

Urban Reforms

Proactive ULBs lead the way

The past year saw increased activity on the project front under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). However, the overall activity levels in terms of implementation of reforms did not appear to be as strong. Nonetheless, there was an emphasis by a promising number of urban local bodies (ULBs) on undertaking reforms for improving financial sustainability and service delivery.

Financial reforms

One of the prominent reforms seen across many ULBs was reflected in increased efforts to collect user charges and taxes. Many municipal corporations, including those of Chandigarh, Chickmagalur, Greater Visakhapatnam, Kolkata, Mangalore, Margao and Mysore, launched drives against illegal connections and tax defaulters. The Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) recorded its highest tax collection since 1983-84. Further, tariff revisions were initiated by the Belgaum City Corporation in Karnataka (under the 24x7 water supply scheme), the Municipal Corporation of Shimla in Himachal Pradesh, the Delhi Jal Board (which increased the water and sewer development charges) and the Nagpur Municipal Corporation (increase in water tax).

However, one could also point out instances to the contrary. The Lucknow Jal Sansthan refused to implement the Uttar Pradesh government's proposal to revise tariffs upwards stating that it would undertake water supply infrastructure improvements before increasing tariffs. Similarly, the Mohali Municipal Council in Punjab unanimously rejected the state government's directive to rationalise water supply and sewerage tariffs in the city. The Goa government even had to roll back an increase in water

tariffs amidst stiff political opposition.

Service delivery

There was a move towards automation and e-governance for better service delivery. For instance, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) set up computerised citizen service centres to implement e-governance, enabling residents of Kolkata to conduct transactions such as paying bills and taxes online. The Chhattisgarh and Punjab governments also announced plans to introduce e-governance and automate the ULBs of the state.

Meanwhile, the Thane Municipal Corporation in Maharashtra partially moved away from the existing manually operated water supply mechanism to a round-the-clock automated system. The Rajkot Municipal Corporation in Gujarat decided to install global positioning system on its water tankers to control theft. The Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board introduced spot billing and collection in the core areas of the city. Also, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) completed developing a geographic information system for the core area of the city, based on which details of the entire water supply network in the area can be seen online.

Customer grievance redressal was given due importance, with the Municipal Corporation for Greater Mumbai (MCGM) introduc-

ing water helplines for resolving water supply and sewerage-related issues and implementing an ICT-enabled customer-friendly payment and complaint redressal system. To complement this, the plumbers' association and hydraulic department of MCGM launched a drive to repair leakages in water pipelines and taps across the city. Among other instances, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) decided to extend the ITS Jansuvidha SMS automatic complaint redressal system to the south zone of the city to facilitate registration of complaints via SMS. Jamshedpur Utilities and Service Company (JUSCO) introduced a customer-centric approach through its sahyog kendras and the New Delhi Municipal Council launched a modern interactive voice response system for registering complaints online or via SMS.

The Kerala Water Authority launched a round-the-clock grievance redressal helpline number in Kochi to register complaints regarding water supply and sewerage, reporting water thefts and booking water tankers. It also launched a "Blue Brigade" for key cities of the state to maintain and repair water supply infrastructure. The Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation set up a cell to monitor contamination of drinking water.

Initiatives to implement other kinds of reforms were limited to the more proactive cities in Maharashtra, Gujarat and south India, with some beginnings in other cities as well.

Leak detection and metering

In Maharashtra and Gujarat, water and energy audits were launched by leading ULBs. MCGM decided to outsource the task of detection and repair of leakages in its water supply network to private players. It has engaged the Public Utilities Board, the national water agency of Singapore, to implement a Rs 100 million project to detect and repair leakages in the city's water distribution network. PCMC, also in Maharashtra, initiated the process to appoint a contractor to conduct an energy audit of the cities' water supply systems. In the neighbouring state of Goa, the government signed a memorandum of understanding with the Japan



International Cooperation Agency to reduce non-revenue water.

In Gujarat, AMC completed an energy audit for 11 pumping stations and 21 pumps under its water supply network, while the Surat Municipal Corporation secured recognition for achieving energy efficiency in water management. Down south, the Kerala Water Authority launched a leak detection and repair scheme in Thiruvananthapuram city; the Tamil Nadu government initiated an energy saving scheme for water supply services at 29 ULBs of the state; and the Kundapura Town Municipal Council in Karnataka managed to considerably reduce its non-revenue water. Meanwhile, metering initiatives picked up pace in select cities including Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, Hubli-Dharwad, Mumbai, Pimpri Chinchwad and Thane. The Uttar Pradesh government also approved a scheme to install water meters in seven cities in the state under the JNNURM.

Augmenting water resources

With the water crisis hitting hard in the summer months, many cities undertook asset maintenance to ensure optimal performance of existing infrastructure. In this context, the reliance on groundwater was also increased, with cities like Delhi, Nagpur, Patna, Pune, Salem and Tiruchi undertaking schemes for repairing defunct bore wells across the city. The MCGM decided to repair the city's bore wells and dug wells and allow housing societies to dig borewells to cope with water scarcity, while KMC withdrew the ban it had imposed on installing tube wells after a decrease in water supply from Garden Reach Water Works. On the other hand, the Gurgaon administration imposed a ban on drilling bore wells to maintain the groundwater level in the city.

Other cities, instead of relying on groundwater, undertook rainwater harvesting to augment water supply. These include the Allahabad Development Authority, which directed all zonal officers to identify buildings spanning over 200 square metres to imple-

ment rainwater harvesting and the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board, which organised an awareness generation camp for rainwater harvesting. In Bangalore, where a lot of emphasis has been laid on rainwater harvesting and water conservation, the Karnataka government decided to make rainwater harvesting legally binding through an amendment to Section 72(A) of the BWSSB Rules.

Further, the Karnataka High Court directed the state government to preserve the lakes in Bangalore. Meanwhile, BWSSB decided to recycle wastewater by establishing biogas plants at 14 sewage treatment plants, which would enable it to meet its power requirements at upcoming water treatment plants. Water rationing was also adopted by many cities such as Mumbai, Pune and areas in Jharkhand. In Guntur, water supply was rationalised by taking steps to implement a uniform supply policy across the city.

24x7 water supply became a buzzword in Karnataka after the success of the pilot projects in Hubli-Dharwad, Belgaum and Gulbarga. The state government has proposed to replicate the project in more places in the state under the Kannada Ganga project. The Udupi district planning committee, Mangalore City Corporation and PCMC proposed similar projects.

The Mysore City Corporation also conceptualised a similar project, the Rs 1.94 billion water supply management project, which it has decided to do with a private player, JUSCO. Notably, after protests from citizens, the corporation undertook stakeholder consultations in association with non-governmental organisations to improve understanding of the project, which has finally received community consent as well. Even Uttar Pradesh, which has so far been relatively less proactive in the sector, invited private sector participation to implement a 24x7 water supply project on pilot basis in Allahabad and Lucknow.

Other initiatives

In a unique effort towards interdepartmental

cooperation, the Salem City Municipal Corporation in Tamil Nadu formed a team to solve drinking water issues in the city, comprising members from the corporation, Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board, and other elected representatives. For better project implementation, PCMC initiated third-party inspection of all projects implemented under the JNNURM and the Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation in Tamil Nadu launched an e-tendering facility.

Meanwhile, to improve access to services for the urban poor, the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation in Maharashtra implemented a project to provide 24x7 water supply to the urban poor whereas the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation in Andhra Pradesh announced subsidies in water supply to the urban poor. At the state level, the Andhra Pradesh government directed the state's ULBs to utilise 40 per cent of their net annual funds for developing urban infrastructure in slum areas, including water supply, drainage and sewerage networks.

Going forward

These islands of excellence are being encouraged by the union government through various initiatives like the National Urban Water Awards and the JNNURM Awards to Best Cities, in the hope that this would encourage other cities to come forward and implement such reforms as well. Meanwhile, the size and scope of the JNNURM is set to increase with plans to include 28 more cities.

Moreover, the states of Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra have also decided to launch state-level urban renewal missions to replicate the JNNURM in cities that have been outside its ambit so far. Hence, the funding for implementing urban infrastructure projects is set to increase. In such a scenario, it is essential that cities take up implementation of reforms, so that the assets created under the various schemes and missions are sustainable over the long run. ▀

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