Chapter Six: A civilising mission in slums

A French man in his mid-30s introduced himself to me at my field office in Rajendranagar slum. Rajendranagar is one of the five slums that merge into each other just next to the upmarket residential area of Kormangala. The residents of Rajendranagar were relocated to the area in 1974 from near Dharmambudi lake at the centre of the city at a time when Kornamangala was a village outside Bangalore. He was working for a Bangalore based NGO with some experience of projects in North India and two others in Coorg, the birthplace of the Cauvery River some 350 kilometres south-west of Bangalore. He wanted to start a water supply project in a Bangalore slum and was trying to find an NGO with a 'good presence' in a slum with whose help he could implement the project.

He spoke well, full of earnest desire to help make a difference and seemed honestly concerned about the plight of the urban poor: 'do you know how the poor in slums have to suffer everyday without water?' In his mind, the blame for the situation lay squarely with the state. The solution lay, "with the people" and the state should be kept as far away as possible. The "government in this country" was "hopelessly corrupt", and "did not care at all about the poor" and "would only ever do good things around election time". When he was asked how, say, the Japanese state did such a good job of supplying water to its people, he replied confidently, "but the Indian government will never be like the Japanese."

The only contact his project would have had with the BWSSB was when it bought bulk water. This would be stored in a tank to be erected at the slum communities' expense. The families in the slum would then source water from this tank "paying Rs.2 for 12 litres of water." The local NGO partner would have to make sure that the 'community participates by paying for their water and maintaining cleanliness around the tank' while the man, not the local people, would act as a conduit between the community and the BWSSB ensuring timely supply of the bulk water after adequate payment had been 'mobilised' from the community. The amount they paid would

have to be enough to cover the costs of the water supplied and for the services of the local NGO for their efforts in ensuring community participation. For his part the young man "would coordinate the project and maintain an appropriate amount of pressure on the BWSSB."

The reason I raise this is not to highlight his patronising tone or accuse him of any kind of neo-colonialism or anything like that – that he is French isn't the issue although it obviously makes things a little more difficult. I raise it because his conceptualisation of the problem and his suggested prescription are surely consequences of the continuing metastasis of the concept of commodification and the further erosion of the state as a welfare provider, which makes this more than just a case of misplaced enthusiasm. In the same breath he talked of the importance of the underlying principle of 'full cost recovery' and subsidised pricing for those who could not afford to pay enough to cover the costs. Well, sorry, however much you may try, they're not going to fit together.

No matter how much you want to make sure everybody gets water, if you're running a supply primarily on the principle of full cost recovery it's the people who can help you recover those costs (the people with more money to pay) that you are going to serve first and foremost. The people who can't pay may still get served but making the balance sheet the primary determinant of whether or not you're running a good supply seems to be making the people who don't have so much to spend hostages to fortune.

This person didn't work for a water company, he wasn't going to gain monetary profit and he strongly believed that he had the best interests of people at heart. But the important question for the future does not concern his commitment but the ideas he expressed and whether they are worth pursuing.

His final point was, "look, I'm just trying to make a difference in one area and help some people." In a sense he's right and it feels churlish to condemn his intentions,

but his way can never be a comprehensive solution and nor should it be proposed as one. Water projects and studies often involve people who want to do something good for society and do not have any ulterior motives. It would be unwise and snobbish to sneer at these people as deluded do-gooders, and that is not my intention here, but it is more than a little frustrating, depressing even, to see these people advocating schemes and theories that will actively undermine their desire to make a change for the better.

The ideas are much easier to argue against if it's a Thames Water (the British Water Company) executive proposing them due to the obvious conflict of interest but the fact that the same arguments are used by people without something to gain shows their intuitive power and appeal. At worst this misplaced compassion results in confused thinking, as we shall see in the next section; at worst it acts as public justification for policies and projects that will, underneath their glossy exteriors, undermine the lives of the people for whom this benevolence is intended.

One NGO may do good work in one slum; forget the NGOs, one community might solve their own water needs by themselves and all power to them. But if we're working towards comprehensive, equitable coverage (in that everybody gets the same decent, basic supply), there's no way of escaping the need for a formal service, and the centrality of the state to that, especially in an urban area. That's not saying the state has to do everything - the more citizen participation in the reform of a local service the better – merely to say that if you want everybody to benefit from a water supply it seems necessary to have a centralised political body as the medium through which this can happen.

This is unfortunate as states and governments tend to be unresponsive, cumbersome, bureaucratic, inefficient, inequitable and repressive; the list goes on and on. But if we accept that there has to be a formal, overall supply, to which everybody should have access, the question becomes how to reform the state, not how to bypass it.

I will now look at a research study that 'proved' that the poor were willing to pay for water and that water should be seen as a commodity. I will then look at three examples of self-styled 'civil society' initiatives that involve water, and are of the Civil society used like this includes NGOs, research bodies, development funding agencies and private water companies. They work by bypassing the public provider and by taking on its functions and its constitutional obligations, although in these cases their targets are not 'global consumers' but the urban poor.

The way that water and people's water needs are viewed and conceptualised essentially comes down to whether the supply of water is viewed primarily as something that should be determined by either social motives or economic ones. Many people would say the latter ensures the former (therefore saying you don't need to choose between them). It's true that you can have both – a comprehensive, equitable supply can also be an efficient supply and indeed is better if it is – but the question is one of emphasis: the social motive – the motive that sees water as a fundamental right of all people– has to come first, even if this means subsidising the water service. No matter what the rest of a policy say about providing to the poor, if full cost recovery is a primary aim of the service, the social motive is undermined and has the potential to be scuttled.

Here I would like to discuss an influential research study, funded by the British NGO WaterAid in four Bangalore slums to show how collection of a range of pretty obvious data was used to argue that water supply should be cost-based.

WaterAid is an 'international charity dedicated to helping people escape the stranglehold of poverty and disease caused by living without safe water and sanitation[55]. It has operations in seventeen countries and 'works with individuals and families in their communities and use a mixture of low-cost technologies to deliver lasting water, sanitation and hygiene solutions (ibid). It is a fact that

[55] WaterAid Website, About us

WaterAid has many talented staff and it does a lot of good work around the world supplying people with water.

The conflicts come when we learn that WaterAid was initiated by water companies in the UK and receives substantial financial support from them (private water companies) and it has former and current employees of water multinationals such as Thames Water and United Utilities sit on its board[56].

This combination leads it into contradictory positions. It stresses that 'water is a human right' (WaterAid Website) but as we shall now it has funded a report that stresses that its supply should be determined by 'client power'. It says it 'strongly believes participation of people of poor countries in governance' but it is in Bangalore in a project called Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor with Thames Water, which, as we shall see in the next section, has tried to involve private companies in the water supply without the consent of the communities.

Are they being Served?

Anyway, whatever the true nature of the organisation, if there is ever such a thing, it is the study produced under their funding, *'Are They Being Served?'* which I am interested in here.

The study was funded by WaterAid. The data collection was conducted by a Bangalore based organisation, the Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA), which had previously worked in the four slums that were chosen for the survey. The data was analysed and the report written by the Public Affairs Centre, a research based organisation whose founder was awarded the World Bank's Gill Memorial Award for outstanding public service just before GBWASP was set rolling. This

[56] http://www.publicintegrity.org/water/db.aspx?act=db&sec=org&oID=27

comes after having worked for the Bank in Washington from 1985-91 as an advisor on 'public sector management'.

Here are the study's major findings, based on the data collected by the local NGO, APSA:

'with regard to drinking water, it has been observed that there is more access to public sources than to individual connections. While a substantial proportion of people have access to these sources, feedback on the sources shows up the problems that slum residents face to access drinking water through two main sources – public taps and piped water supply.

1.Public taps

- Availability of water throughout the year in public taps is reported by only around 30% of the slum residents. Almost all respondents go to nearby localities to fetch water during the scarcity periods in summer months.
- Frequency of water is very low in both CMCs with residents of Mahadevapura worse off with most of them getting water only once in a week.
- Breakdowns are common with 77% of respondents reporting breakdowns within three months.
- Surprisingly only about 44% made a complaint about the breakdowns and that too mostly orally. This indicates either apathy among residents or a sense of helplessness. Even those who complained reported that there was no prompt action taken on their complaint.
- Overall dissatisfaction with service through public taps is very high (over 60%).

2. Piped water

- Over 60% households report availability throughout the year. Satisfaction with adequacy is relatively higher. As there is the same amount of water flowing in public

and individual taps the relative satisfaction expressed by users is proportionate to the amount of people accessing water.

- Timings were found to be convenient by a reasonable number of households though there were issues on foul smell.
- Complete satisfaction with piped water is higher compared to public taps but there is still scope for improvement[57].'

Following this was the major finding of the report: the poor are willing to pay for a better water supply. The report found that, 'communities from [all the surveyed areas] are willing to pay for individual connections in large proportions' and, 'considering the amounts they spend on getting water from other sources when they do not have access to piped water, the amounts they are willing to pay are just marginally higher.' (ibid)

Also recommended is a widening of the piped water supply network: 'the findings from this study strongly articulate the need for expanding the network of piped water supply in the slums. Findings on willingness to pay clearly show that residents of all slums are willing to pay for piped water connections. For those families that cannot afford to pay for connections or monthly charges, public taps can continue to be sources but with increased frequency of supply[58].'

So, water supply in slums is grossly inadequate, people prefer having an individual connection in their house to having to share a malfunctioning public tap and people are willing to pay for that connection. The first two points almost go without saying. Of course people want individual connections and of course everybody, including people living on undeclared land or the urban homeless should be given individual connections.

[57] *Are They Being Served?* Research by Association for Promoting Social Action, published by WaterAid
[58] Ibid

Of course mothers who kept their pots overnight in a line should not have to crowd round malfunctioning public taps every other day, hoping that when water does splutter forth there will be enough to quench their children's thirst and, if they are lucky, wash them, but the issue for debate is how people should be given these individual connections and under what terms; whether or not they come as part of a comprehensive pro-poor policy with subsidised tariffs and such like. Problems arise when promises of individual connections used to justify the shutting off of public taps are not fulfilled (as we saw in the last chapter) and only slum dwellers living on declared land (with formal property rights) are even considered for them, leaving those on undeclared land or the streets with no water supply as their only previous source – the public tap – has been shut off with nothing to replace it. This is not so much a fault of the study but it shows how careful you have to be in the current context not to produce research that could be misused.

I have already seen the need for care in drawing too many conclusions from the evidence showing willingness to pay. Families in desperate situations do not have a choice. Most urban poor families live a hand to mouth life. In slums children can be seen running with small empty bottles in the evening to buy that day's kerosene to cook that day's food from the money the family earned that day. This level of risk and the proportionate desire for security will invariably, as we saw in the introduction, render people willing to pay more than they should for water, access to which is surely one of the most fundamental needs if any sort of security of living is to be achieved. On inspection of the data, although this is not mentioned in the report, it turns out that willingness to pay is inversely proportionate to the frequency, quality and accessibility of water in their particular area[59]. In other words the people with the worst supply – those most desperate for water - were prepared to pay the most for a better supply.

After this presentation of the data the report goes on to assert that 'the state has a responsibility to recognize the right of all people to this vital resource, and to provide all citizens with this resource in a way that does not compromise the right to life

[59] Ibid

enshrined in the constitution, either in letter or in spirit' but also that, 'though the 'rights' based approach to water for the poor is well appreciated, there is an increasing realisation that water is no longer a 'free good'. There is a strong argument that nominal user fees might eventually empower poor users by legitimising their entitlements and enable them to voice their 'client power' in powerful terms[60].'

What? Why does an approach that recognises the right to water automatically imply that water is a 'free good'? Food is seen as a right after all and yet nobody argues it should be free except, and here's the crux of the argument, when people cannot afford to pay for it. It costs money to supply food to people in a famine but even though the people can't afford to pay they still get food (assuming measures are being taking to stop the famine). It costs money to supply water to a city and people have to pay for that but it is not this payment that should determine whether or not they get water – if they can't pay they should still get it. Casual remarks like water is 'no longer a free good' in highly influential studies can seriously undermine this crucial caveat.

And why do people's 'entitlements' need to be legitimised by money? Surely the point of being entitled to something is that you have a right to it no matter if you can pay or not. A person is not entitled to a pair of nice shoes until she had paid the shopkeeper for them. But does her right to water need to be legitimised in this way? If her entitlement to water is dependent on her client power does that mean a rich person (who presumably has more client power) is more entitled to it?

The problem is that the report is trying to have its cake and eat it (or have its water and drink it) by first saying everybody has a right to water but following that up by saying, actually, people only really have that right if they pay for it. For the same reasons it is nonsensical to highlight that the state's duty to supply water. If the state has a responsibility to supply water to its citizens then why is client power an issue?

[60] *Are they being served?* Research by Association for Promoting Social Action, Published by WaterAid.

The answer may be that the state is not perfect and will be more inclined to provide water to people who can pay for it. But if it is okay that a person's supply is dependent on her client power then surely it makes sense to get a private company in as that will be far better attuned to people's capacity and willingness to pay (client power) than the state. As we are constantly told the state does not respond to the market as well as companies so if you want water's supply to be determined by capacity to pay then don't fanny around holding on to outdated notions of a responsible state: let a company supply it!

It is this kind of flip-flopping that has made the report so popular as it seems to square the circle and make commodification consistent with and necessary to a rights-based approach. *Are They Being Served* was quoted by water companies and international development agencies on a regular basis in public consultations and official meetings that I was invited to participate in. Unsurprisingly they focus on the facts that water should be seen as an economic good and that the poor were willing to pay. With a gleam of triumph in their eyes they have produced it to show that, look, the poor can pay! The poor even want to pay so let's get the companies in and help them fulfil their human right to choose to buy. Let the poor pay for water! They also, somewhat bizarrely, seemed to be using the study's recommendation for an increase in the amount of individual connections as further evidence of the appropriateness of privatisation.

The problem is the people living in the slums may not have been quite as eager to buy in to this new conception of water as the writers of the report. After seeing what this report was being used for APSA went back to the people to share these developments and gauge their reactions to it. In the preface to the 2nd Edition of the report, the Executive Director explained:

> 'It is exactly a year since the first edition of 'Are they being served?' was released. Much has happened in Karnataka in the past year regarding the issue of water supply and sanitation and this report has

been used by many different parties. But it is unfortunate that the intended objective of the report to empower the poor to participate in a comprehensive planning process for improved water services to slums has not been met. On the contrary, the report is being used on various platforms as justification for involving private companies in the supply of water and sanitation[61].'

The people made it very clear that, while they would be prepared to pay for water, they did see it as their right and they do not want to be paying their money to a private company. In the 2nd Edition, which WaterAid refused to fund, I documented their reactions:

> 'all the people consulted .... said they held the government responsible for provision of their water supply. When asked why, they said that was the reason they voted to elect representatives. Most people expressed the view that the state should provide water free of cost but said they were willing to pay a fixed minimum charge for individual connections. When informed about the proposed involvement of private companies in the GBWASP there was unanimous opposition. It was stressed again that water and sanitation was the responsibility of their elected representatives. They felt the state should provide individual connections and should take care of the Operations and Maintenance of the system.' (Urs and Whittell, *Are they Being Served* 2nd Edition)

One of the reasons that the first edition of the study was packed next to the indoor putting kits of Thames Water employees was the evidential support it seemed to give for their Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP) project. As the website puts it, 'WSUP is itself a partnership – between public, private and civil

[61] Preface to *Are they Being Served* 2nd Edition

society organizations – and provides a new model that engages businesses and communities to achieve real, meaningful and practical solutions..... to expand and improve water and sanitation services in low income urban communities in developing countries[62].

These partners are, from the private sector, Thames Water, Unilever and Halcrow Group, a UK based infrastructure and consultancy firm that has consistently advocated for the privatisation of water supplies around the world. From civil society came the NGOs WaterAid, Care International and Water for the People and the World Wildlife Fund and the UK's Cranfield University is also a member. Other than Bangalore it is currently preparing projects in Madagascar, Kenya, Mozambique, Brazil, Nicaragua and Zambia[63].

Its stated objectives are, 'to identify affordable and sustainable means of water services delivery to low-income consumers around the world, and then to demonstrate that these work, and can be scaled up to provide an efficient and effective long-term solution within the overall delivery of services to domestic, commercial and industrial customers.'

Its method involves working, 'directly with Local Service Providers to design, develop and implement effective solutions. We drive and facilitate every stage in the process, ensuring that the people we are working for get the safe water and basic sanitation they need and want[64].'

[62] www.wsup.com
[63] http://www.wsup.com/projects/index.htm

[64] http://www.wsup.com/how/designsolutions.htm

The website explains that,

> WSUP projects will work on two different levels: WSUP itself coordinates, scopes, and develops a project on a non-profit basis, while a Project Consortium implements the project on a limited-profit basis, subject to appropriate competitive procedures. (ibid)

WSUP also puts a lot of emphasis on the importance of local participation in its projects. Its website explains that, 'WSUP projects will include effective community participation from the earliest stage of each project, effectively placing the potential 'consumers' at the helm in defining and designing appropriate water supply and sanitation service schemes that meet their needs and capacities. Social benefits will feature prominently in criteria for the acceptance of project feasibility studies and bidding proposals. Each project implementation plan will develop a tailored strategy on how to achieve this locally[65].'

But what if people decide that supplying water for a profit, is not an 'appropriate water supply and sanitation service' to 'meet their needs and capacities? And if WSUP is coordinating, scoping and developing the project and has already agreed on the conceptual tenets that water is a commodity, people buy it as consumers and that it should be sold for a profit, what more is left to decide? It talks about forming committees in slums but presumably the committee members will only be talking about how best to implement an already designed project rather than how they think their water needs should best be met. It is the 'tyranny of participation', again.

Unfortunately its engagement with the local communities in Bangalore has so far not proved as deep as has been advertised. On learning of Thames Water's involvement APSA, which had been approached to act as the local NGO in the project said that, being a member of the Campaign against Water Privatisation they couldn't have anything to do with the project. The next NGO to be approached also

[65] Ibid

came to the same conclusion. The Campaign against water Privatisation issued a statement opposing any involvement by a private company in the water supply of the city, however well presented it may have been. To their credit WaterAid, despite being under serious pressure to continue, has also pulled out of its involvement in the Bangalore project. This has not deterred the organisers though and they have set up an office in the city and are looking, after gaining sanction from the government to do so, for suitable slums for the pilot projects.

Why are the companies involved in this? According to WSUP the companies involved, 'are not motivated by commercial interest in the projects. Instead they provide their most valuable resource: people with skills, experience and know-how in water and sanitation. And their expertise is provided to the projects at cost or in kind. Our members are seeking to move beyond traditional corporate responsibility mechanisms - and to provide their staff with opportunities to dedicate some time to projects that directly contribute towards a better life for poor people in urban areas. And for local private sector partners, business cannot thrive in societies that thirst or have poor health[66].'

They are using a strange definition of expertise. In the summer of 2006 Thames Water admitted to citizens of London, the water supply of which it runs, that it was losing 915 million litres a day - a third of all the water it was meant to supply to them - equivalent to more than 300 swimming pools – through leaks? The only expertise it demonstrated was in filling its coffers: at the same time that it was leaking this water it raised prices in the city by 21% and posted profits of £360 million - Rupees 1476 Crores. (Profits up, prices up – ans so are the excuses as Thames Water fails to plug the leaks, The Guardian, Mark Milner and Miles Brignall, Thursday June 22, 2006).

[66] http://www.wsup.com/how/membership.htm

WSUP is not even an example of the private sector giving money for 'good' causes. For a start the UK government has given 4 million pounds to it through a DFID grant of which almost £800,000 (Rupees 6.6 Crores) was earmarked for the Bangalore project (DFID, FOI request, Freedom of Information Act 2000 request reference no: F2006/151). So rather than asking what Thames Water are doing, a more apposite question may be what are DFID doing giving 4 million pounds of UK taxpayers' money to a project it appears the residents of Bangalore do not want and which involves a company that has hardly best served the needs of the residents of their capital city?

And anyway, the point of WSUP is that its projects are designed to become self-sustaining, so that the poor buy and manage water within the slum community, thereby absolving its members from serious financial contributions. It's great business for Thames Water as they get their name in a project that will no doubt be advocated as a model to be replicated throughout the world for minimal cost. What they do with this reputation remains to be seen.

But in a sense trying to fathom the participants' motives for this is beside the point. There are more fruitful lines of enquiry and analysis than imagining oneself as a fly on a boardroom wall. For a start, what is the Karnataka State Government doing letting organisations such as this take the responsibility for supplying water for the poor? It seems anybody who turns up in the city wanting to help the poor is given carte blanche to implement their schemes; indeed they are encouraged to do so. Not only that but, as we saw with the AusAid project, their findings and models are taken up as official policy on the issue. This policy is not to be implemented by the government but by more of these organizations that just want to help.

In the case of WSUP this may be just bureaucratic apathy and indifference to the situation of the poor and a disinclination to undertake the rigorous, uphill work needed to meaningfully address this situation. Of course this is not good enough - it is exactly the sort of bureaucratic lethargy that needs to be eradicated. But it is hard

to see how this will change if projects like WSUP are encouraged. They are essentially trying to do the government's work. This is not reforming government, it is sidelining it.

Also in Bangalore recently has been Water Partners International, a US based charity that, 'envisions the day when everyone in the world can take a safe drink of water[67].'. Its website, a triumph of humanitarian design, replete with tear-jerking photos of young girls sitting on dirty steps with empty cups (no doubt waiting for people to come and let them be customers) asks potential donators, 'are you a half-full thinker? For many the reality is empty. Help fill it.' (http://www.water.org/). To do this it 'uses [its] expertise to foster high-quality, sustainable, community-level water supply projects' and promotes, 'innovative solutions that enable communities to take a leading role in solving their own water supply problems.' (http://water.org/about/). It is a major operation with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is itself looking to enter the water sector.

Anyway, the CEO of Water Partners International came to APSA, which seems to be the first stop for all these bodies when they come to Bangalore, with the stated purpose of improving the access of the poor to water by giving them financial support for this. They wanted the partnership of an established NGO in this venture.

The proposed method to help the poor was to give the local NGO a grant of $50000, which could be increased to $100000 if required, to establish sound financial credit systems. This would be followed by loans to the NGO for on-lending to the poor for them to access water at interest rates decided at its discretion. This was believed to strengthen the "the client power" (Water Partners International) of slum dweeling communities. There were very strict terms to what this money could be used for though: after expressing their belief that it was the government's responsibility to supply water to the people, APSA staff, many of them from slums, asked if the

[67] http://water.org/about/

money could be used to lend to the poor for heath requirements, for example to address water-borne diseases. The answer was no.

APSA then arranged for the CEO to meet residents of some slums to discuss the proposal. The reception was not welcoming with people somewhat impolitely drawing parallels with the East India Company. One lady said, 'they came with an offer to support us in trade and within no time they were ruling us. They stayed put for 250 years. We see no difference between you and our colonisers. Leave.'

The point here is not whether Water Partners International are just like the East India Company or not, but that their money is not wanted by the people, in this community at least, for whom it is intended. Obviously it is another example of a way to normalise the commodifcation of water but it is one of the more incoherent. Its proponents may say that it is only a stop-gap measure to help people pay for water that they currently buy at expensive rates from private vendors. But these people would probably also say that water supply should be determined by the market. If that is the case then, according to the basic principles of supply and demand, giving people loans for the sole purpose of buying water will mean that the cost of water will go up! On top of this in the long run the capacity of people to pay for water will be further reduced as they will have to pay off the interest on the loans which they have only been allowed to spend on buying water. Water Partners International is as I said a charity: for much of its revenue it relies on donations from individuals from the US. Their concern could be put to better use.

'Good Living - for the people, of the people, by the people'

This was the headline of the half page advertisement by the Hubli-Dharwad Municipal Corporation (HDMC) in the Deccan Herald newspaper in early 2007 when Manivannan was the Commissioner. Its purpose was to inform people in the twin cities of Hubli-Dharwad of the formation of 'citizen's committees' in every polling ward, through which 'every citizen' could 'contribute to the cities' overall

development' so that, 'a common vision and strategy for the overall development of the city could be derived through a participatory process'[68].

The HDMC advert is part of a city development strategy programme funded by Cities Alliance, a 'global coalition of cities and their development partners committed to scaling up successful approaches to poverty reduction[69].' These partners include the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, USAid, DFID and various other Northern governments. The fact that its Consultative Group, which is responsible for developing the Alliance's long-term strategy and approving its annual work programme, is co-chaired by the Vice President, Private Sector Development and Infrastructure, of the World Bank, gives a good idea of its stance on public policy reform. The only Indian member on the policy advisory board of Cities Alliance is the founder director of a Mumbai based NGO SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres) which has taken the lead in promoting land sharing in Mumbai (and she is also a member of the national level Technical Advisory Group of the JNNURM).

Its slogan is 'Cities without Slums'. Land sharing is one of the policies they propose for achieving this vision (as is public-private partnerships in water supply) so a more detailed slogan may be, 'Cities Without People Who Used To Live In Slums Until Their Homes Were Knocked Down To Make Way For A Mall'. That's not quite as catchy though.

The term Citizen's Committee makes it feel that all the citizens of an area can, if they choose, actively participate in issues of governance of their area and beyond. But this all depends on how you define citizenship. The advert had its own criteria for this, which it revealed in an eligibility list for committee membership. The first and probably the most important was, 'be a regular property tax payer'. At a stroke all the people who live in slums, the urban homeless, lower income families and many

[68] An advertisement placed by the Hubli-Dharwad Municipal Corporation in Deccan Herald
[69] http://www.citiesalliance.org/about-ca/about-ca.html

middle class families who do not own their own property are excluded from participating in the development of their own city.

The second criterion is: 'be a registered voter in the polling booth corresponding to the citizen's committee'. Now, this may seem uncontroversial but it can be very difficult for slum dwellers and the urban homeless to access their right to franchise as existing procedures prevent them from enrolling on the voter's list. For example, Rama Devi, an activist from Bangalore has recently brought attention to a government practice whereby the place of habitat of any new applicant for the voters list has to be inspected and approved by the local revenue officer. 'I do not know who decided to introduce this new procedure' she says 'the Revenue Officer does not accept the place of habitat criterion unless residents have a pukka house and have paid their taxes hardly ever gives approval to slum dwellers or the urban homeless[70]'. So they do not get to be in the voter's list which mean they do not get on to the citizen's committees.

The poor are here in a catch-22 situation as they can't get a Voter's ID until they have proof of resident but they cannot obtain land titles until they have a Voter's ID card. This effectively disqualifies them from any kind of participation in local affairs for want of legal documents. The right to participate, it seems, is in the property, not the individual citizen.

This is not just class based discrimination. Even for those propertied citizens who can join the committees their right to participate is restricted to 'overseeing effective implementation of development programmes and schemes in respective polling booth areas'. A citizen's committee will therefore not be able to question or overturn the decision made by the state government to let Veolia manage the water supply in the area. It can only participate in implementing a decision already made by distant, unknown individuals and entities. In effect, toothless committees are being set up in

[70] Ramadevi, a street educator from a women's organisation. She has been working with the urban homeless in Bangalore for more than 10 years

the name of participatory democracy to legitimise the subversion of democratic processes of decision making and governance affecting the people for whom these processes are, to borrow from the advert, of, by and for.

The processes that are being played out in Hubli Dharwad point out to how meticulously the poor are being denied their rights even as the middle class are being co-opted into believing that they are actively participating in societal transformation. The issue then goes beyond that of water supply to how banal this deliberation of participatory democracy is, in the face of increasing corporate power especially in developing countries.

Cities Alliance are also involved in Bangalore's water supply. This is as part of their recently approved 'Bruhat Bangalore Comprehensive Development and Slum Upgrading Strategy':

> 'The City Managers Association of Karnataka will receive a $74,419 preparatory grant to provide technical assistance to the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagar Palike (BBMP), the Greater Bangalore Municipal Corporation, to set up a strategic advisory cell within BBMP. The cell is to work closely with public utility companies to 1) elaborate policies and develop an action plan to address infrastructure service delivery in areas of the urban poor, 2) create a city development and slum upgrading strategy to be detailed in a formal proposal to the CA, and 3) develop a strategy for resource mobilisation focusing on property and administrative taxes. This project is co-financed by the BBMP ($3,000), JBIC ($7,000) and USAID/FIRE($15,500)[71].'

In terms of water, they have taken up the gauntlet laid down by AusAid and the Social Development Unit and want to extend the work of these agencies to over three hundred more slums in the rest of BMP area.

[71] www.citiesalliance.org/publications/newsletters/april-07/april-07-project-approved.html- 30k-

For the two years they have tries to find NGOs that are willing to help them in this venture and finally signed contracts with five organisations. This is a far larger project than WSUP (although the WSUP model may well be taken up as part of it) but the same questions we raised there about the state's role in letting Cities Alliance do this can be brought up again.

As the project has not started yet there is no experiential evidence to judge it on but the (accepted) proposal it gave to the BWSSB gives a good idea of the principles it will be operating on. Talking about the work of its predecessor, the Social Development Unit and its attitude towards public taps, it explains:

'The SDU also assumed the responsibility of reducing slum dwellers reliance in public taps and offering them the options of either individual or shared connections .....in many slums people have also connected illegally to the system and are enjoying free water. Efforts are on to tackle this menace[72].'

In a way this is a breath of fresh air as it is a rare example of a document from one of these initiatives that doesn't mince its words. But just to give one example of the menace of somebody 'enjoying free water': I was waiting for a bus at a corner of a busy, dangerous junction near the airport through which hundreds of eastward bound lorries negotiate their way everyday. A young boy was bending down from the footpath, his head sticking into the road, reaching down into the gutter. He was collecting water from a leaking pipe. After five minutes he pulled out a full, half litre bowl. He had a five-litre bucket next to him that was filling up so his family wouldn't go thirsty that day. The people who think this 'a menace' will soon be overseeing the water supply of approximately 400 slums.

The proposal also stressed that:

[72] Proposal of Cities Alliance to BWSSB

> 'After successful implementation of the Pilot Project it has been considered imperative to replicate these experiences to the best advantage of the BWSSB, to increase its consumer base and broaden the revenue base[73]'.

But if they're looking at slums because they will broaden their revenue base, Cities Alliance will be sorely disappointed as poor people live in slums: people who don't make that much money, people who may actually cause your revenue base to thin. The focus of all these projects is on supplying water to the poor. So while the GBWASP appears to have been aimed at satisfying the water needs of Bangalore's non-poor citizens, responsibility for the water supply of the poor has been handed over to agencies like those below. For both the state and these agencies this must seem like a win-win situation: the BWSSB does not have to worry about the tricky task of getting water to the urban poor while these agencies gain more projects and further justification for the funds they are receiving. And the companies and development agencies that are giving these funds gain further 'proof' that the commodification of water and often the involvement of private companies are the best ways to solve the world's water problems.

For the poor who they are serving however the benefits are not so obvious. Aside from the threats that commodification and privatisation pose to their future access to water, projects like these further distance them from the welfare provisions that their state is constitutionally obliged to provide. These are not just filling gaps in the state's water supply, they are serving to absolve the state of responsibility to provide all its citizens with the same basic water supply.

It is open to debate how connected these initiatives are and to what extent they are consciously concerned with preparing the ground for privatisation but when taken together they demonstrate the scale and breadth of the challenge facing anybody

[73] Ibid

who wants to prevent processes like privatisation and commodification. It is to these people that I turn in the next chapter.

Just before I do though, it's important to note that privatisation hasn't actually been suggested for the poor in Bangalore. If anybody, it's the middle classes and above who are going to get their water from private companies through GBWASP (if the privatisation goes ahead). So is privatisation the issue?

This point has been made by the Director of the Adam Smith International consultancy firm (the producers of a pro-privatisation pop song in Tanzania) in response to a report attacking water privatisation worldwide as detrimental to the needs of the poor:

'... it is privatisation of water that seems to get the anti-privatisation element of the NGO community most hot under the collar, even though such activity represents less that 1 per cent of all developing world privatisation. Again it's puzzling why this is so, since bringing the private sector into urban water supply, usually done by management contract, is neither an attack on the interests of the poor, nor a huge help to the poor either. Piped water supply in most poor developing countries is only available to a small urban elite constituting a tiny proportion of the population. The poor buy their supplies from private vendors at 10 times the price or more. Rather than a futile debate about how to supply water to the elite, wouldn't it be more productive to focus on developing new approaches - involving government, communities and the private sector - to expanding piped supply to the poor in rural and peri-urban areas[74]' - (and obviously the poor friendly tone of the argument is undermined by the fact that Adam Smith International are paid with money described as 'development aid' to spread water privatisation around the world, as in the case of Tanzania).

[74] http://www.bond.org.uk/networker/2004/dec04/opinion.htm

The obvious canard here is that the 'new approaches' he is talking about are no doubt of the ilk as those I have been discussing in this chapter.

However debating the merits of privatisation is not just 'a futile debate on how to supply water to the elite'. As he says, the policy focus should be about extending the piped water service. If private companies are managing that, even if it is now just for the elites, then one would assume they will be managing it when the poor are connected, which means privatisation of the piped water supply does matter. Otherwise there will be a two-tier society, which would not be desirable for a host of reasons, and effectively two different systems of water supply, which could not work.

If the goal is a piped water supply to every household then how would it work if the 'elites' had their water managed by a private company and the poor by a 'new approach', considering that they are all getting water from the same source, and that water is sharing the same pipes for much of its journey from the river to the tap? The companies selling to the 'elites' would therefore be charging a higher price for providing the same service as the 'new approaches'. This would not even be to subsidise the poor as the higher prices would be going straight back to the company.

Again, we're back to the point made at the beginning of the chapter that practically and ethically the only aim can be a formal, comprehensive water supply that serves all citizens equally. Privatisation does matter for the poor if it is being promoted as the best way to run that service.

The '*Are they being served*' willingness to pay study was part of the program taken up by the BWSSB starting 2007 to connect about fifty slums in Bangalore to the water grid based on commercial principles. The motivation was to reduce non-revenue water and to increase BWSSB revenue. It involved a dual strategy to remove public taps and forcing people to go for individual connections and strengthening the "client power" of slum dwellers by charging them a user fee. According to the ADB (2007), this was a win-win situation. The view follows

controversial prescription of good governance, which is that incentives and institutional systems that are good for the market are also good for the poor. As mentioned by a BATF member (quoted earlier), issues of slums is like relating to a political cesspool. So the idea of the project was to convert the disorderly mob in slums into obedient consumers. In a civilising manner, this was then looked at as being good for the evolution of slum dwelling communities.

A department called Social Development Unit (SDU) was started within the BWSSB for this purpose. The basic objective of the SDU was to achieve financial efficiency of BWSSB by encouraging slum dwellers to be obedient consumers. The outcome of the project raises serious issues of whether the urban poor can access basic services like water and sanitation if the primary agenda of the project is to achieve commercial efficiency.

The project also excluded elected representatives and marginalised voices of the poor who opposed it. The project adopted two strategies to implement its program. The first was to employ NGOs to mobilise the communities and the second was to form user groups in slums. One NGO was employed for each community with the specific responsibility of forming water and sanitation committee (WATSAN). The WATSAN committee was an additional layer in the project hierarchy and was to be an intermediary between the project team and individual households. It was "empowered" to make decisions on behalf of the community. It was also responsible to instil a sense of ownership among the community about the pre-determined project. As Cornwall and Gaventa (2001) described the SDU project promoted a shallow concept of decision making and participation that only allowed people to choose from pre-defined frames of reference.

The second responsibility of the WATSAN committee was to convince the community members that they have to pay for services which cannot be provided for free. The third responsibility was to manage and maintain the operation of new services in the slums. As Ackerman (2004) states "this model of participation are of

a functional nature and depoliticised without being able to genuinely address questions of structural power between users of a service and the provider. However, there were legal hurdles to remove all the public taps as it was a social obligation to provide people of Bangalore public water as per the BWSSB Act, 1964. So the SDU ensured the BWSSB Board to amend Section 62C and 85C making it punishable by fine and imprisonment for people to have "illegal" connections.

The board also deleted section 38 of the Act which specified how the BWSSB could through public taps, provide water to the masses. SDU had a public campaign to inform slum communities about these amendments. There was no public consultation when these amendments to the BWSSB Act were made.

Despite all these the project failed to achieve its set objectives both in providing services to the poor and in making obedient consumers of the poor. In a personal interview, the Director of the SDU said that the failure was because of the WATSAN committees which could not "explain the benefits of the project to slum people (sic)".

In a report to BWSSB, the SDU Director writes with dismay that "it is easy to get the slum people to have individual meters but it is difficult to make them pay". In interviews conducted in slums, community members voiced their concern about the project being opaque with no clear information on what it meant to their Right to Water or their ability to pay. A woman single parent from a slum in the Northeast of Bangalore showed me a bill of Rs.43000/- which according to BWSSB was an accumulated amount with interest for the unpaid bill. The project had clearly failed. This did not stop the ADB to extol the project as a "Grand Success". In April of 2009 more than a year after the SDU director wrote to BWSSB about the failure of the project, the ADB put up a detailed note on its website about the grand success of providing water to the urban poor in Bangalore. It said "the project offers affordable water and with its perks of encouraging people's participation is attracting the poorest of the poor in Bangalore". It quotes "one satisfied slum resident" as saying