



Unheard **Voices**



UN-HABITAT

Water for Asian Cities Programme



## MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Values guiding the UN Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals include Freedom, Equality, Solidarity, Tolerance, Respect for nature and Shared responsibility.

### Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

**Target 9:** Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

**Target 10:** Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

**Target 11:** By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation (Goal 7) requires an integrated approach. Without sanitation and hygiene, safe water is much less useful for health.

## Water for Asian Cities Programme

The Water for Asian Cities (WAC) Programme launched during the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Water Forum, is a collaborative initiative between the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Governments of Asia. The overriding thrust of the Programme is to enhance capacity at city, country and regional levels and to create an enabling environment for new flows of pro-poor investments in the urban water and sanitation sector with a view to meet the water and sanitation related Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in Asian cities. The Capacity Building component of the Programme focuses on four key areas:

- Pro-poor urban water governance
- Promoting urban water demand management
- Promoting integrated urban environmental sanitation.
- Income generation for the urban poor through community-based water and sanitation services

The four thematic thrust areas of the Programme should not be seen as mutually free standing priorities but closely interconnected through a number of cross cutting themes, notably, gender mainstreaming, urban sustainability, poverty reduction, environmental protection and integrated water resources management. The programme shall be addressing these cross cutting priorities through targeted interventions in the water and sanitation sector.

The WAC Programme will be implemented in one city in each of five countries from Asia representing five sub-regions viz. South Asia, Southeast Asia, Mekong, East and Central Asia and the Pacific.



**Some VOICES of  
India's underprivileged women**

## Slum Women's **Voices** in Mumbai

**“We have to steal water by illegally tapping the underground water pipe.”**

**Sagira**, a young woman, lives in an illegal slum of 30,000 people on the pavements of Mumbai. She gets up in search of water at 3.30 in the morning but often has to buy water for cooking. Rehmat, who also lives in the same slum, relates, “We have to steal water by illegally tapping the underground water pipe. The water is available from 4.00 a.m. to 7.00 a.m. We have started charging Rs.20 per month per family and several people have started buying and using this illegal water. We recovered the cost of installing the tap used for stealing water in a few days. Now more people have started tapping underground pipes for stealing water. The police have also come to know of it, but we have put a few boys on the lookout on information on the police's arrival, we cover up everything. After the police has left, we fill our buckets again.”

**Sunita**, who lives in another illegal slum in the same city, has to walk through slush and mud every morning to fetch water. Going to the water source takes her an hour while the return home takes even longer as she carries the water pots on her head. There are often fights near the water tap, especially when anyone tries to jump the queue. Sometimes, these fights end up in the police station.

**Shalini** lives in a slum settlement of 3000 families. She told us that two years ago, a group of 10-15 families, among this her own, collected money and got a water connection each. For the past six months, however, there is no water at all in these taps and she has had to buy water for drinking, washing, bathing... everything. “We pay Rs.10-15 for water every day!” she said, “We have to hire bicycles or auto-rickshaws to bring water...The people from whom we are buying water have tapped water lines going into big buildings and have put pumps to draw water. Some of them sell water to individual families at Rs.100 a month.



**“Men bathing near the taps would... used to pass all kinds of vulgar remarks at us. It was so humiliating”**

**Jyoti**, who lives in a slum in Pune, described her experiences regarding collection of water and said, “I used to get up early in the morning... and the first thing I had to do was to bring two *handaas* of water from the taps near the toilets. Sometimes the toilets would get blocked and filthy water would collect. We had to fill water in all that mess. There were flies and insects flying all around. Sometimes my children would fall into the trenches and half my attention was on them.”

There were other problems that added to Jyoti’s woes... “Men used to wash clothes near the taps and make us wait for a long time before we could fill our *handaas*. Men bathing near the taps would soap themselves and deliberately shake their heads vigorously so that the lather used to fly all around and fall on the water as we filled our *handaas*. They used to pass all kinds of vulgar remarks at us. It was so humiliating... in order to avoid having to face all this, I often used to walk much further to another housing area to get water!”

**“My daughter had to stop going to school so as to be home when the tanker arrives.”**

A slum formed by some 280 families has developed on land belonging to the Ministry of Defence; because it is illegal, the Municipality does not, and cannot provide the slum dwellers with any facilities. A woman living in the slum spoke out, “Every day we get water brought to us by tankers. The delivery time is not regular. My daughter had to stop going to school so as to be home when the tanker arrives. Occasionally when the tanker does not come, we cannot wash, cook or bathe. When it does, there is a big scramble for water. We had an awful accident two years ago – a young girl got crushed under the wheels of a tanker as she hurried to fill water before the tanker halted.”



## Slum Women's **Voices** in Delhi

**Omvathi**, a 48-year-old slum dweller from New Delhi, belongs to a family of 10 members. Talking about the availability of water she said, "There are no water sources near the house." Everyday, she and her daughters have to walk a long way to fetch water from a standpost, which delivers water for a fixed period. It takes her more than 2 hours to fill up two five-litre bottles. She has to make two or three trips each day... during summer they have to often do without water.

**Ramani** is an inhabitant of Govindpuri slum in Delhi, which has no source of water supply. The women go to the neighboring slum, where water is available only after 3 O'clock in the afternoon. However, because everyone arrives at 3 O'clock to collect water, there are long queues and frequent fights. Despite this arduous routine of walking long distances, standing in queues and fighting with others, there are days when she does not get any water at all. Ramani reveals a sense of hopelessness at her condition and believes that everyone in the slum has accepted the existing conditions, and do not try to visualize a better life.

**Sunita** has an illegal connection, installation of which cost her Rs.1500. Earlier, she had to spend Rs.150 a month to buy water. Although satisfied with the water connection, she is worried that it might be disconnected if the Municipal authority discovers it.



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# Unheard **Voices**

## Search for Safety & Dignity

The conditions that slum women cope with, in relation to sanitation, are imaginable to those living outside their society. Here are some examples:

In a slum in Mumbai, one of the slum-dwellers said, “We use open land for defecating – men go to one side and women to the other. People passing by can see women squatting. The day before yesterday, an old woman went out at seven in the evening to defecate, when a man came from behind and grabbed her. A few of us generally go together for toilet purposes. Men hide behind the bushes and watch women when they are swatting. If they see a woman alone they creep up and molest her. In the past, we met the Councillor many times and told him about such incidents... its been years but nothing has happened.”

**“Men hide behind the bushes and watch women when they are swatting. If they see a woman alone they creep up and molest her.”**



## Slum Women's **Voices** in Mumbai

**There are frequent accidents and every week or so someone used to get hit by a train and got killed on the tracks. Many times, we used to find pieces of flesh outside our doors."**

Another woman living in the slum narrated a similar experience, "There is no toilet in this whole area. Men and women from the settlement squat along the road. Women do not go to relieve themselves after six in the morning. They wait for the cover of darkness. We even eat less so that we do not have to relieve ourselves during day time... We tried to get our MLA and local Councillor to build toilets for us, but they said that they did not have funds... SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Research Centers) is helping and building toilets for us."

A woman who lives in a slum close to the railway tracks said, "We use the railway tracks as toilets. We go to relieve ourselves between midnight and four in the morning, because at other times there were people around...We sit between railway tracks and if a train comes we jump onto another track. There are frequent accidents, and every week or so someone gets hit by trains and gets killed on the tracks. Many a times, we have found pieces of flesh outside our doors."

Mangal Kamble, who also lives near railway tracks said, "Although there are public toilets, they are about half an hour away...and very dirty. Also, there is always a long queue;so instead of using the filthy toilets, we go on the tracks after ten at night or early in the morning at 4-5 O'clock."

Yamini, who lives in similar conditions as Mangal Kamble, said, "We had no toilets. The children use the open drain. For women, we had erected a small tin-shed over a large drain but when the railway authorities found out that it was a toilet they demolished it."

In one of the slums, in which there are public toilets, the women complained, "We have to pay Rs.1 for each use...it is a problem. In the morning I have to cook for my husband and



# Unheard Voices

## Struggle for Water

According to official figures, Mumbai has a population of 15 million. More than half of this population live in slums. Although some of the slums have been legalized and are provided with limited piped water supply and a few public latrines, these are usually not adequate for the entire population. In such a scenario, the major burden of searching for water and for sanitation facilities is borne by women.

According to official data, Mumbai gets an average of 158 litres of water per day per person. However, in order to get water, women in the slums have to get up at 3.30 in the morning, stand in queues and scrounge, beg or buy water. Often they get involved in fights and even land up in police stations, and sometimes in prison. Something seemingly as uncomplicated as obtaining their daily quota of water makes slum women's lives tiring, stressful and humiliating.





send the children to school. There is no time to stand in a long queue at the toilet. Even when I go at 5.30 in the morning, there are people ahead of me. Once you get in the toilet, people in the queue start shouting at you to hurry up.”

In another city (Pune) the women voice similar problems and concerns about sanitation. One of the occupants, Jyoti, said, “There are no toilets in our settlement. We go up the hill for defecating. We go at night under the cover of darkness. There are no lights up there. It is scary. When we go, we call out to each other so that 3-4 of us can go together. In the rainy season, it is difficult to walk there.”

## Slum Women’s **Voices** in Delhi

**Defecation in the open is not safe – my daughters and I face rude comments from the passerby almost everyday**

**Omvathi** is a 48-year-old woman with 10 members in her family. She has an old mother-in-law and four daughters as also three young sons to look after. Discussing sanitation, she said, “We don’t have a toilet or bathroom in our home. In the community toilet, the women have to pay Rs.1 per visit. This is expensive for a family of our size; unless defecating is urgent, we do not use the community toilet. Everyday, we wake up at 5.30 a.m. and go out for defecation – with my daughters and mother-in-law – on a big ground located outside the slum. Defecation in the open is not safe – my daughters and I face rude comments from the passerby almost everyday. In spite of this, we have to use the open grounds for defecation; otherwise it will mean a sharp increase in expenditure which we cannot afford.”

Describing her problems of health and cleanliness, Omvathi recounts, “There are flies and mosquitoes inside the house. During rainy weather, the rainwater cannot flow through clogged drains, and therefore enters our house. At such times, all members of my family spend time sitting on the bed as the room gets knee-deep with sewage water. They have to wait for the rain to stop to take out the dirty water from the room and clean it. All the people staying in the slum face this problem. We have frequent fights with the rag pickers



community (who also live in the same slum), who are blamed for the clogging of drains, but the problem has been going on year after year. My children (and other children) suffer from fever, malaria and other diseases during the rains. A major portion of our household income is spent on medicines." Omvathi falls ill quite frequently. She goes to her village to convalesce and get some fresh air.

Another slum woman says, "To reach the community toilets, one has to pass through a shopping area with about 100 shops. During the day, going to the toilet is a real problem. Eve teasing is common amongst young boys loitering around the shops. Mothers have to accompany their daughters when they go to community latrines!"

Wahi's marriage to a poor man living in a village forced her to defecate in the open, which was an indignity and humiliation for her. After the family migrated to a slum in Delhi, she went to a community toilet, which was badly maintained. The stench and uncleanness often made her vomit but it was impossible for her to defecate in the open.

When Wahi's son was to be married, Wahi started saving money so that her young daughter-in-law would not have to start her married life with daily trips to community toilets. Now her house is spotlessly clean, and it has made all the difference to her life and her sense of dignity.



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# Unheard Voices

## The Girl Child in Slums

The guard then took hold of her, gagged her and dragged her back to the community toilet and raped her.

**Sunita, a young girl of eleven**, along with three younger siblings, and her parents live in a one room *ĕjhuggi* in a Delhi slum. Sunita is a good-looking child, articulate and easily noticeable. Her parents go to work and Sunita is left behind to fetch water and look after her younger siblings. Everyday, during mid-morning, she goes to the Community toilet, sometimes with friends or younger siblings, and sometimes alone.

The Community Toilet had recently appointed a new guard. One day, around 11.00 a.m., Sunita had to go alone to the Community Toilet. The guard offered Sunita some biscuits, which she refused. The guard then took hold of her, gagged her and dragged her back to the community toilet and raped her. The guard threatened to kill her if she mentioned this incident to anyone.

The little girl, bleeding and traumatized, ran home. The mother, when she returned home from work, found her daughter in this condition; she conferred with her neighbors and they decided to take her to a nearby hospital. But the hospital refused to admit her unless the matter was first reported to the police. The frightened parents, with the bleeding child in their arms, then took her to another hospital. Sunita had to stay in the hospital for a



## Slum Women's **Voices**

week. Threats and pressures from the family of the guard became a daily routine for Sunita's family. The neighbors too advised that continuing with the case would affect Sunita's marriage prospects! The parents, with no moral support, finally decided to drop the case!

Sunita has a burning anger against the injustice and the way the crime was handled. She is also angry with her parents' decision to withdraw the case. She wants to become a lawyer to fight such cases. What opportunities does she have in life, with a rape behind her, and hardly any schooling?

**I saw a man coming with a dark blanket. There was no light in the area. The man lifted the girl and walked briskly towards the bushes. I ran after the man who then dropped the girl and ran away.**

**Shanti, a slum woman,** describes an incident that occurred when a young woman in their slum had gone out for defecating ó the event influenced Shanti to marry her daughter early. Shanti, describing the event, said, "I had pain in my stomach and I went out to defecate. Prior to my arrival there was a young girl already sitting there to defecate. I saw a man coming with a dark blanket. There was no light in the area. The man lifted the girl and walked briskly towards the bushes. I ran after the man who then dropped the girl and ran away.

The girl who was saved has been sent by her family to stay with her relatives in the village to save her from such encounters. Shanti herself decided to marry her daughter, who is 15, as soon as she can because of what happened to the young girl, and what may happen to other young girls in the slum!



Jyoti, a young girl of 14 years of age, lives in a slum of 800 *jhuggies* with a population of around 1500.

There is a community toilet block, 100 yards away serving two slums.

Jyoti says, "I do not use the community toilets because the boys have broken the windows to look at the girls. I go out in the open to defecate because it is somewhat safer ñ although men peep from behind the bushes!

Regarding taking a bath, Jyoti said that she puts up a *ēcharpoyí* (a stringed cot) outside the *ējhuggí* and covers it with a sari. She said, "The boys try to tease and throw stones at us while we are trying to bathe. I bathe with my *ēdupattáí* on (half a *sari*). I never remove all my clothes for a bath."

### **Young girls were raped by men who picked them up from fields when they were relieving themselves**

Farida, a 15-year-old girl with 6 younger sisters, described her experiences in her school which had no toilet. She said, "In the event that some of us wanted to relieve ourselves we had no choice but to step outside the school and find a secluded spot in a field and then rush back. It was embarrassing and it took time, therefore we did so only when the urgency to relieve oneself could not be ignored."

Farida was aware of the danger to young girls from rapists and molesters when relieving themselves in open fields. She said, "My mother's friend told me of several instances when young girls were raped by men who picked them up from fields when they were relieving themselves ñ after which they became pregnant and had to abort."



A few years later, when Farida began to earn, she and her other sisters persuaded their father to construct a toilet at home. Farida and her sisters say that the best gift the father had given them was to agree to construct the toilet at home!

A young mother, who decided to build a toilet at home for her daughters said, "My daughters are growing up and for their safety I must construct a toilet. I have no help from government. I have somehow borrowed and collected money for building this toilet for my daughters. There are rowdy elements who move around and make the atmosphere very unsafe for my girls."

A young girl's dream in urban slums and even in rural areas is to marry into a household with a latrine. Through the many voices we heard, we realized that we lived in a world where many young girls are denied their childhood.



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# Unheard Voices

## Search for Privacy & Self Respect

**“I will not share my toilet with others!!”**

So says an emphatic **Jalu Bai**, a sixty-year-old woman from the Muslim community, who has been living in Nagalpur village for the past 42 years. Her family includes her husband and three married children, a son and two daughters.

Till recently, Jalu Bai's home could not boast of its own toilet and bathroom. She, like numerous other women of limited means, used a near by *wada* (an open area with a low wall built around it used by local women as a community toilet) to relieve herself. She still shudders as she remembers incidents of her privacy being rudely invaded by men landing up at the same place to relieve themselves... sometimes intentionally.

At night Jalu Bai, much rather remain at home than trek all the way to the *wada* or the forest. The women would use their courtyards and cover the night soil with mud and sand and dispose of it the next morning. Things are different today with Jalu Bai being the proud owner of her own, private toilet and bathroom.

In terms of water supply, Nagalpur village is self sufficient. Jalu Bai has a piped water connection in her house which assures her of year-round water supply.

Based on a study undertaken by  
The Agha Khan Foundation Foundation in Partnership with UNHabitat



## Women's Voices

“ My daughter's education will ensure that she gets a groom with a toilet in his house.”

**Manjulaben**, who is 38-years-old, is yet to get over the feeling of empowerment that comes from having her own toilet and bathroom within the confines of her home. Manjulaben is a daily wage labourer from Nagalpur village (Kachchh district, Gujarat state). Coupled with her husband, she generates a total annual household income of approximately Rs. 25,000 (US\$ 531). She has three daughters and a son.

Manjulaben's new home has a toilet, something that she is still getting used to. She still remembers the trauma of going to the *wada* during her four pregnancies or when she was unwell. when the frequency of use would increase. However, given the time constraint and privacy issues, it became nearly impossible for her to use the *wada* in daylight hours. So she exercised the only other choice she had; to suppress the natural urge to relieve herself and consequently, learn to live with being constipated.

Also, without a toilet, the privacy of her three young daughters was compromised. Looking back, she says that her daughters were instrumental in pressurising her to construct the toilet.

However, in terms of drinking water, there are practically no problems. Piped water supplied by the government is clean and fit for drinking.



## “Agreeing to construct a toilet was the best gift that our father could give us.”

**Farida Ben** is 15 years old and has six sisters and a brother. She belongs to the Ismaili community and has lived in Naglapur since birth. Farida completed her class 10 from the local village school. The school did not have toilets at the time that she was a student. According to her, “In the event of us wanting to relieve ourselves, we had no choice but to step outside the school premises, find a secluded spot in a field and then rush back. It was embarrassing. Mercifully, the situation at Farida’s home was different since it had a toilet and a separate bathroom.

Till the 2001 earthquake devastated her home, Farida’s house had a toilet. After the quake, however, Farida’s family exercised the option of moving to her uncle’s farmhouse in a neighbouring village, but that brought on with it an altogether different problem – her uncle’s house did not have a toilet. But now it is like the old times again since Farida and her family moved back to Nagalpur and into their new home with its spanking new toilet and bath facilities.

Farida is aware of the danger to young girls from rapists and molesters when relieving themselves in open fields. She says, “My mother’s friend told me of several instances when young girls were molested or raped by men who picked them up from the fields when they were relieving themselves. Some of them then became pregnant and had to undergo an abortion.”

Like the rest of the village, Farida’s home is supplied with piped water that is used for both, drinking and other purposes.





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