

Authorising Sewage Drains in 'Unauthorised Colonies'

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Introduction

The aim of this campaign is to influence the Delhi State Government to prioritise the construction of sewerage systems in the Unauthorised Colonies (UCs) of Delhi. The campaign will do this by- 1) creating awareness about the health, environmental and social repercussions of living in unsanitary conditions, 2) forming a collation of advocacy and research organisations to combine their efforts to target the government, and 3) involving the affected people living in the UCs to voice their concerns and demand immediate actions.

Context

In India, UCs are unapproved and unregulated settlements which do not come under the planning and development authorities of government bodies (Zimmer, 2012). Before independence, these were mainly rural and private agricultural lands which were subdivided into plots and over the years their development has evaded building lays and planning standards (Ajith and Kataria, 2022). Delhi has 1731 UCs with over 4 million people living there (Planning Tank). Due to increased migration, growing housing demand, and lack of affordable housing in the city, private landowners sub-divide their land or sell them to contractors to construct smaller housing, usually unplanned, without provisioning for water and sanitation, street networks and other basic amenities (Ajith and Kataria, 2022). This has resulted in high-density urban clusters without public services. Even after Supreme Court's 2006 ruling that basic civic amenities must be provided to the residents, a significant portion of residents now have access to water, either through the irregular water supply or water tanks, one critical issue that remains gravely unaddressed is the absence/inadequacy of sewerage networks (Vohra, 2018).

Issue Analysis

This section will focus on analysing the political and social setting and environmental and health concerns to identify the barriers to change and formulate effective strategies to tackle them.

Political Contention

While the UCs have escaped developmental concerns of the different political parties in power over the years due to their status, they have been a popular tool for vote bank politics and come under their radar only during the election season (Ajith and Kataria, 2022). The three major political parties that contest the state election- Indian National Congress (INC), Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP, the party at power at the Centre) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP, the ruling party in Delhi since 2013), have used election propaganda to 'promise' welfare schemes to the unauthorised colonies (Singh, 2019). With BJP at power in the Centre and the AAP at the state level, the political competition has intensified in recent years.

In the run-up to the 2020 state elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, launched the PM-UDAY (Prime Minister – Unauthorized Colonies in Delhi Awas Adhikar Yojana) scheme in Delhi in 2019, to extend property ownership or transfer rights to the residents of unauthorised colonies in Delhi. BJP suggests that UCs cannot be developed without the security of ownership and rights to mortgage/ transfer properties rights (PM-UDAY 2019). However, only 10% of residents had submitted their applications till the end of 2021, indicating a gap in implementing the scheme (Ajith and Kataria, 2022). In March 2022, Delhi BJP Chief Adesh Gupta and Leader of Opposition at the State Assembly, announced that the DDA will implement a relaxation of requirements to avail building plan sanctions in the UCs (Chitlangia, Hindustan Times, 2022). While this is a welcome move for the residents, it will increase unplanned construction in the UCs, worsening the already congested narrow lanes.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has maintained that the AAP government has done more for UCS than the BJP and INC have done in 30 years. The State Government has set aside Rs. 1300 crore in its budget for the development of UCs for improving road connectivity and water pipeline. (Mathur, 2022).

Environment and Health Implications

The unchecked expansion of unauthorised colonies has led to the increased production of sewage, resulting in the increased pollution of the Yamuna River, which has intensified in the last 20 years (National Green Tribunal). The National Mission on Clean Ganga (NMCG) reported that 12 out of the 18 major drains in Delhi still discharge untreated water into the river and that untreated water from UCs is one of the main reasons behind the high level of pollution in the river. (TOI, 2022). The Kejriwal government has increased its budget allocation from 5% to 10% in 2022 to improve water services, for the redevelopment of Najafgarh drain (the biggest drain in Delhi) and for the Yamuna clean-up project. But there is no emphasis on the construction of sewerage networks in the UCs (Singh, 2022).

According to the Union Ministry of Environment, the responsibility of the management of Municipal Solid Waste has been entrusted with Urban Local Bodies (MOEF). Due to their unauthorised status, the environmental problems from the open disposal of sewage from the UCs evade the responsibility of the Delhi Jal Board, which is responsible for providing water and sanitation services as well as handling waste management in Delhi. Further, the Bureau of Indian Standards specifies that for septic tanks in houses with more than 2000 litres, it should have 2 chambers (to avoid seepage and contamination of ground water). But most septic tanks in UCs have one chamber because of cluster housing and lack of space (Foundation for Environment and Sanitation). For instance, in Sangam Vihar, in an average house, the volume of the septic tanks goes up to 6000 litres and it goes directly into open drains without being treated, which then directly or indirectly goes to Yamuna (Anwiti, 2019; Live Mint).

The problem of overflowing sewage in the UCs gets more intensified during the monsoon season due to severe waterlogging, increasing the risk of water-borne diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea (Gupta et al., 2017). In India, Diarrhoea is the third most common cause of death in under-five children, which accounts for 13% of deaths in this age category each year (Lakshinarayanan and Jayalakshmi, 2015). While the Modi government launched the second phase of its flagship project Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 in 2021 with the objective of 'Making cities garbage free: clean water, clean air and clean land', it is alarming that little action has been taken to address the health concerns that result from the absence of sewerage networks in the UCs (SBM, 2021) .

Fig. 1: Sewage collecting in open lanes in Sangam Vihar



Source: DNA News Outlet

Fig. 2: Severe waterlogging during monsoon in Sangam Vihar



Source: The Indian Express

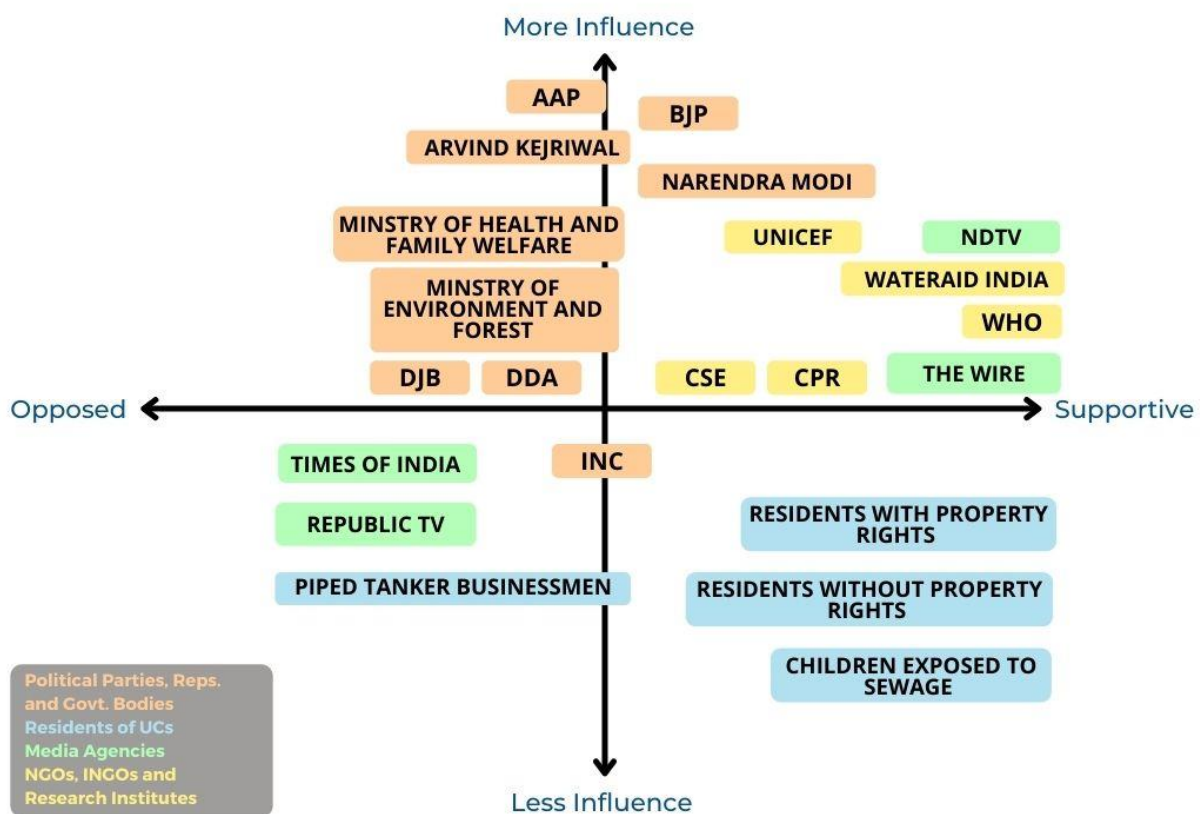
Objective

To lobby the Delhi State Government to prioritise the construction of sewerage systems in UCs in Delhi. To be noted that this campaign will not target the 69 UCs classified by DDA as 'unauthorised colonies inhabited by affluent sections of society'.

Stakeholder Mapping and Power Analysis

To understand the power relation between the different stakeholders, Lukes' (2004) classification of visible, invisible, and hidden is incorporated in the analysis.

Fig. 3: Stakeholder Mapping



The most 'visible power' lies with AAP led by Arvind Kejriwal. However, due to the status of the UCs and the direct involvement of the BJP led central government in matters related to the UCs, a complex distribution of power is created. Additionally, because of the constant competition between the two political parties, it is the 'hidden power' that dictates political negotiations and power contention.

WaterAid India, a water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) INGO has been influential in the promotion and implementation of SBM-1 and has provided support to the government in terms of advocacy, and R&D. Similarly, Unicef India's WASH sector and the WHO India office are active advisors of the Central

and State Governments. WHO India and the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched the 'The WHO India Country Cooperation Strategy 2019–2023' providing a roadmap to achieve its goals. These INGOs are playing a crucial role in advising the government on policy matters. ThinkTanks like the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) have also been persuasive in informing government policy.

Media agencies like NDTV (news channel) and The Wire (Print Media) play an important role in influencing power dynamics. Not only do they help to raise awareness, but they also hold 'hidden power' to portray government actions or inactions from a critical lens, thus impacting a media-conscious government. Moreover, their ability to shape public opinion and encourage people to collectivise can be an 'invisible' but powerful tool for bringing change.

Strategy and Tactics

The campaign will undertake different strategic approaches, including both insider and outsider tactics, to ensure maximum impact. The process will involve using the influencing power and different agendas of the relevant stakeholders to bring about change.

Insider Tactics

Since the DJB comes under the AAP government, MLA Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, leader of the opposition from the BJP will be a vital player in emphasising this issue in the legislative assembling. After the success of SBM-1, and with a focus on getting results from SBM-2, the BJP is keen on delivering its promise of making cities garbage free. Thus, it will be in their interest to push the AAP government to provide sewerage systems in the UCs by 2024 (The target for meeting SBM-2 goals).

So far, when discussing the issue of water supply and sewerage networks, the government has taken the lens of it being a concern of civic amenities. While this is a reasonable approach, it has not resulted in any significant progress. The campaign will thus try to widen this perspective by incorporating the health and environmental concerns, that were identified earlier, and use that to lobby for immediate action. In this regard, unifying the agendas of the health and environment departments, with that of DJB will facilitate this process. Satyendar Jain, the Delhi Minister of Health and Family welfare is also the Chairman of the DJB. Thus, the campaign will target him as an important agent to necessitate action and augment the shift to viewing this as a more wide-ranging issue. Since the AAP government has already expanded its budget in the water sector, as mentioned earlier, there will be a push to incorporate provision for sewerage networks within its planned expenditure. Stressing that this is in congruence with their agenda of making the Yamuna cleaner and redeveloping the Najafgarh drain, will aid in making the government prioritise this issue and include it within their planned expenditure.

The national elections are scheduled for May 2024 and the state elections are set to happen in February 2025. Given the history of vote bank politics in the UCs, the election campaign period (2023-2024) will be a critical juncture to lobby the government to implement changes to benefit their own political interest. As the BJP government at the Centre launched the PM-UDAY scheme in 2019, it will be a strategic move for them to take up this issue to indicate continued interest in the development of UCs and further their SBM-2 goals. The Kejriwal government too, which is enjoying the success of its 'Mohalla Clinics' health scheme launched in its last tenure, can use addressing this issue as a policy initiative to advance its health programmes.

Outsider Tactics

Engaging the key NGOs and INGOs to organise and put pressure on the government will accelerate the process of change. Having personally worked with WaterAid India in the past, the campaign will utilise the established network connections within the organisation, and the close association of the organisation with other INGOs including Unicef and WHO to form a coalition of interest groups. WaterAid India CEO, VK Madhavan will play a pivotal role in forming these alliances. Given their influential role as multilateral organisations, their involvement will provide a strong foundation for implementing the other strategies as well. As WHO is currently working with the central government on its Cooperation Strategy, it will be a key player to negotiate project goals and advocate for prioritising sewerage construction in UCs. Moreover, as there isn't any academic report that focuses on the socio-economic, environmental or health impact that improper sewerage systems have had on residents of these UCs over the years, research institutes like the CPR and CSE, will be taken as allies to fulfil this gap. Since these institutes have consulted the government on many projects in the past, specifically the department of health and environment, their findings and advocacy will be integral to influencing the government's position.

Increased media attention will help to shed light on this overlooked issue and create public awareness. NDTV news channel will be lobbied to incorporate this issue within its successful 'Banega Swasth India' campaign to raise awareness in the public domain and mobilise support from different interest groups and private businesses. Since, both AAP and BJP become particularly concerned with their media image during the election campaign, the period between 2023-2024 will be a crucial opportunity to use media to draw focus on this issue. Apart from this, the upcoming World Environment Day (June 5th) and World Toilet Day (November 19th) and World Health Day (April 7th) will be vital moments to have topic-specific focused news reports as well as encourage people to join the campaign using hashtags like #NoDrainNoGain.

Additionally, DDA's 'Master Plan for Delhi-2041' includes policies aimed at regularising UCs. They are accepting 'suggestions/feedback' on the plan till the end of the year. This crucial opportunity will be capitalised on by using the media campaigns and the NGOs to encourage the residents of Delhi to participate in public action and submit feedback to impel the government to include the construction of drainage systems and sewage management in their planning.

Positive Deviance

Understanding that sewerage construction is time-consuming and might require several months to laydown pipelines to cover the entire region, this campaign proposes a successful short-term solution to be undertaken immediately. In Sangam Vihar, India's largest UC, the issue of no sewerage is particularly acute. The locals here have come up with a unique business which uses tankers to collect sewage from the filled up septic tanks from individual houses in the area using 300-350 feet long pipes and motor pumps (Anwiti, 2019). Using pipes is key in these unplanned colonies as there is little space for roads or traffic. There are about 20 people involved in the business and they have a strict 'no manual scavenging' policy (Anwiti, 2019). But these businesses are unlicensed. The campaign will formally notify the DJB of the existence of this well-functioning enterprise, urging them to authorise these businesses and incorporate them into the formal system. It will serve as an intermediate step to address the issue, demonstrating the government's continued interest in developing the UCs, while the planning for the longer projects is undertaken. Further, this business model can be adapted or even extended to the other UCs as they are all in adjoining areas, within the same district.

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