby 2005). Identities, loyalty and solidarity cannot be taken for granted and collective

action in a slum – a religious festival, elections ‒ occurs within subgroups rather than at the level of the community. Perhaps therefore, for outsiders to link to slums it would be wise to check what groups and divisions are present before getting involved in organization, mobilization, or ‒ most critically ‒ in channelling benefits and funds to urban poor communities.

It was established that in all the cases where outsiders engaged with so-called communities, the actual interaction was mostly with local leaders or what was perceived as 'representatives'. This was the case in the donor-funded Bangalore urban poverty project, where the newly formed slum organizations were dominated by the existing leaders (and their wives) and where these gradually came to form a new layer of power and gatekeeping between project staff and the poor. Only after the formation of Grameen-style savings and credit groups did the project regain a direct link with the poor (de Wit, 2001). Things were more problematic in the case of the Slum Adoption Programme in Mumbai, where in fact there is a brazen capture of funds and power by a tripartite nexus formed by local municipal officials, councillors and local leaders who are considered the CBOs in local rhetoric (Desai et. al., 2007). So on the whole, this paper argues that extreme caution is to be exercized when starting or implementing 'community-based' or 'community-driven' programmes, and while relying on CBOs. The very concept of CBO needs to be questioned: For India it is more accurate to speak of leader-centred networks where a leader heads a close and reliable network of followers, supporters, hangers-on and workers.

There are many programmes which are in name 'participatory' and even 'empowering', but only serve the interests of slum leaders and slum elites, municipal officials, politicians and in some cases also NGOs (as in one case of Chennai SHGs). Such interventions become vehicles of profit and status for others than the urban poor. And if the organisation of urban poor into local slum organisations is extremely difficult, the endeavour to link several slum CBOs into larger federations is even less likely to yield effective and sustainable results (cf. Harris 2005: 19). This links to Mohanty's critique of the fashionable concepts 'empowerment', 'civil society', and 'democratization', which he perceives as part of a new package of liberalisation discourse: 'Civil society is defined narrowly to include only established, organised groups, with which the state and dominant western forces are willing to co-operate, to the neglect of the poor and powerless' (2005: 1435).

However, on the positive side stands the case of self-help groups in Chennai, where – supported by NGOs but quite independently and quite successfully – small groups of women manage to get together even while they have dissimilar incomes and backgrounds. One obvious explaining factor is that these are 'natural' and small groups, with existing ties, common interests, based on being friends or neighbours or having the capacity to work together in a small enterprise. Some of them may collapse – and it was shown that they suffer from efforts by outsiders to use them, as in the case of politicians who consider them a useful and easily accessible vote bank. But they fulfil an important need, and some of them have assumed a fairly strong and respected social role, for example also interfering in cases of domestic violence or education.

Yet in spite of their noble intentions, NGOs (at least) in India cannot escape the logic of patronage. From the perspective of the poor, the benefits that they hopefully offer are as particularistic (to be competed for) and temporary as those provided by politicians, administrators and brokers. Moreover and critically, NGOs can rarely bypass or structurally change the CBOs on whom they depend for effectiveness and legitimacy of their interventions. These organizations inevitably reflect and reinforce local divisions, inequalities and power differentials, and elite capture of benefits is not the exception but the rule. NGOs can at best strive to become better and more reliable (but not necessarily 'progressive') patrons. Their niche may be broadened by the increasing scarcity of traditional patronage as

a resource, and the commercialization of brokerage making it inaccessible for large numbers of poor people.

More research is certainly needed on the dynamics and evolution of the propensity of the poor to engage either in collective or, in contrast, individual actions to solve problems and safeguard livelihoods. This includes the incidence of patronage and brokerage and differences along various parameters such as gender, scarcity, heterogeneity, inequality among the poor and vulnerable, and regimes (types of democracy).

For the future, we expect that the importance of vertical relations like patronage and brokerage for the poor is not likely to diminish any time soon. Even while also the middle classes and urban rich use vertical and personal relations to get things done, their dependence on patrons and brokers for basic needs is far less critical. Studies have shown that the poor operate differently than the rich or the middle classes, the latter being more able to directly access offices, to make phone calls, to put pressure on officials through upper-strata networks (Baud and de Wit, 2007, Benjamin, 2000, Harris, 2005). Such differences will further accentuate the polarization between the poor and the well-off in cities. The net result is that the rich-poor gap is widening, not only in terms of wealth, but also in terms of access to services and control over the local state. Seen this way, the urban poor have to survive in an increasingly competitive context where they have to fend for themselves under complex social, political and habitat constraints.

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