**Development
Progress**

TOWARDS A BETTER LIFE?
A cautionary tale of progress in Ahmedabad

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Cover image: Sky filled with kites in
Ahmedabad, India. © Sandeep Achetan.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AMC	Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation	**MHT**	Mahila Housing SEWA Trust
AMTS	Ahmedabad Municipal Transport System	**NGO**	Non-governmental Organisation
AUDA	Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority	**NOC**	No Objection Certificate
BRTS	Bus Rapid Transit System	**NSSO**	National Sample Survey Organisation
BSUP	Basic Services to the Urban Poor	**SDG**	Sustainable Development Goals
CBO	Community-based Organisation	**SEWA**	Self Employed Women's Association
DP	Development Plan	**SNP**	Slum Networking Project
GTPUDA	Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act 1976	**TLA**	Textile Labour Association
		TPS	Town Planning Scheme
JnNURM	Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission	**ULB**	Urban Local Body

Abstract

Ahmedabad, the fifth largest city in India, has achieved significant progress since the 1990s. The city provides a useful lens through which to explore the rural-urban transition and how its challenges can be addressed, providing a compelling example for exploring the factors that have contributed to progress in the urban context in terms of improvement in material well-being (including income, access to finance and housing); environment (focused on basic environmental services and urban expansion); and political voice (through collective action as well as strengthened local governance).

In the western Indian state of Gujarat, where Ahmedabad is located, the urban poverty rate declined from 28% in 1993-94 to 10% in 2011-12. Trade unions, such as the Self-employed Women's Association, founded in Ahmedabad in 1972, have played a key role in organising and empowering informal workers. By 2001 Ahmedabad was already above both state and national urban averages in the coverage of drinking-water, and progress has continued. The municipal government has introduced specific programmes to improve access to public utilities – water, sanitation and electricity – for slum dwellers irrespective of tenure status. Additionally, the city stands out for its 'smart growth' through proactive planning for urban expansion, enabling a compact urban area while allotting spaces to house poor families.

This has been enabled by various efforts that have strengthened municipal governance and finances, allowing the local government to invest in infrastructure across the city. Moreover, civil society organisations have played a critical role in mobilising poor communities, and the municipality has welcomed collaboration.

However, gaps have remained and relations between communities and the government have become strained in recent years. Significant sections of the population continue to lack access to good quality services, and Ahmedabad has evolved into a city segmented by class, caste and religion. Further, across much of urban India there has been a shift in the conception of development from inclusive growth to the creation of 'global cities' marked by capital-intensive projects. As a result, dialogue has decreased, becoming increasingly confrontational, and the availability of public funds has diverted focus away from flexible local programmes built on a collaborative model of development. While urbanisation has been recognised as key to India's future, the experience of Ahmedabad provides key lessons – both positive and cautionary – relevant to urbanisation both nationally and globally.

1. Introduction

Residents in the old town, Ahmedabad. Photo: © Chris, via Flickr.

1.1 Why explore progress in Ahmedabad?

There has been a rapid increase in the urban population worldwide, with about 54% or around 3.8 billion people now thought to live in urban areas (UN DESA, 2014). This share is projected to increase to 66% by 2050, with the largest urban growth expected to occur in India, followed by China and Nigeria – countries that will, together, account for 37% of the projected growth in urban population. Managing the transition from predominantly rural to urban societies, and the challenges and opportunities this poses – particularly for the urban poor – is one of the defining features of the 21st century.

India has witnessed significant growth in its urban population in recent decades. The city of Ahmedabad, in the north-western state of Gujarat (Box 1), has demonstrated how the transition from rural to urban can be managed while addressing the needs of poorer households, mitigating urban sprawl and strengthening basic services. In Ahmedabad, poor people, including those living in 'slum' settlements, have seen a number of concrete improvements.

Across Gujarat the urban poverty rate[1] declined from 28% in 1993-1994 to 10% in 2011-2012, at a rate slightly ahead of the national urban average (NSSO, 1995; 2013). This was achieved against a backdrop of significant national economic growth. There has also been a dramatic decline in the share of Ahmedabad's population recorded as living in slum settlements, from 25.6% in 1991 to 4.5% in 2011 (Registrar General of India, 1991; 2011), and an improvement in the well-being of slum dwellers. Extending water and sanitation services to slum communities, regardless of tenure, has been an important step towards their integration into the city – which was enabled by the involvement of civil society working alongside government.

To better understand this progress, this case study analyses how a series of government and civil society-led initiatives have improved the well-being of people living in Ahmedabad's informal settlements. Local government has played a key role in proactive planning for urban expansion and has worked closely with partners to provide slum dwellers with official access to public utilities. In

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1   Figures relate to the national urban poverty line.

addition, the presence of strong and vibrant civil society organisations and trade unions for informal workers in Ahmedabad has fostered political engagement and strengthened dialogue around municipal decision-making.

Ahmedabad provides a useful lens through which to explore how a rural-urban transition can be managed to benefit poor communities. The city's experience over the past 20 years offers a compelling case for the analysis of progress across a variety of dimensions, and we explore three of these in particular:

- material well-being, including income, access to finance, and housing
- the environment, with a focus on environmental services and the management of urban expansion
- political voice, through an increase in collective action and stronger local governance

It must be noted, however, that progress has not been linear: it has been characterised by peaks and troughs as certain challenges were resolved and others emerged. Further, while there have been significant gains in Ahmedabad, there have also been signs of a recent slowing or even reversal of progress for poorer households. A number of recent top-down urban development policies – even those intended to benefit poor families – have negatively affected poor people and damaged relations between government and civil society as they failed to understand people's concerns and priorities. Moreover, the shift in policy focus – aimed to attract investment by creating a 'global' city (Desai, 2014) – demands a rethink of how progress is defined and whom it is intended to benefit?

1.2 Urbanisation and multidimensional progress

Rapid urbanisation is a complex socioeconomic phenomenon, and one that has been accelerating in recent decades. Growing awareness of the need to exploit the opportunities presented by urbanisation and mitigate its challenges is demonstrated by the inclusion of a goal for cities in the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 'to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (UN OWG, 2014). This goal also acknowledges the multidimensional nature of what a 'liveable' city is.

Those living in urban areas also benefit from a host of opportunities, including better and more diverse job prospects, improved access to services including health and education, and the potential for environmental advantages such as through the more efficient use of resources (Henderson, 2002; Hildebrand et al., 2013). There is now widespread recognition that well-being and development imply much more than economic growth and higher incomes, and urbanisation itself is inherently multidimensional. Well-being is a broad concept that

> **Box 1: Ahmedabad: the basics**
>
> Ahmedabad is the largest city and former capital of the western Indian state of Gujarat. With a population of more than 5.8 million and an extended population of 6.3 million (Registrar General of India, 2011), it is the fifth largest city and seventh largest metropolitan area of India. The city has been one of the chief drivers of Gujarat's economic progress.

involves complex linkages and relationships across a variety of dimensions – social, economic, political and environmental (Sen et al., 2009; Alkire, 2012). The Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group at the University of Bath argues that well-being consists of three aspects: (1) the subjective, consisting of people's perceptions and experience; (2) the relational, concerned with personal and social relations; and (3) the material, related to practical welfare and the standard of living (White, 2009).

Economic and social mobility are intertwined, especially through jobs, which are sources of both self-respect and social identity (World Bank, 2015). In this respect, urban living also provides new cultural and social opportunities – some of which are particularly relevant in the Indian context – as people can escape from some of the gender and caste-based norms that are still deeply entrenched in rural communities (Deshingkar and Start, 2003). There is also some evidence that cities reduce rural poverty either by increasing demand for rural labour or through the remittances that are sent back to rural areas (Cali and Menon, 2009).

While urbanisation clearly brings opportunities, unplanned urban growth may negatively affect well-being, given such challenges as congestion, poor housing, pressure on limited public services, air and water pollution and all of their implications, particularly for health (Henderson, 1999). In addition, the benefits of agglomeration are not experienced equally, with poor people facing greater risks (Hildebrand et al., 2013; Mathur, 2013). Although access to services is, on average, higher in urban areas, for those living at or below the poverty line, service quality can be poor, costs high, and certain groups – particularly those living in informal settlements – can be marginalised. Informal and insecure housing tenure has a profound impact on the way in which municipal governments and service providers interact with people, often excluding those without secure tenure from access to services (Ducrot et al., 2010; K'Akumu, 2004).

With the majority of the world's population now living in urban areas, inclusive urbanisation has become critical for both human development outcomes and environmental sustainability. Well-planned and managed cities are better able to deliver development progress across a number of intersecting dimensions in a more equitable manner than those that are poorly planned or managed. With rapidly

expanding urban populations, huge strain is being placed – and will continue to be placed – on already overburdened planning mechanisms, infrastructure and urban finance. Within India there are vast variations in the pace of urbanisation across states and cities, and how well cities provide for their poorest people.

1.3 The Indian context

India has often been labelled as a reluctant urbaniser (Sanyal et al., 2010): its official urbanisation rate has been considerably lower than that in comparable countries. It wasn't until the ten years between 2001 and 2011 that India experienced a larger absolute increase in its urban population than its rural population (Bhagat, 2011), with the urban share of its population increasing from 25.5% in 1990 to 27.7% in 2000, and to 31.7% by 2012 (World Bank, 2014). Over time the contribution of urban areas to national output has increased from 38% in 1970-1971 to 63% in 2009-2010 (Ministry of Urban Development, 2014). This urban growth, both in terms of population and economy, is definitely accelerating, notwithstanding definitional issues (Box 2). It is estimated that around 40% of India's population will live in urban areas by 2030 (UN DESA, 2014).

Traditionally, urban issues have not been prioritised as highly as rural development in India in terms of government spending. To the extent that urban development has been addressed, policy has evolved through distinct phases, responding to wider political and socioeconomic developments (Tripathi, 2013). The first phase, extending from 1947 until about 1966, focused on slum clearance and housing construction in response to the development of large slums in and around cities due to the influx of refugees following partition with Pakistan. However, this phase lacked any comprehensive vision for urbanisation, and its ad hoc nature failed to address emerging urban challenges.

The second phase, broadly from 1969 to 1984, attempted to promote balanced urban growth by encouraging the expansion of smaller urban centres rather than a concentration in large cities. There was a shift in vocabulary from slum 'clearance' towards 'upgrading', marking a tacit acknowledgement of the rights of the urban poor.

The third phase, from 1984 to the present, has been influenced by wider macroeconomic reforms in the Indian economy, particularly increasing liberalisation and privatisation since 1991. This phase has been characterised by growing advocacy for the opening up of private sector participation in urban development.

Policy development over the past decade, in particular, has increased the magnitude of resources available to cities, acknowledging the need for cities to provide good basic infrastructure. This policy approach has encouraged the strengthening of local capacity through governance reforms; although, progress on these fronts lags behind

> **Box 2: Definitions of what is identified as an 'urban' area**
>
> As a result of national differences the distinction between urban and rural populations is not amenable to a single definition for all countries or even to the countries within a particular region. Each country defines 'urban' areas according to its own criteria, which poses a challenge for comparative analysis. At present, nearly half of the countries covered by the UN's World Urbanisation Prospects use a single criterion to identify urban areas, while about 27% of countries use a combination of two criteria. A small minority – only 7% – of countries, including India, use three or more criteria to identify urban areas (Buettner, 2014).*
>
> India employs a stringent definition of urban areas with multiple criteria (Registrar General of India, 2011), which contributes to what is probably a low estimate of its urban population. In India an area is designated as 'urban' if it meets the following criteria:
>
> - all places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee (called statutory towns)
> - All other places that satisfy the following three criteria (called census towns):
>   - a minimum population of 5,000
>   - at least 75% of the main male working population is engaged in non-agricultural work
>   - a population density of at least 400 people per square kilometre.
>
> * Buettner (2014) reports that 6% of countries had no official urban definition and that 11% reported that their population was either entirely urban or entirely rural.

what is desired. The new Government of India, elected in 2014, has recognised the need for urban policy to plan for and exploit the opportunities presented by urbanisation (Box 3). However, in recent years, there has also been concern about an increasingly top-down planning approach to urbanisation, with questions being raised on the impact of such policies, particularly in terms of inclusivity.

Future urban growth in India will place huge demands on governments at local, state and national levels to respond proactively to a range of policy challenges to ensure that no additional strain is placed on already overburdened infrastructure and services, to manage urban expansion in a sustainable manner. It is important that urban policy matches the pace of urbanisation, and that lessons are learned from national and global experiences of managing rapid urbanisation, delivering the benefits of agglomeration and tackling issues of urban sprawl, congestion, inequity in access to services and social tensions.

1.4 Methodology and structure of the report

This case study is one of a number of related studies by the Development Progress project. Ahmedabad is being studied in terms of its progress in material well-being, environmental sustainability and political voice. Two other multidimensional case studies focus on Ethiopia, exploring progress on poverty reduction, employment and education, and on Ghana, looking at progress in health, education and political voice. This case study is also one of three studies focused on urban areas, looking at the physical living conditions of slum dwellers in Ahmedabad, Peru and Thailand.

While many of the other Development Progress case studies have examined progress at the national level, this case examines progress by looking at one city, given that India is a large and diverse country. This focus allows us to understand the changes that accompany urbanisation

and the issues facing urban areas in greater detail while revealing certain lessons that have national relevance.

To track progress across dimensions over time, the Development Progress project has used a deviation-from-fit method. This measures countries' performance across eight dimensions[2] of well-being to determine which have 'deviated' from the predicted trajectory, starting from a 1990 baseline, to achieve greater progress than might have been expected (Samman, 2012). By this measure, analysis identified India to have made considerable progress, ranking among the top ten countries worldwide in improving the quality of life in urban areas (material well-being), environmental management and in building open and inclusive political systems (political voice). Within India Ahmedabad was selected following analysis of available data, a literature review and interviews with country experts.

The researchers undertook over 50 semi-structured interviews with policymakers at municipal, state and national levels; academics and researchers; civil-society organisations; and planners and private sector developers in Ahmedabad. We also conducted focus group workshops in two parts of the city to understand the perceptions of the communities of the progress and the challenges they face. Finally, the research team also conducted a half-day workshop with local experts to present initial findings and discuss possible lessons.

The case study aimed to answer four research questions:

- What progress has been made in terms of material well-being, environment and political voice in the context of urbanisation over the past 20 years in Ahmedabad, and, in particular, how has it affected poor people?
- What are the factors that enabled this progress?
- What are the challenges that impede further improvements or threaten to reverse past progress?
- What lessons does Ahmedabad's experience have for other cities?

This report has five sections. Section 2 explores the nature of Ahmedabad's progress in material well-being, environment and political voice over the past 20 years. Section 3 identifies some of the main factors that have contributed to progress. Section 4 outlines some of the existing and potential future challenges to progress in Ahmedabad and relates the city's experience to the broader context of urbanisation in India. Finally, Section 5 highlights some of the lessons that can be drawn from Ahmedabad that are relevant both nationally and internationally in terms of how urbanisation can make some aspects of the urban SDG – making cities inclusive, resilient and sustainable – a reality.

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2   These dimensions are: health, education, political voice, environment, security, social cohesion, employment, and material well-being.

2. What progress has been achieved?

Pedestrians in Ahmedabad. Photo: © Emmanuel Dyan.

'Ahmedabad has been a pro-poor city in terms of provision of basic services' – Urban expert

Ahmedabad has made impressive progress on many fronts over the past 20 years while at the same time experiencing dynamic spatial and population growth, not only within the centre of the city but across the peri-urban areas that surround it. This section begins by describing the city's historical development up until the 1990s before examining its progress on three inter-related dimensions:

- progress in material well-being, particularly in terms of the livelihoods of informal workers and the living conditions of people in informal settlements

- improvements in the environment, particularly how the city has managed urban growth as well as improved coverage of environmental public services
- gains in political voice through collective action and local government accountability.

Particular programmes and schemes have played a significant role in the progress across these areas in Ahmedabad. Data from various initiatives are shared here to illustrate the scale of progress, with further details on these efforts included in the following section to outline how that progress occurred.

2.1 Ahmedabad's historical development

Ahmedabad had an official population of over 6.3 million[3] in 2011, making it the fifth most populated city in India (Registrar General of India, 2011). The city has been at the forefront of many of India's defining social, political and economic developments. It was, for example, the site of Gandhi's Ashram, where he developed his political philosophy and intervened in labour disputes. Ahmedabad has seen considerable industrial growth in textile, chemical and pharmaceutical industries but has also experienced numerous outbreaks of sectarian violence. As such, it has been labelled the 'shock city' (Spodek, 2011).

Unlike many other large Indian cities, such as Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Kanpur, which came to prominence during the rule of the British, Ahmedabad has a long pre-colonial history. It was founded in 1411 on the eastern banks of the Sabarmati River, under the stewardship of Sultan Ahmed Shah, and capitalised on its strategic geographical location, emerging as an important trade centre for the western states of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

With the arrival of the railways in the 1860s, the city experienced a second phase of expansion, becoming a central hub between Mumbai and Delhi. This expansion accelerated with the emergence of a vibrant textile industry following the establishment of the first cotton mill in 1861. By 1921 around one third of the city's people were engaged in the textile industry (Marten, 1924).

Ahmedabad was at the forefront of the Indian independence and civil rights movement. Mahatma Gandhi established the Sabarmati Ashram on the banks of the Sabarmati River in 1917, living there until 1930. The Ashram served as one of the main centres of the Indian freedom struggle, and it was here that Gandhi directed the non-cooperation movement. His presence influenced local industrial relations: in 1918, for example, he interceded in a dispute between mill owners and textile workers. Encouraging a dialogue between both parties, Gandhi successfully helped negotiate a compromise agreement. It was due to his influence that the Textile Labour Association (TLA) trade union was formed in 1920 on the Gandhian principles of conciliation, non-violent struggle and constructive welfare (Mahadevia, 2012). This approach to conflict resolution through dialogue set the tone, in many ways, for industrial relations in the city and encouraged the development of an incipient union movement.

The expansion of the industrial sector (primarily the textile industry) and the associated demand for labour sparked a wave of in-migration that inflated the city's population. The textile industry reached its peak in the 1940s with the city's population growth rates at their

Figure 1: Population growth in Ahmedabad (1921-2011)
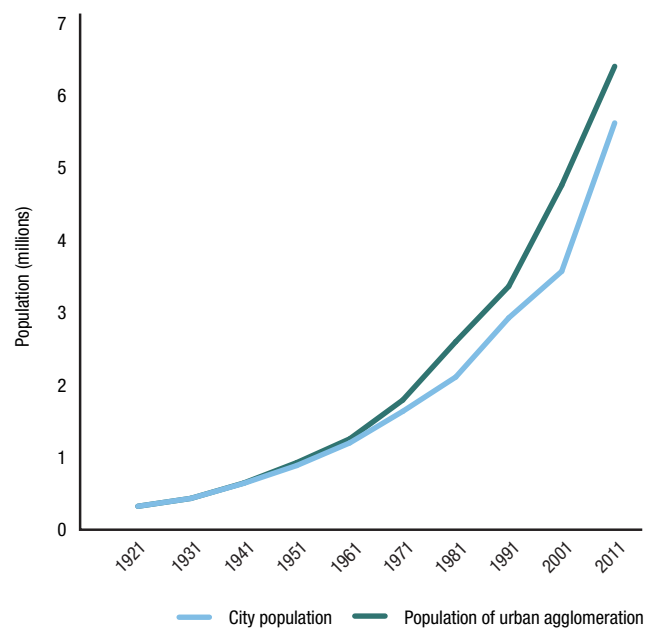
Source: Registrar General of India, various years

highest between 1931 and 1941 (Census of India, 1931; 1941). Within the existing city limits habitable areas became saturated, and the city began to expand into the periphery where more land was available to absorb the growing population. To accommodate this expansion, the administrative limits of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), the urban local body governing the city, were redrawn in 1950 and the city municipality was given the status of Municipal Corporation. This period of rapid expansion increased the pressure on existing infrastructure – particularly housing – and fuelled the proliferation of chawls[4] and slums. As Ahmedabad's population increased (Figure 1) and spread out, the administrative boundary of the city was expanded once more in 1986 and again in 2002.

The development of a vibrant industrial sector was accompanied by the emergence of an influential civil society. The families that founded and owned the textile mills came to play a significant role in the city's development. They sponsored the establishment of various educational and charitable enterprises as well as professional and technical institutions.

However, by the 1980s Ahmedabad had entered a period of industrial decline, particularly in the textile sector where the technology used by the mills had become obsolete, driving up production costs. The mills also experienced stiff domestic competition from the informal

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3   The population of the administrative city of Ahmedabad was nearly 5.6 million people but the population of the urban agglomeration, including residents outside the city's official limits, was 6.3 million (Registrar General of India, 2011).

4   The term 'chawl' refers to tenement-style 4-5 storey buildings, with shared latrines, originally constructed to meet the housing demands of the migrant textile workforce.

power loom sector and from synthetic yarns produced using waste generated by the petrochemical industries (Mahadevia at el., 2014). Faced with a more competitive market, a large number of mills closed down. During the first wave of mill closures in the late 1970s and early 1980s around 40,000-50,000 people lost their main source of income. Large mills gave way to small-scale specialised units in the informal sector, which focused on weaving and dyeing. While there were about 85 textile mills in the city in 1985, this number had declined to 23 by 1997 (Bhatt, 2003), with an estimated drop in employment from almost 160,000 in 1976 to 25,000 in 1996 (Breman, 2004). With limited alternative employment opportunities former mill workers were pushed into the informal sector, which expanded significantly during this period.

The closure of the textile mills coincided with a decline in the ability of the Municipal Corporation to levy and raise taxes. As a result, investment declined in the operation and maintenance of infrastructure services, which had an impact on both the quality and quantity of service delivery in the city. By the late 1980s AMC was faced with a significant budgetary deficit and liabilities, and was experiencing chronic administrative inefficiencies. In response it sought to implement a series of far-reaching reforms that strengthened its financial position and established relations with other development partners in order to become more responsive to the needs of the urban poor.

2.2 Two decades of progress on material well-being

Well-being itself is a broad concept combining various concepts that comprise 'human capital', as proposed by Amartya Sen, including income and assets, employment and livelihood activities, education and skills, physical health, access to services and amenities and environmental quality (White, 2009). One understanding of the concept of material well-being is the basic economic and material dimensions of well-being, measured by per capita income and consumption (Samman, 2012). In addition, some researchers include access to shelter as an indicator of material well-being (Doyal and Gough, 1993; Ranis et al., 2005).

This section examines progress in terms of two material aspects that are relevant in the context of urbanisation: livelihoods and living conditions. Understanding where and how there has been progress in improving the lives of people engaged in informal work and of slum dwellers is critical in the context of the high degree of informal work in urban areas, given the significant knock-on benefits of improvements in these areas. For example, because precarious housing is often associated with illness, injury and premature death, improving living conditions in slum areas contributes to improvements in health outcomes and reduces environmental risks (Baker, 2008).

Figure 2: Urban poverty rate (at national urban poverty line)
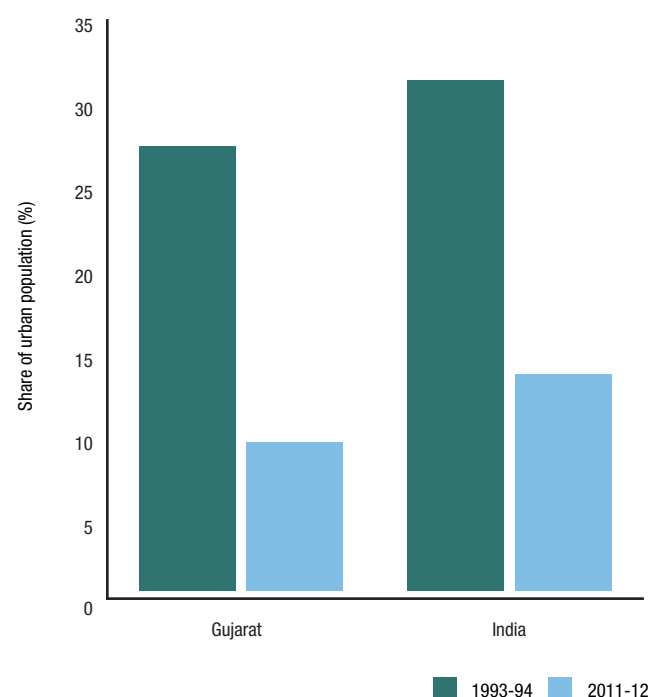
Source: Government of India (1997); Planning Commission (2013).

2.2.1 Economic growth, livelihoods and increased incomes

Traditionally seen as relatively rich and industrially developed, the state of Gujarat has had one of the fastest growing economies in India over recent decades (Mahadevia et al., 2012). Between 2000 and 2010 its GDP grew at an annual average rate of 10%, exceeding the high national growth rate (Ministry of Finance, 2014). The average per capita monthly expenditure in urban areas in Gujarat grew from Rs. 454 ($12.5) in 1993-1994 to Rs. 2,472 ($50) in 2011-2012, almost exactly in line with the increase in the national urban average from Rs. 458 ($12.6) to Rs. 2,477 ($50.1) over the same period (NSSO, 1995; 2013).

Gujarat also experienced a significant decline in the urban poverty rate, from 28% in 1993-1994 to 10% in 2011-2012 – also very similar to the national decline from 32% to 14% in urban areas over the same period (Government of India, 1997; Planning Commission, 2013) (see Figure 2).

Ahmedabad, as an industrial and trade centre, has helped drive growth in the state. Since the decline of the textile industry, the city has seen the emergence of many other industries, including petrochemical refining, pharmaceutical and chemicals, automobile, and agro and food processing enterprises. Many of these have been located in the periphery of the city, contributing to considerable transformations in the peri-urban areas

beyond the city limits. Increased labour demand for these industries has attracted migrants from rural areas and other states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. Yet, Ahmedabad's new manufacturing industries are capital- and skills-intensive, and accounted for only 29% of the workers in Ahmedabad district[5] in 2005 (Mahadevia et al., 2014).

The services sector provided about 70% of all jobs in the district in 2005 (NSSO, 2005). In this case, although the volume of work available has increased, it has been largely informal – a trend that has been noticeable across India, with about 80% of workers employed informally as either wage workers or self-employed in 2010 (Indian Institute for Human Settlements, 2011). In Ahmedabad changes in the nature of employment have included a decline in regular employment and an increase in self-employment (Mahadevia et al., 2012). This has been the result, in part, of the outsourcing of many manufacturing activities to home-based workers and informal retail trade. Retail trade alone employed 31% of the district's workers in 2005, most of them in small enterprises, indicating informal employment (Mahadevia et al., 2014).

At the city level, incomes in Ahmedabad have increased even among the poor (Figure 3, overleaf), while the median household income increased from Rs. 7500 to Rs. 19,500 a month (Clarke-Annez et al, 2012).

However, as employment patterns shift from formal to informal and home-based work, the livelihoods of poor people can be at risk. In this context we look beyond aggregate statistics of income and poverty and assess the progress that has been made in easing some of the constraints faced by the poorest people. As many urban households draw a significant proportion of their income from informal trading or home-based manufacturing, housing improvements and access to public utilities are closely related to income generation for people engaged in home-based work (Sattherthwaite and Mitlin, 2013). In addition, access to finance is important for urban poor groups that are self-employed to be able to invest in their livelihoods and withstand economic shocks.

2.2.2 Increasing access to finance
The large numbers of people across India who work in the informal sector in home-based self-employment are unprotected by government labour regulation. Over the past few decades there has been an expansion in the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in helping meet the needs of informally employed workers across the country.[6] Ahmedabad has been at the forefront of this expansion in terms of organising and assisting informal women workers through organisations such as the Self

Employed Women's Association (SEWA), one of the most extensive models of empowerment.

SEWA was founded in Ahmedabad in 1972 as the first trade union for workers in the informal economy, globally. It brought together poor self-employed women and aimed to protect workers who were vulnerable to exploitation. As of 1998 half of SEWA's urban members lived in households where income per capita was below $1 a day, and over one-third of those remaining had incomes below $2 a day (Chen and Snodgrass, 2001).

Over the past four decades SEWA's membership has grown from about 1,100 women in Ahmedabad to about a million women in 2008 (Figure 4, overleaf), more than half of whom are from Gujarat. As of 2006 about 70% of members were manual labour service providers, and another 14% were home-based workers (SEWA website – accessed February 2015). Over the years SEWA has mobilized informal workers, assisted them in obtaining identity cards, kept them informed about welfare schemes or available training programmes, and advocated for their rights.

SEWA also operates its own bank, which is owned by self-employed women through individual shareholdings. SEWA Bank was established in 1974 with 4,000 depositors who each contributed Rs. 10 ($1.3) from their daily income as share capital. Since then its membership has soared to nearly 450,000 and it had working capital of Rs. 940 million ($17.6 million) as of 2012-2013. The bank emphasises savings over credit in order to build the asset base of poor families and reduce their vulnerability to shocks such as the death of family members, theft, fire, and job loss. Although SEWA Bank's coverage has extended beyond the city, about 70% of its shareholders are urban, largely working as retail vendors, labourers or home-based workers.

In recent years other organisations have also aimed to meet the savings and credit needs of poor people in the city. The Saath Savings and Credit Cooperative Society, an NGO micro-finance venture launched in Ahmedabad in 1989, has also recorded a significant increase in membership over the past several years (Figure 5, overleaf), with the total value of loans dispensed growing from Rs. 20 million ($432,000) in 2009-2010 to over Rs. 81 million ($1.3 million) in 2013-2014. The value of savings has also grown steadily, with cumulative savings growing from Rs. 9.4 million in 2007-2008 ($240,000) to Rs. 29.7 million in 2010-2011 ($647,000) (Saath, 2012).

Organisations such as SEWA, its sister organisations and Saath have played a crucial role by extending financial services to the urban poor, especially women, to help them raise money to invest in their livelihoods and housing improvements.

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5   In the absence of data at the city level, this section analyses data at the district level for Ahmedabad.

6   In the absence of accessible city level data on changes in access to finance, this study has looked at the coverage of some of the prominent organisations that serve the poor as brought out during interviews.

Figure 3: Changes in the distribution of household income in Ahmedabad
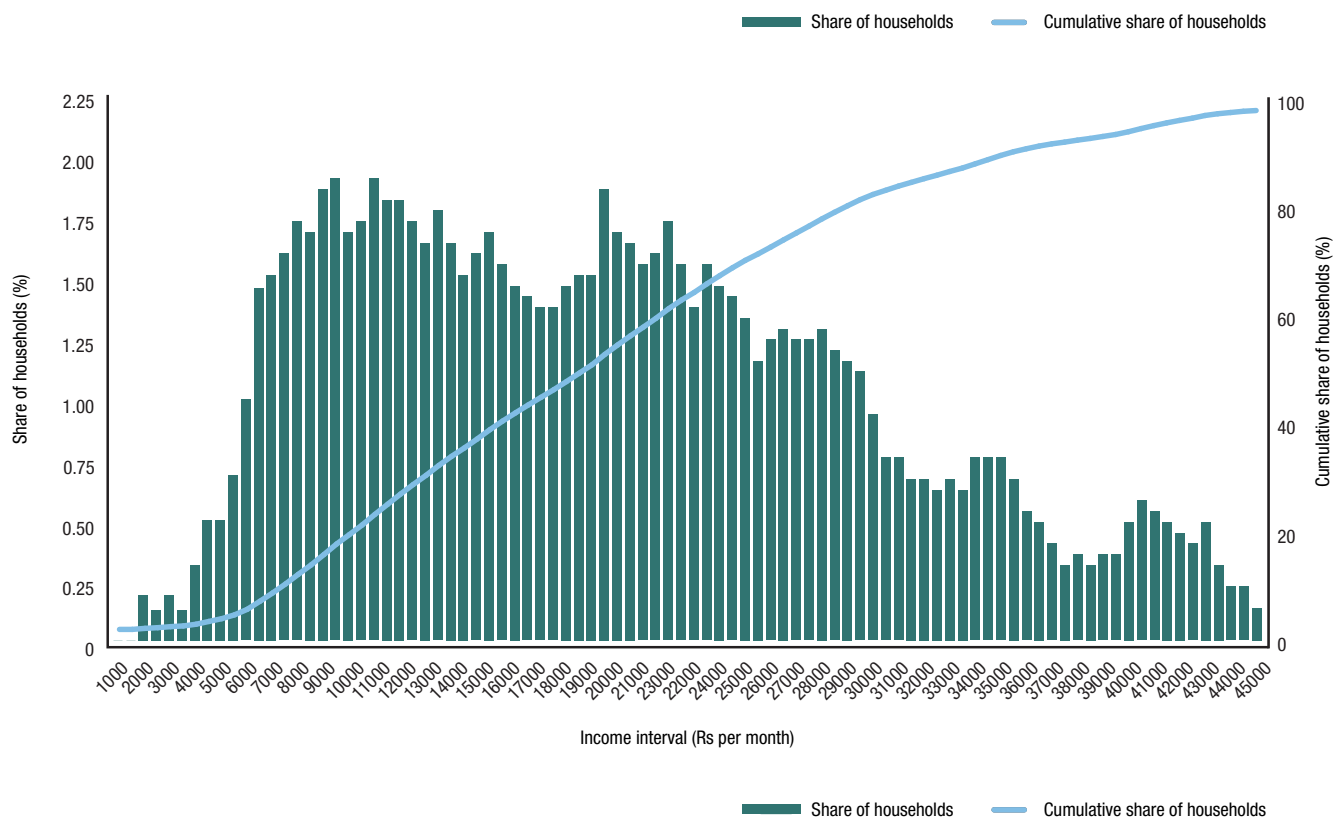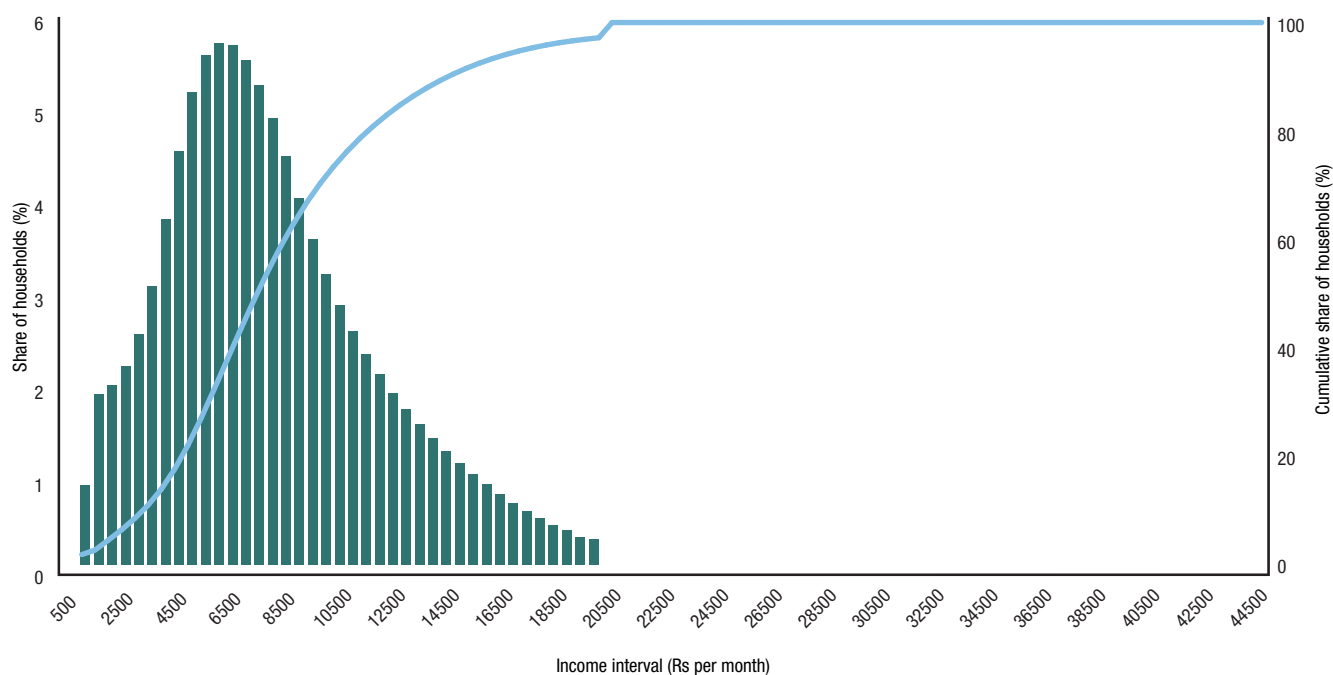
Source: Clarke-Annez et al. (2012) based on NSSO (years).

2.2.3 Slum upgrading

In most cities informal workers, including migrants who are unable to purchase or rent formal housing, often resort to living in informal slum settlements. Because of the risk of eviction, secure shelter is an important pillar of social protection in urban areas (Mahadevia et al., 2012). It contributes to improved access to basic services including housing, water, sanitation, electricity, education, health and employment – all of them important constituents in determining well-being. In addition, having

Figure 4: Growth of SEWA membership: 1972-2008
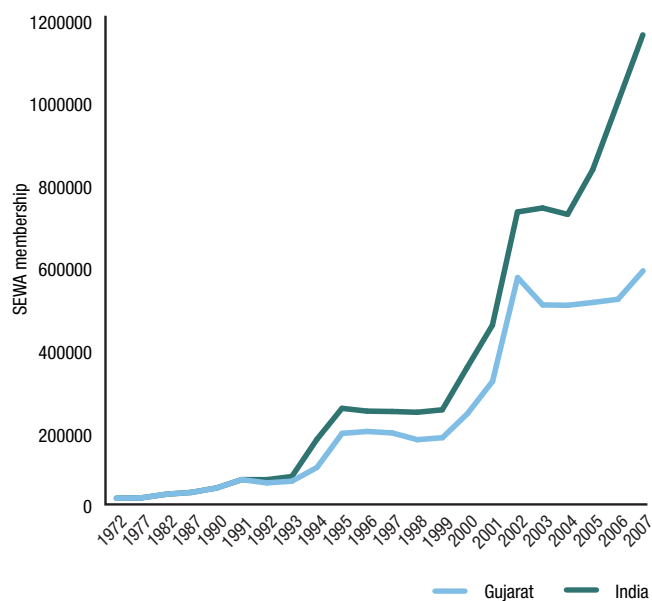
Source: SEWA website (accessed 2nd June 2015).

Figure 5: Saath microfinance: membership and total amount of loans dispersed
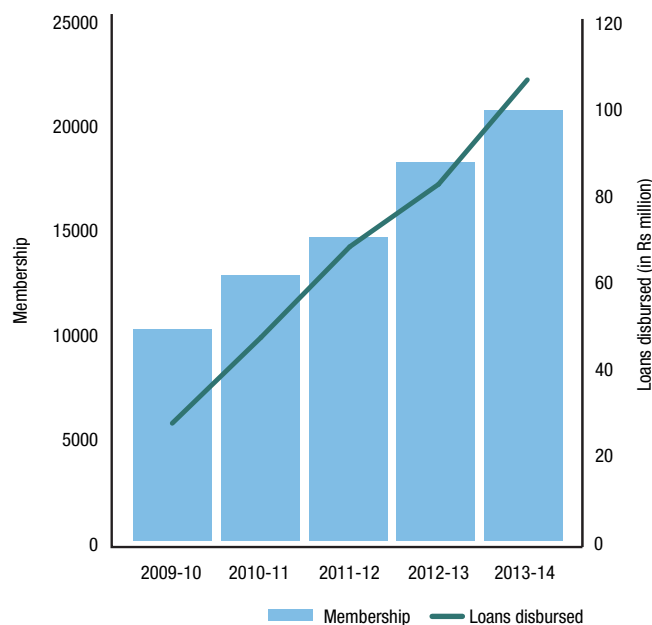
Source: received from organisation.

Figure 6: Proportion of urban population living in slum areas, 1990-2010

Source: UN Habitat, Global Urban Indicators Database (2012).

housing security and a 'legal address' provides people with an official identity, which is closely related to urban citizenship and can be a prerequisite for access to formal sector employment.

India appears to have made faster progress in reducing the proportion of its urban population living in slums than neighbouring countries (Figure 6). At the national level the share of the urban population living in slums in India has declined from about 55% in 1990 to about 30% in 2010 (UN Habitat, 2012). However, the dramatic decline in the share of urban population living in slums has been in large part due to a change in the criteria for identifying slums, which may not necessarily indicate progress.

Within the country Ahmedabad has recorded greater progress in terms of improving housing conditions than other cities (Figure 7, overleaf). The share of population living in slum settlements declined from 25.6% in 1991 to 12.5% by 2001 and further to 4.5% in 2011 (Registrar General of India, 1991; 2001; 2011). Here too, while the data are contested[7], given the considerable definitional and measurement problems (Box 4, overleaf), a downward trend is confirmed by most estimates. This study has, therefore, relied on a variety of sources to better understand the extent of progress achieved.

Moving beyond debates about the number of slum dwellers, improvements in slum settlements can play a

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7   This first figure is, however, contradicted by a survey conducted in the 1990s by the AMC that identified 42% of the city's population as living in slums and lacking the most basic amenities (Kundu and Mahadevia, 2002). Some localised surveys have found that the Census underestimates the numbers living in slums. For example, a survey by the AMC in 2001 estimated that nearly 28% of the city's population lived in slums (declining to 13% by 2010), nearly double the census estimate.

Box 4: Definitional and data challenges in measuring slum populations

What do we mean by 'slum'?

The term 'slum' has been used to cover a wide range of housing deficiencies and settlements, and the lack of a consistent definition across different organisations and authorities makes it difficult to measure the number of people who live in such areas.

In the early 2000s UN Habitat proposed a definition that conceptualised a slum household as a group of individuals that live under the same roof in an urban area and that lack one or more of the following:

- durable housing of a permanent nature that protects its inhabitants against extreme climate conditions
- sufficient living space with no more than three people sharing a room
- access to improved water services
- access to improved sanitation services[*]
- security of tenure that prevents forced evictions.

Elements of this definition are used in India, but there are discrepancies between the definition used by the Census, the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and the various state governments within India, and the definition has changed over time.

The 2001 Census of India identified slum areas as: (1) all specified areas in a town or city notified as 'Slum' by State/Local Government and Union Territory (UT) Administration under any Act, including a 'Slum Act'; (2) all areas recognised as 'Slum' by State/Local Government and UT Administration that may have been formally notified as slum under any Act; (3) A compact area with a population of at least 300 or around 60-70 households of poorly built and congested tenements in an unhygienic environment, usually with inadequate infrastructure and lacking proper sanitary and drinking-water facilities. The 2011 Census retained that definition but also identified 'slum-like' clusters as 'a compact settlement of at least 20 households with a collection of poorly built tenements, mostly of a temporary nature, crowded together and usually with inadequate sanitary and drinking-water facilities in unhygienic conditions.'

The NSSO categorises slums as non-notified (a compact settlement of at least 20 poorly built tenements, mostly of a temporary nature, crowded together and often with inadequate sanitary and drinking-water facilities) and notified (areas notified by the local governments as slums).

In addition, state governments have adopted varied definitions. Under these definitions the physical characteristics are usually similar: a cluster of dwellings with dilapidated and infirm structures having shared toilet facilities, suffering from a lack of basic amenities, and with inadequate arrangements for drainage and for the disposal of solid waste and garbage (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2010).

Data limitations

In addition to definitional issues, data limitations pose a challenge to the measurement of the share of people living in slums and progress on improving their quality of life (Lucci and Bhatkal, 2014). Household surveys sometimes under-represent populations living in slum areas because of difficulties in identifying and interviewing them (Carr-Hill, 2012). In addition, tenure security, a prime concern for residents of informal settlements, is not yet included in most measurements because of data limitations (UN Habitat, 2007).

[*] Access to improved water and sanitation follows the UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Programme definition, which employs a uniform definition to both urban and rural areas and includes the use of shared facilities. It has been argued that this definition is inappropriate for crowded urban informal settlements as it ignores issues of density and affordability (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013).

significant role in moving poor people out of poverty, and Ahmedabad's slum upgrading schemes have improved the lives of beneficiary communities significantly.

Between 1995 and 2009 around 60 slums in the city were upgraded under the Slum Networking Project (SNP)[8], benefitting 13,000 households (Mahadevia et al., 2011). The community-led project integrated slums with the city and its infrastructure by providing *de facto* tenure (guarantee

of non-eviction) for 10 years in addition to infrastructure and community development. Following on from the SNP, the slum electrification programme was introduced in 2001, which by 2008 covered all slums across the city, totalling over 200,000 households (World Bank, 2011).

While the physical impacts of the extension of service access are impressive, the social aspects of the project are equally important, although more difficult to quantify.

8   The Slum Networking Project (SNP) in Ahmedabad, implemented between 1995 and 2009 through a unique partnership between the AMC, NGOs and communities, provided a package of seven basic services to transform the urban environment in slums along with a guarantee of non-eviction (discussed in Section 3.2).

Figure 7: Share of population living in slums
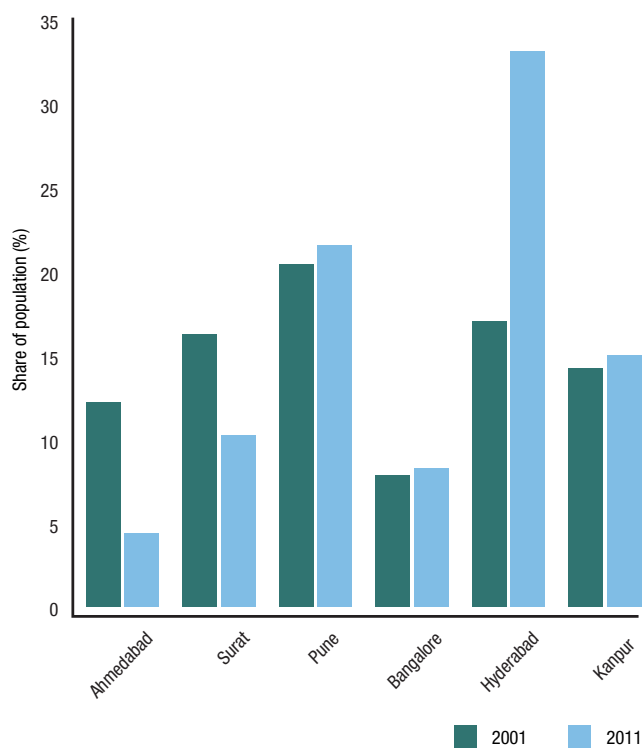
Source: Registrar General of India (2001; 2011).

Households participating in the SNP recorded various improvements across a number of economic and social dimensions. Since a large share of slum dwellers working in home-based manufacturing and retail jobs use their homes as their workshops and storehouses, their livelihoods are closely related to housing and access to public utilities. An evaluation found that following the SNP, women in participating households reported an increase in the amount of time they spent working each day of one to two hours due to the availability of basic services in the home – additional time that contributed to increased incomes (SEWA Academy, 2002).

Upgrading has also generated improvements in health and hygiene. The reported incidence of illness across the participating households fell from around 19% to 7% after upgrading, with dramatic reductions in the incidence of water-borne diseases. A study also found an increase in school attendance among children aged 6 to 10 years, as individual water connections meant that parents could get their children ready for and take them to school, rather than spending time in the morning queueing to collect water from the public tap or walking to housing colonies to collect water (SEWA Academy, 2002).

One of the strengths of the SNP was its underlying philosophy which acknowledged that slums, while they have challenges, also play a functional role in raising poor urban people out of poverty. They provide social networks that offer employment opportunities in times of crisis and are a ready repository of affordable housing.

2.3 Environmental improvements

In India rapid urbanisation has put intense pressure on cities, their infrastructure and the natural environment. Sustained development in the future depends on balancing environmental concerns with the demand for economic growth. While there are trade-offs inherent in the food-water-energy nexus, urbanisation also presents opportunities for inclusive and sustainable growth. In the context of the plethora of problems faced by its cities – including infrastructure constraints in terms of public transport, water supply, the disposal of wastewater and solid waste management – Ahmedabad has taken steps to deliver services and improve environmental conditions.

2.3.1 City boundaries and transport

India's urban development has come to be characterised by haphazard and poorly planned growth contributing to the emergence of sprawling cities beset by economic, social and environmental challenges. Such cities experience various challenges and costs in terms of increased infrastructure and transportation and environmental degradation, which are experienced disproportionately by poorer sections of society in comparison with cities that manage and coordinate urban growth well (Table 1, overleaf) (Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, 2014).

Ahmedabad demonstrates a number of the characteristics of smart growth through proactive planning for urban expansion, to minimise the impact of the expanding urban population. This has helped create a more compact urban area with a much lower sprawl than cities such as Bangalore, Hyderabad and Pune, which have similar populations (Figure 8, overleaf).

Planning has also helped to ensure well-connected infrastructure in terms of roads as well as water and sewerage. Ahmedabad's concentric road network – with clear ring roads and radials that start from the city centre and extend straight out to the edge – is a huge asset for the expansion of the city, enabling easier transport.

Its coordinated approach to urban planning and the development of a well-planned and connected road infrastructure have enabled Ahmedabad to leverage funds from the central government under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM) (see Box 5, page 31) and roll out initiatives such as the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS). Opened in 2009, the BRTS aspires to provide a low-carbon public transport system for the city. Compared with other cities that have sought to implement similar schemes, Ahmedabad has made admirable progress with a rapid transport network of 45km, which is expected to expand to 135 km over the next few years.

Since the BRTS became operational, its revenue and the number of passengers have soared. It has received various awards, including the Sustainable Transport Award from the United Nations Environment Programme in 2010. However, although it is a well-managed service, some components

are either missing or have not received enough attention in design. The success of the scheme has been challenged, most notably on whether it is an affordable option for poor people (Mahadevia et al., 2012). Further, the advent of the BRTS has also led to the neglect of the city's old bus transport system, the Ahmedabad Municipal Transport System (AMTS), which has a larger coverage and lower fares. In addition, the BRTS project involved the demolition of slum houses and the displacement of street vendors in some areas, undermining a key source of livelihoods for poor urban families and removing an important aspect of the city's character (Mahadevia et al., 2013).

2.3.2 Progress in water supply

India has 18% of the world's population but only 4% of its water resources, and faces a water crisis with a significant decline in the availability of water: from 6,042 cubic metres in 1947 to 1,545 cubic metres in 2011.

Ahmedabad is located in a region that is prone to sporadic drought and flooding and that has faced challenges in the adequacy of water supply, particularly in the context of increasing demands from a rapidly expanding urban and peri-urban population. As the Sabarmati River flowing through Ahmedabad is a non-perennial river, there have often been water shortages during the dry summer months. Although attempts were made to augment the water supply from surface water sources through water storage and distribution centres, the AMC also dug wells in the riverbed to draw groundwater, and various housing societies have also sourced groundwater over the years. By the end of 1980s

groundwater accounted for 87% of total water supplied by the AMC, resulting in the rapid depletion of this source and a lowering of the water table (Urban Management Centre, 2013). This over-reliance on groundwater became a critical concern in 1999 when the city faced a severe drought.

In the aftermath of the drought the AMC undertook the ambitious Raska Water Project, designed to supply water and including the construction of a pump house and 42 km of pipeline to bring water to the city. Additionally, water from the Narmada River Canal was also channelled to the Sabarmati River as part of the Sabarmati Riverfront Development project (discussed in Section 3.2). Today, 90% of the water provided by the AMC comes from surface sources (Central Ground Water Board, 2011).

While Ahmedabad was already exceeding state and national urban averages in terms of access to drinking-water in 2001, the city continued to strengthen its coverage in this area (Figure 9, overleaf).

Specific programmes have played a role in improving water supply to poorer households. Under the SNP and more recently the NOC-500 policy (discussed in Section 3.2) the AMC has provided water and sanitation services to households in informal settlements regardless of their tenure status. As mentioned in our interviews, 'accepting that tenure issues are complicated, the AMC pragmatically has detached tenure from access to services' (stakeholder interview – urban expert). While an imperfect solution, it has overcome the constraints faced in other cities that preclude the provision of services to slum settlements, and has contributed to a marked improvement in access to services for Ahmedabad's slum residents.

Table 1: Comparing urban sprawl to contained growth

	Sprawl	Smart Growth
Density	Lower density, dispersed activities	Higher density, clustered activities
Land-use mix	Single-use, segregated	Mixed
Scale	Large-scale, with larger blocks	Human scale, with smaller blocks
Services (shops, schools, parks)	Regional and consolidated, requiring automobile access	Local and distributed to accommodate walking access
Transport	Automobile-oriented, and poorly suited for walking, cycling and mass transit	Multi-modal; supports walking, cycling and mass public transit
Connectivity	Hierarchical road network with many unconnected roads and walkways	Highly connected roads, allowing direct travel
Street design	Streets designed to maximise motor vehicle traffic volume and speed	Reflects 'complete streets' principles that accommodate diverse modes and activities
Planning processes	Unplanned, with little coordination between jurisdictions and stakeholders	Planned and coordinated between jurisdictions and stakeholders
Public space	Emphasis on private realms (yards, shopping malls, gated communities, private clubs)	Emphasis on public realms (shopping streets, parks and other public facilities)

Source: Global Commission on the Economy and Climate (2014).

In the 60 slums upgraded under the SNP between 1995 and 2009, there was a very significant increase in the share of homes with piped water: from 1% in 1996 to 89% in 2011 (Figure 10, overleaf).

2.3.3 City-wide sanitation

Ahmedabad had one of the first underground sewer systems in India, commissioned by the then President of the Municipality and textile magnate and constructed in 1893. By 1958 the entire area under the AMC was served by an underground sewerage system (AMC, 2011).

Figure 8: Spread of built-up areas in Indian cities
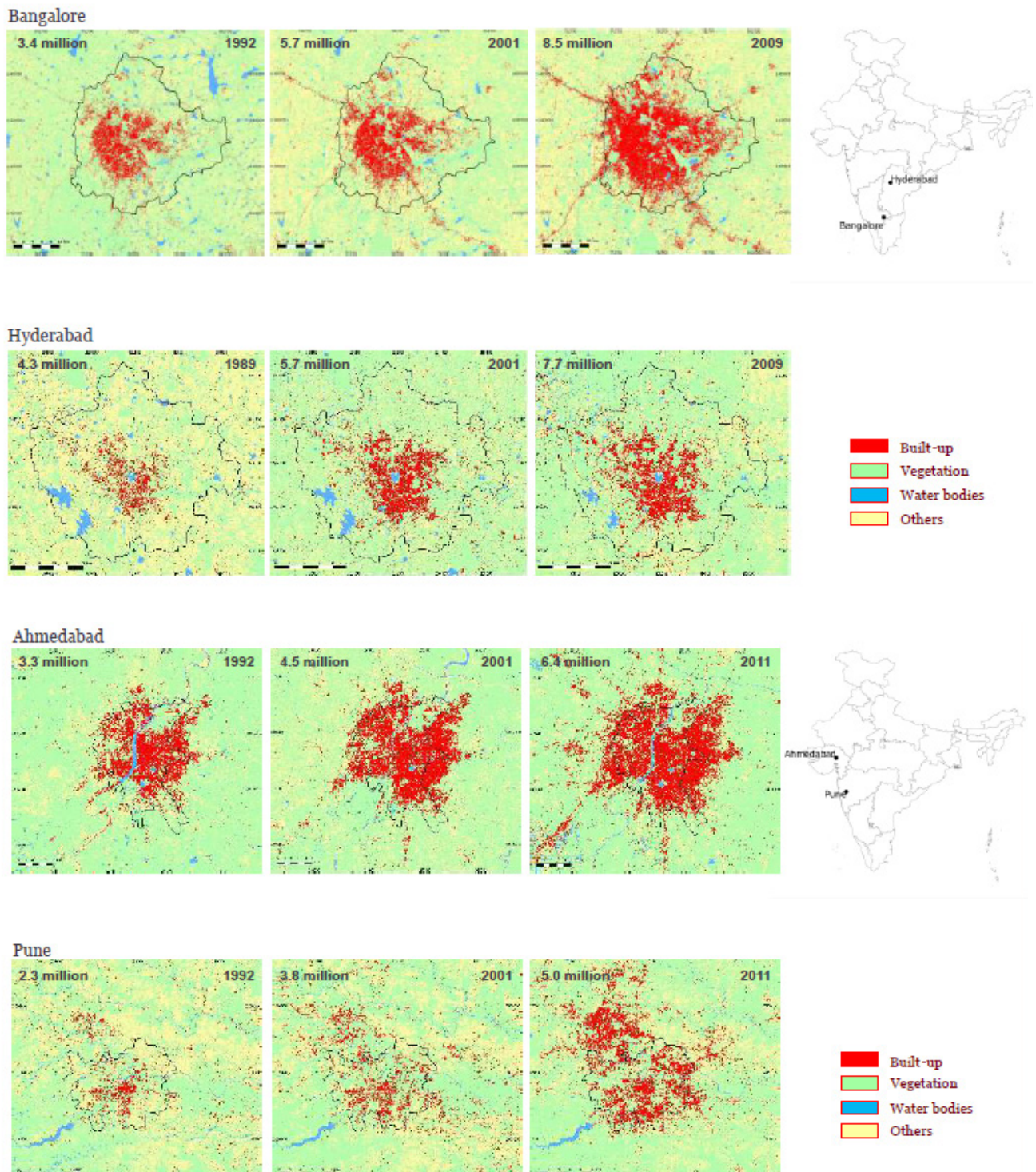
Source: Sudhira (2011).

Figure 9: Piped access to drinking-water within households (2001, 2011)

Source: Registrar General of India (2001; 2011).

Figure 10: Access to drinking-water among slum households participating in the Slum Networking Project

Source: Mehta and Mehta (2011).

However, most of the city's sewage was piped to stabilisation ponds at Pirana, on the periphery of the city, and a significant proportion of untreated sewage was discharged either on to nearby land or directly into the Sabarmati River. Years of neglect and the flow of untreated sewage and industrial effluent into the river left the Sabarmati heavily polluted, and the river posed a major health and environmental hazard, particularly to the estimated 10,000 households living along its banks in slum settlements.

To address these issues the AMC commissioned the construction of sewage treatment plants at Vasna and Pirana in 1997 to treat sewage before its discharge into the river. In addition, as part of the Sabarmati River Front Development project, it implemented an integrated storm water and sewage system with interceptor drains installed along both banks of the river. These captured sewage from 38 discharge points and routed it to the sewage treatment plants, preventing untreated sewage from flowing into the Sabarmati. This has led to improvements in the city-level environmental conditions and also in the quality of water in the Sabarmati River.

As regards the coverage of sanitation systems in terms of access to underground closed drains, Ahmedabad performed

significantly better than the national and state average, even in 2001, and has continued to progress over the decade (Figure 11). As of 2011 access to wastewater disposal in Ahmedabad was about double the national urban average.

Further, Ahmedabad has exceptional levels for both coverage[9] and efficiency[10] of wastewater collection based on Service Level Benchmarks introduced in 2009 by the Ministry of Urban Development of the Government of India (Figure 12). Importantly, compared with Bangalore and Hyderabad – which have roughly similar population sizes – Ahmedabad performs better and has made greater progress during the short period for which data are available (Ministry of Urban Development, 2012).

As with water supply the AMC has also been active in addressing sanitation issues in slum communities. Among the households that participated in the SNP, the share of slum households with covered or closed underground drains increased from 21% to 87% (Figure 13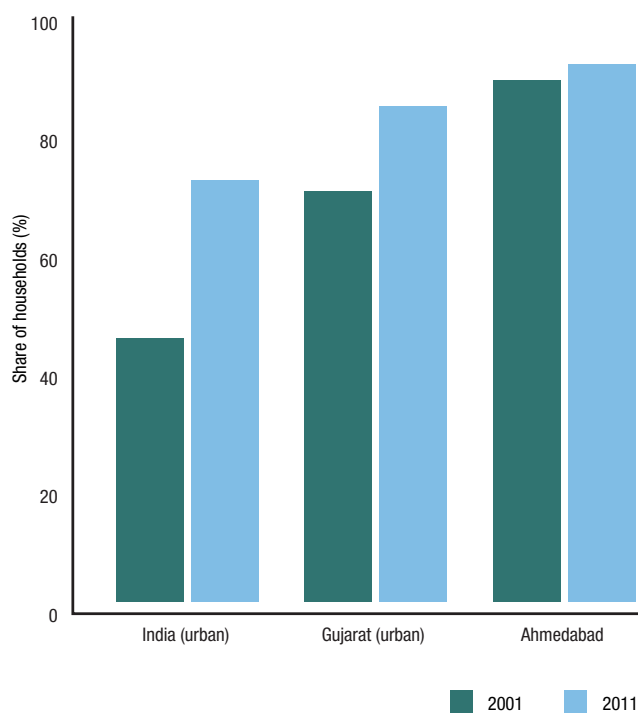, overleaf) (Mehta and Mehta, 2011). In addition, about 10,500 houses have been provided with individual water and sanitation connections under the AMC's NOC-500 programme (see Section 3.2).

Moreover, the AMC and Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA) are extending the city's

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9   Coverage of sewage network services denotes the extent to which the underground sewage network has reached residential, commercial, industrial and institutional properties. Properties that connect their sewerage outlet to storm water drains or open drains are not considered.

10 Collection efficiency of sewage network services is measured as the amount of wastewater collected as a share of the sewage generation, as measured at the inlet of wastewater treatment plants.

Figure 11: Access to wastewater disposal through closed drainage
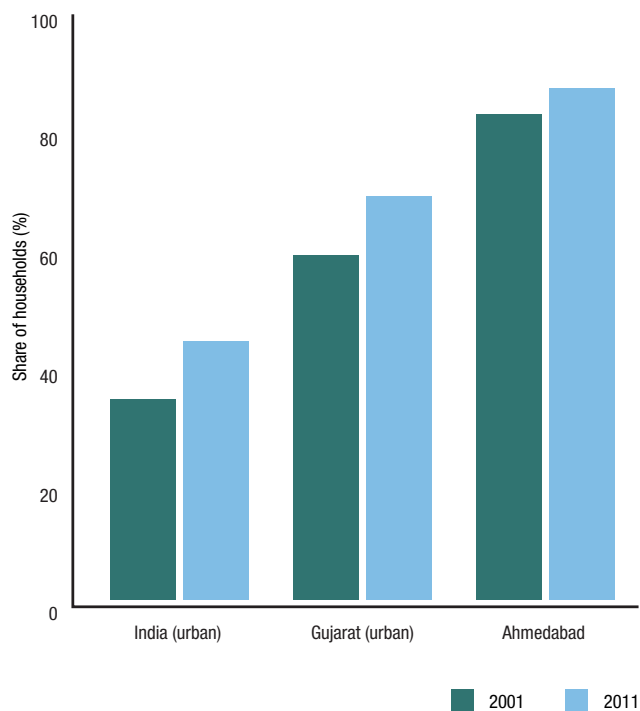
Source: Registrar General of India (2001; 2011).
Note: Closed drainage refers to the type of wastewater outlet to which households are connected.

Figure 12: Coverage and efficiency of wastewater collection services (2008- 2011)

Source: Ministry of Urban Development (2012)

water and sanitation infrastructure to new areas on the periphery of the city as they plan for urban expansion.

2.4 Gains in political voice

Progress in political voice is more of a process of ongoing engagement and bargaining between state and society than a specific outcome. Political voice depends both on the ability of citizens to mobilise collectively and on governments providing guarantees for a humane, fair and just society, implemented through the effective rule of law (Stiglitz et al., 2009). In this case study we understand political voice to mean the ability of citizens to influence government policy, decision-making and implementation processes.

Citizens express political voice through a variety of channels, engaging with the political system to have an impact on government decision-making through, for example, voting in elections, membership of political parties, collective action through civil society and community-based organisations and through the use of media. Voice can play a crucial role in holding the state to account, but the power of citizens to influence political outcomes depends on the context – the degree to which the state is receptive to the views expressed; and whether it has the will and/or the capacity to respond to the demands and concerns that are being voiced (Gloppen et al., 2003; Moore and Teskey, 2006; O'Neil et al., 2007).

Given its process-based and multidimensional nature, political voice does not translate neatly into measurable indicators. Further, while data on political voice are difficult to come by at the national level, they are even sparser at the city level. Nevertheless, analysis of the limited data available at the local level, combined with evidence gathered through interviews and focus groups, provides some testament to the growing strength of political voice in Ahmedabad, including the empowerment of poorer communities. Here we explore progress in political voice through two main channels: collective action and the mobilisation of communities and transparency in local government.

2.4.1 Collective action

An active civil society, in which people are engaged and well informed, can facilitate accountability and dialogue between the state and society, as well as improve the quality of governance and service delivery. Ahmedabad has had a long-established and prominent civil society even before Independence, with civil society organisations working actively on a range of issues. In addition, the city has a long history of trade unionism, which started with the Textile Labour Association (TLA) in 1920.

More recently, Ahmedabad has seen the formation of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which

Figure 13: Type of sanitation facilities before and after the Slum Networking Project
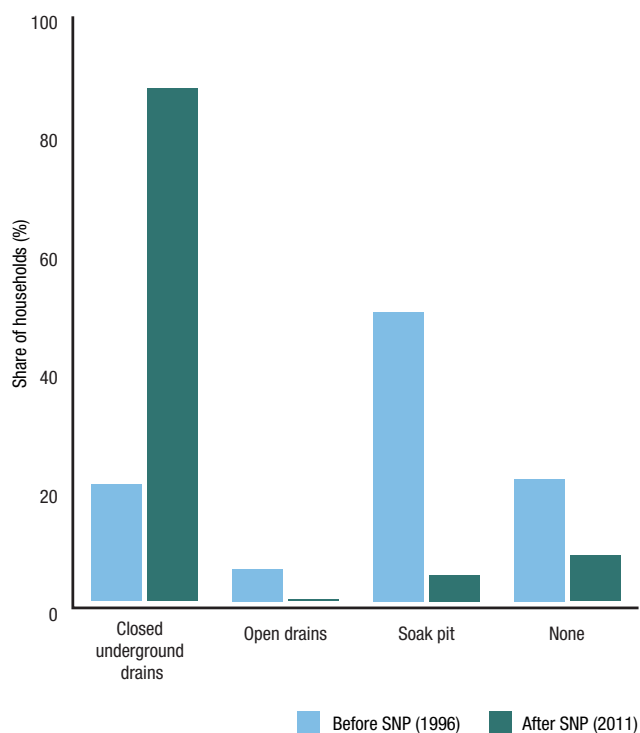
Source: Mehta and Mehta (2011).

organised women workers in the informal sector and has grown to a membership of about a million female members. Such organisations have enjoyed a high degree of public trust in Ahmedabad and played a critical role in the mobilisation and empowerment of its poorest people.

It is noteworthy that women in Ahmedabad have assumed a degree of prominence as mediators in the relationship between municipal authorities and the urban poor. Women-led organisations, such as SEWA and its sister organisations, such as the Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (MHT), which works on housing issues, have played an active role in negotiating with – and contesting – the government.

The mobilisation of civil society through trade unions and community-based organisations has gone some way to improving access to services for poor urban people. There has been a tradition of a high level of dialogue between the AMC and civil society, encouraging the development of strong working relationships between different stakeholders, such as with the Slum Networking Project (SNP). A critical design feature of the SNP was its participatory approach (discussed in Section 3.2).

NGOs, in particular Saath and MHT, have played a key role in aiding dialogue between communities, the AMC and utility providers. Perhaps more importantly, NGOs have facilitated the formation of *mahila mandals* (women's groups) as community-based organisations in slum communities across the city. These groups bring the women of the community together and give them a platform to

collectively voice their concerns and demands to the local government. Over time groups have interfaced with the AMC to demand access to services in informal settlements and secure benefits and livelihood training under government schemes. Their formation has also helped increase women's confidence (SEWA Academy, 2002).

Despite the proactive steps taken by local government to encourage community participation, the relationship between the government and communities has become strained, marked by a breakdown of trust (discussed in Section 4.2).

However, political voice is not just about polite debate but has often been channelled in more contentious and disruptive ways. The political voice of poor people can be seen in the way in which they have come together to protest and redress inadequate implementation of pro-poor policies or violations of their rights (Mahadevia et al., 2012). For example, when plans for the Sabarmati River Front Project were to be implemented in 2005 without consulting the communities that would be displaced without rehabilitation, residents came together to form the Sabarmati Nagarik Adhikar Manch (Sabarmati Citizens Rights Forum or SNAM), facilitated by NGOs. The coalition lodged a public interest litigation in the Gujarat High Court to ensure the government rehabilitated them. Although they faced numerous challenges and implementation has been problematic (see Section 4.2), community leaders worked together to ensure cohesion as slum dwellers fought for their rights (Mathur, 2012; Mahadevia et al, 2012). Similarly, urban poor workers have approached the courts for rehabilitation following other projects such as road widening and lake development.

2.4.2 Strengthening responsive local governance

At the local level the AMC has encouraged the engagement of citizens with the state through dialogue, collaboration and participatory decision-making; although there have been recent setbacks. There are several examples of 'invited spaces' or modes of citizen engagement in governance in Ahmedabad.

The AMC and AUDA have encouraged dialogue around urban planning with consensual decision-making as central elements within the Development Plan-Town Planning Scheme, which involves the drawing up of a 'Development Plan' for the city and its surrounding area and the preparation of 'Town Planning Schemes' (TPS) on plots of land within it (See Section 3.3). Public consultation is held when the Development Plan is drawn to seek views and objections on the expansion of infrastructure and zoning in the city. Similarly, at the heart of the TPS process is a participatory approach to the review and discussion of plans with farmers and other land owners. Draft TPS proposals are presented at public meetings of landowners, and opinions and objections are solicited to build a consensus, with three individual hearings with each landowner (Ballaney and Patel, 2009). This plays a key role in ensuring that the process of urban expansion takes into consideration the views of a range of stakeholders.

A consensual approach to addressing issues has also been applied to redressing complaints about service delivery. Ahmedabad has been efficient in addressing complaints – an indicator of improved governance. One constraint to the inclusiveness of this service is that it uses Internet-based technology that may exclude certain groups, and in particular the very groups that often struggle to access services.

Ahmedabad and, more generally, the state of Gujarat have also emerged as pioneers of e-governance: the provision of services with online application, registration or payment. E-governance has been introduced for a variety of government services, from land-record registration and the registration of births and deaths to the process of obtaining an affidavit for income. Gujarat has outpaced all other states in India in terms of the number of e-transactions for public services (Figure 14). Gujarat accounted for up to 27% of all e-transactions recorded in services provided by state governments in between 2013 and 2014.

The adoption of e-governance was a tacit acknowledgement that citizens' engagement with the AMC had become defined by complex procedures, unnecessary delays and corruption. The consequences of inefficient processes were that middlemen often exploited citizens and many local government departments were inefficient and disorganised, contributing to insufficient revenue collection and revenue loss. E-governance has encouraged the development of more transparent and accountable municipal authorities, and citizens with Internet access are able to access information or make complaints more efficiently.

Figure 14: E-governance transactions in Indian states (in millions) (Jan 2013-Dec 2014)
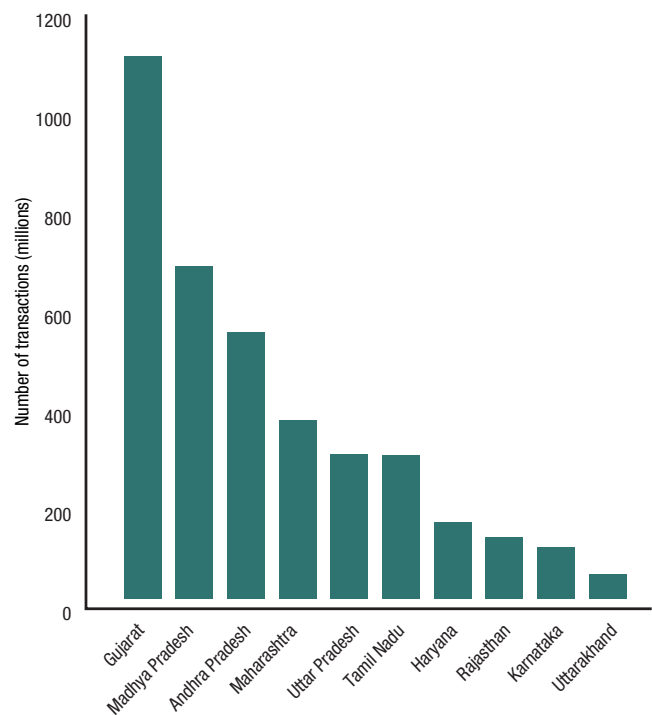
Source: Department of Electronics & Information Technology (n.d.).

Towards a better life in Ahmedabad, India

India's urban areas have seen an influx of 160 million additional residents over the last two decades.
Source: Registrar General of India (1991; 2011)

Progress made

Urban poverty rate in Gujurat

1993–94   **28%**
2011–12   **10%**
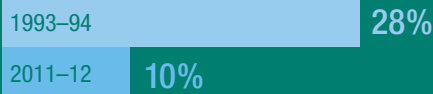
In Ahmedabad

60 slums upgraded, benefitting over 13,000 families.

Source: Government of India (1997); Planning Commission (2013); Mahadevia et al. (2011)

Environment

Urban expansion has been managed through pragmatic and proactive planning.
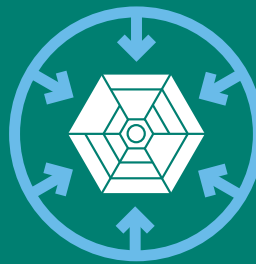
Political voice

Political engagement has strengthened city level decision-making.

Community mobilisation

Dialogue and cooperation with local government

Trade unions for informal workers

Protests

How progress happened

Strengthening municipal governance and finance

NGOs aiding dialogue between government and communities

Investment in infrastructure

Challenges remaining

Breakdown of trust between civil society and government

Inequities in access to services and opportunities

Replacing local solutions with centralised approaches to urban policy

Environmental impacts of urban services

Failure to lessen social tensions

3. What are the factors driving change?

Women walking in Ahmedabad. Photo: © Emmanuel Dyan.

'The historically vibrant civil society movement has played a key role, maintaining balance and enabling dialogue between the government and communities' – Urban expert

This section examines some of the factors that have driven progress in Ahmedabad, outlining the initiatives that have had cross-cutting impacts on well-being, and delivered progress across a number of dimensions. Some of these factors are not only drivers of change; they can also be seen in themselves as outcomes of change in terms of processes. We examine four inter-related developments that have been at the heart of development progress in Ahmedabad:

- strengthening of municipal governance and finances
- investing in infrastructure development
- pragmatic planning and managing of urban expansion
- community mobilisation and joint partnerships for action.

The notion of dialogue between actors has been embedded in much of this progress as the AMC has attempted, with varying degrees of success, to be attuned to the needs of poor people. Civil-society organisations have played a crucial role in facilitating dialogue and building trust between communities and the local government, as well as mobilising communities to demand their rights when this trust has broken down.

3.1 Strengthening municipal governance and finances

Strong and empowered urban local governments are needed to realise the goal of sustainable and inclusive urban development, making it essential that any administrative decentralisation must be accompanied by financial decentralisation, including local government capacity to monitor and oversee private sector investment (Hildebrand et al., 2013; Gupte, 2013).

The Indian Government sought to decentralise authority to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and strengthen democratic government at the local level via the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) 1992. This Amendment marked a watershed in the development of the Indian municipal system, granting constitutional status to ULBs and extending their range of powers and functions – an attempt to strengthen democratic government at the city level. The ULBs, responsible for the provision of basic services, took on responsibility for economic development and poverty alleviation.

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has won a whole series of awards for its achievements, including: best financial management system (CRISIL National Award, 2003); best practice in city civic centres and e-governance (International Best Practices, 2004); an award for the Slum Networking Project for best practice to improve the urban environment (UNHABITAT Dubai International Awards, 2006), and Innovative Infrastructure Development (41st Anniversary of the Housing and Urban Development Corporation Limited, 2010).

3.1.1 Improving municipal governance

Municipal governments in India, and indeed in most South Asian countries, often suffer from low institutional capacity and face financial challenges that contribute to poor performance and an inability to finance and implement programmes. Performance is also impeded by inadequate managerial and technical skills.

Many of the challenges faced by the AMC until the early 1990s resulted from poor administrative capacity. Since that time it has undertaken a range of reforms to attract talent and improve its human resources. For example, the Indian City Managers' Association was established in Ahmedabad in 1997 as a membership-based organisation of municipal bodies, initially funded by USAID. The City Managers' Association was involved in the capacity building of municipal staff, knowledge sharing with other cities and even other countries and advocacy to the State Government. It was a vibrant network for about a decade, although its impact has weakened more recently.

In addition, the AMC – like most local governments – used to recruit junior clerks through a competitive test. In time they

would be promoted automatically through the organisation, reaching as high as deputy municipal commissioner before their performance was factored into decisions about their further promotion. The absence of either a professional work culture or the need to compete for promotion undermines performance within municipal governments.

In 1997, 41 professionals with degrees in business administration and chartered accountancy were recruited as assistant managers in the AMC and placed in strategic positions in key departments, including *octroi* duty[11], property tax, finance and corporate planning. Their salaries were in line with those paid to fresh recruits to the private sector. This was effective in re-energising local administration in the city and the approach has continued, with the AMC still committed to drawing knowledge from experts and consultants. As of January 2011 the AMC had 90 professionals spread across various departments, contributing to the professionalization of the municipal corporation and improving its capacity to deliver. These reforms have contributed to improved performance of the AMC.

In addition, urban areas are often governed by multiple institutions, with blurred lines of jurisdiction and poor coordination (Khair, 2014). This results in frequent conflicts of interest and a breakdown of responsibilities, which undermines progress. In contrast, the AMC is one of the very few municipal governments that actually undertakes all of the 18 responsibilities[12] outlined for ULBs under the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992. This has played a key role in enabling policy and decision-making coherence at the municipal level.

3.1.2 Strengthening municipal financial capacity

As discussed in Section 2.1, the financial condition of the AMC started to deteriorate in the late 1980s, presenting the municipality with serious challenges. The enforcement of municipal taxes was poor and failed to keep pace with the growth of the city. By the end of 1993-1994 the AMC had accumulated cash losses of Rs. 350 million ($11 million) and had a bank overdraft of Rs. 220 million ($7 million).

This drove the State Government to appoint a temporary Administrator to the AMC in 1994, replacing its directly elected leadership. The Administrator was confronted with a host of challenges, including the urgent need to restore financial stability and build citizen confidence in the AMC's ability to deliver services efficiently and equitably. The AMC subsequently undertook a series of bold reforms that resulted in a complete financial turnaround. The AMC was able to wipe off the cash losses in just five months and had a cash surplus by the end of 1994-1995, which grew to

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11 Octroi was a local tax levied on goods that entered the city limits and was collected through various check points. In Gujarat it was collected in seven key cities until it was abolished in 2007 but city governments have so far been compensated by the state government for the loss of revenue.

12 For instance, the responsibility for these tasks in Bangalore is spread out over five different agencies and in Hyderabad it is over four organisations.

Figure 15: Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) revenue income (1991-2015)
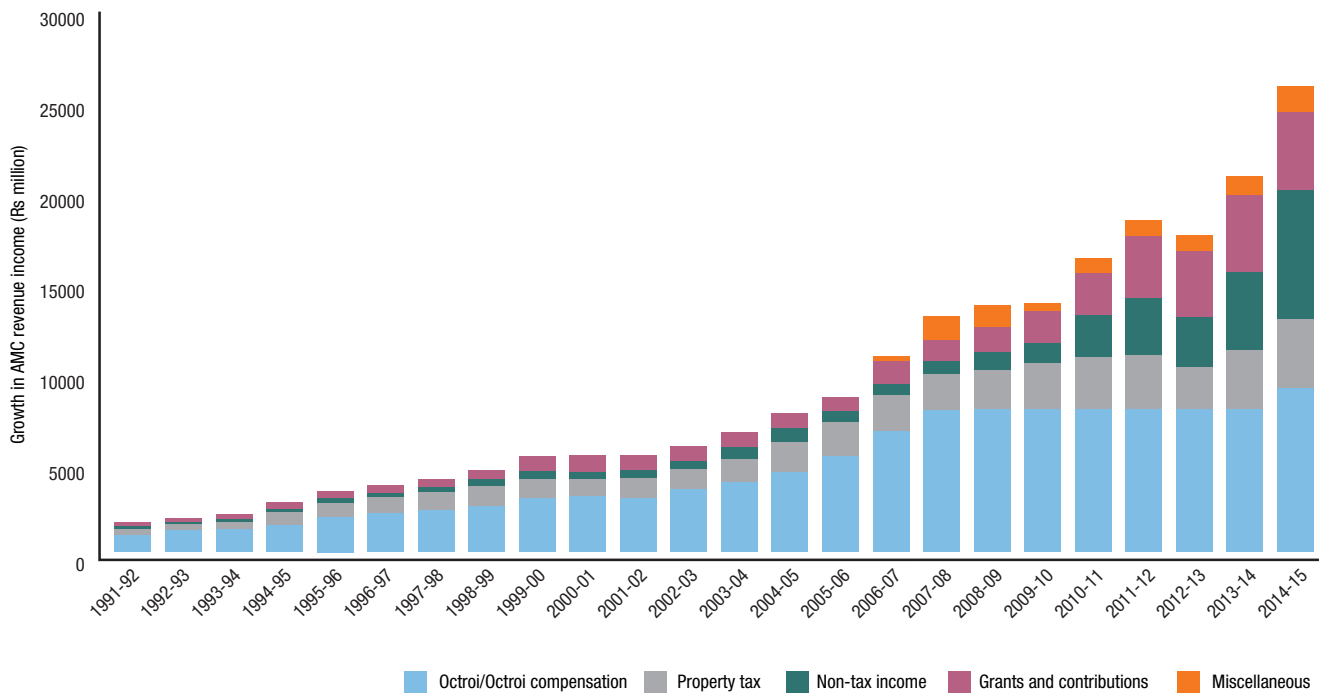
Source: AMC (various years).

Rs. 600 million ($16.5 million) by 1995-1996 and to Rs. 700 million ($19.7 million) by 1996-1997. Revenue has increased steadily since (Figure 15), with another major jump in 2001-2002 following further reforms.

Since 1995 inefficiencies in the property taxation system have been addressed, including the enforcement of stringent collection mechanisms and punitive measures against defaulters. Before these reforms were introduced less than 30% of the property tax that was demanded was collected, largely because of a lack of transparency in land valuation, which was often contested in court, leading to delays and reassessment (Mathur, 2006). In addition, municipal property records were updated to include a large number of previously unrecorded properties and the value of properties was reassessed. The number of exempted properties fell dramatically.

Further, in 2000-2001 attempts were made to make property taxation more transparent and accountable as the system moved from an annual rental system to an area-based valuation. One impressive outcome is that there have been no cases of litigation against the assessments carried out under the new system. These reforms were envisaged, developed and applied over a two-year period and have given the AMC the resources to deliver progress in services across the city. The strong leadership of the AMC was central to their success.

Building on its strengthened financial position, in 1997 the AMC was awarded a credit rating of A+ by CRISIL (a Standard and Poor's Company in India), which was later upgraded to AA. Following this, the AMC became the first

municipal body in Asia to access the financial markets and issue municipal bonds, worth Rs. 1 billion ($26 million), without a government counter-guarantee in 1998. The success of this foray into the capital markets has been emphasised by a strong credit rating, enabling the AMC to raise capital to help finance a large city-wide water supply and sewerage project in the late 1990s (FIRE (D) Project Office, 1999).

Such innovative financial reform has been at the heart of Ahmedabad's revitalisation, establishing financial probity and ensuring the generation of a revenue surplus. The success of these reforms has seen Ahmedabad go from bust to boom and the AMC lauded as one of the few ULBs in India able to generate revenue to finance the development, operation and maintenance of urban infrastructure and assets.

3.2 Investing in infrastructure development

The strengthening of municipal management and finances has enabled greater investment in urban planning and infrastructure development. In addition, existing civil-society organisations and NGOs have played a key role in facilitating dialogue between slum communities and the government, seeking to establish trust and engagement, with varying degrees of success, in the implementation of development programmes.

3.2.1 Infrastructure for slum households

Over the years the local government in Ahmedabad has invested in building infrastructure, including providing housing and basic services for slum dwellers and large infrastructure projects, including roads and public

Table 2: Programmes that provide basic infrastructure in Ahmedabad

Policy	Details	Coverage
80: 20 Individual Toilet Scheme (introduced 1980-1981)	Under the scheme the State Government and AMC together contributed 80% of the cost of construction, while the remaining 20% was provided by beneficiaries. This was a small-scale initiative, partly because of its rigid specifications and complex procedures.	3,000 families
90: 10 Individual Toilets Scheme full subsidy (introduced 1990)	The 80:20 scheme was modified to the 90:10 scheme, with the AMC contributing 90% of the project cost, and beneficiaries paying the remaining 10%.	14,000 families
Slum Networking Project (1996-2009)	The SNP was implemented collaboratively by the AMC, slum communities and implementing NGOs, which also helped communities to raise finances to upgrade slums. This was the first attempt to extend mainstream amenities to slums, including individual water connections, individual toilets and drainage lines, storm water drains, solid-waste management, street lights and the paving of internal roads.	60 slums upgraded, 13,000 families
Slum Electrification Scheme (introduced 2001)	This programme built on the success of the SNP, with two implementing NGOs forging a partnership with the Ahmedabad Electricity Company for slum electrification. Under the scheme each household was provided with a private electricity meter. This provided safe and legal electricity to slum dwellers by regularising connections to minimise the unauthorised use of electricity. When women's organisations facilitated the project, connections were issued in the women's names, enabling them to gain greater visibility as citizens.	200,000 houses in over 710 slums electrified (as of 2007)
NOC-500 Scheme (introduced 2002)	The AMC issues a 'no objection certificate' (NOC) to slum households that allows them to apply for legal individual water and sewerage connections to their houses. While this is not an official or legal acknowledgment of tenure rights or ownership, it permits the official provision of basic services in informal settlements. Households pay Rs. 500 to apply to be included in the programme.	10,500 households
Nirmal Gujarat Sanitation Programme (introduced 2006)	Aiming to make Ahmedabad an open-defecation free city, this scheme was introduced by the State Government for the construction of individual toilets.	18,223 toilets constructed (2009-2010)

Sources: Mehta and Mehta (2011); Mahadevia et al. (2014); AMC and CEPT (n. d.) AMC targeted the construction of 21,000 individual toilets in 2009-2010.* AMC targeted the construction of 21,000 individual toilets in 2009-2010.*

transport. It has used innovative mechanisms to leverage finance for these projects and creative collaborative arrangements to implement them.

The AMC and State Government have introduced various programmes to provide infrastructure for slum dwellers over the years (see Table 2). The AMC continues to invest in basic infrastructure in slum communities, earmarking 20% of its annual budget for improvements for the urban poor.

One of the most notable projects has been the Slum Networking Project (SNP), launched by the AMC in 1995 to upgrade the physical and community environment in slum settlements in partnership with NGOs. The SNP recognised that slums provide affordable homes for poorer people who are unable to access housing through formal markets. As mentioned during one of our interviews, 'slums are imperfect solutions to housing constraints in cities but play an important role' (stakeholder interview, civil-society organisation leader). The SNP, which ended in 2009, was hugely successful and has been widely recognised as a successful development intervention.

Under the SNP the AMC provided seven basic services to selected slums through a unique participatory approach:

individual water supply connections, individual toilets and sewerage connections, paved roads, storm water drainage, street lighting, and community development and social infrastructure. NGOs played a crucial role in mobilising slum communities, working with them to devise infrastructure plans, and coordinating the collection of slum communities' contributions to the project's funding.

The value of infrastructure improvements amounted to Rs. 20,000 ($550) per household, with the cost being shared by slum residents, government partners, private donors and the NGOs that implemented the project (Table 3). Slum households contributed 10% of the cost and the improvements only took place once all households had made their contributions. Representatives of the participating communities were trained to supervise the implementation of work.

The programme identified some of the largest challenges faced by communities in informal settlements. While many households were able and willing to pay for access to basic services, and indeed often paid higher rates than wealthier households to access similar services unofficially, their biggest challenge was their lack of security and legal access to services. The SNP addressed this by providing

all slum households covered by the project with ten-year non-eviction guarantees issued by the AMC, which granted them, in essence, tenure rights over that period.

Building on the lessons of the SNP, the Slum Electrification Programme was introduced in 2001 following a multi-stakeholder collaboration between the AMC, USAID and the Ahmedabad Electricity Company Ltd, the sole distributor of electricity in Ahmedabad, and two local NGOs, Saath and MHT, with these NGOs providing strong support by mobilising communities and helping project implementation. In 2002 the AMC introduced the 500-NOC scheme, overcoming issues of land tenure by providing access to legal, individual connections to water and sanitation for slum households.

Both of these policies have achieved a significant scale over the past decade.

The SNP ended in 2009 after the introduction of the JnNURM (Box 5), which provides central funds to cities to upgrade slums and construct alternative housing under its Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP) Component. Although there are issues relating to implementation (discussed in Section 4), Ahmedabad has been successful in leveraging its strong governance and financial systems to access JnNURM funds,[13] which have been used to construct substantial numbers of houses for poorer people. By December 2013 the AMC and AUDA had constructed nearly 33,000 homes with JnNURM funding; these were used mainly to resettle families displaced by various development projects (AMC, 2013).

Table 3: Slum Networking Project: costs and contributions

	Households	NGOs	AMC
Physical development cost Rs. 6,000 ($135)	Rs. 2,000 ($45)	Rs. 2,000 ($45)	Rs. 2,000 ($45)
Community development cost Rs. 1,000 ($22)		Rs. 300 ($6.7)	Rs. 700 ($16)
Linkage with basic city infrastructure cost Rs. 3,000 ($67)			Rs. 3,000 ($67)
Individual toilet cost Rs. 4,500 ($101)			Rs. 4,500 ($101)
Community fund for maintenance Rs. 100 ($2.24)	Rs. 100 ($2.24)		

Source: Anand (n.d.).

13 Of the total project cost under the BSUP component's financing pattern for Ahmedabad: the share from the Central government was 50%, the share from the State Government was 20% and the share from AMC/AUDA and the beneficiaries was 30% (MHUPA, 2009). The beneficiary share was not to exceed 12% of the cost of the dwelling unit. The beneficiary share in Ahmedabad amounted to Rs. 66,900.

3.2.2 City-level infrastructure

Ahmedabad's strong local government and the level of priority it has given to urban development have also enabled investment in large infrastructure projects.

In 2002 the city developed the 76 km long Sardar Patel Ring Road around the city. Typically, the right of way for such roads is appropriated using the land acquisition method in India (High Powered Expert Committee for Estimating the Investment Requirements for Urban Infrastructure Services, 2011). AUDA used minimum land acquisition, acquiring only 13.1 km of the total land by the conventional land acquisition method and procured the rest through land pooling under the Town Planning Scheme (see Section 3.3).

Similarly, Ahmedabad has implemented the Bus Rapid Transport System (BRTS); most other Indian cities have struggled to create similar bus transit corridors, in part due to a lack of institutional initiatives and to controversies (Mahadevia et al., 2012). While the impact of the BRTS has been mixed, Ahmedabad remains one of the few cities in India that has been able to plan and implement an expanding BRTS. Part of this success stems from a tradition of urban planning, a well-connected road infrastructure and a history of coordinated approaches to implementing large projects.

Another big project in the city has been the controversial Sabarmati Riverfront Development. The AMC began discussions about this project in 1995 to improve the health of the Sabarmati River and reclaim land for parks, promenades and other public uses. The project was controversial mainly because it required the resettling of about 10,000 slum households from the river banks.

Following delays and cost escalations, the project was implemented at a cost of about Rs. 11 billion ($200 million). Yet, even with initial lower cost estimates the AMC faced considerable financial challenges and was unable to borrow to fund the project, as the investments would not generate the revenues necessary for repayment (Clarke-Annez et al., 2012). In response, the AMC devised creative ways to generate additional revenues to construct and maintain the riverfront. Narandra Modi, who was then the Chief Minister of Gujarat, played a crucial role in shaping the riverfront project (Desai, 2014). In 2003, the property rights over the riverbed and reclaimed land were transferred from the State Government of Gujarat to the AMC.

The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Limited was then created as a special purpose vehicle (SPV)[14]: a model that was adopted to avoid the delays associated with municipal decision-making. Around 14% of reclaimed land was reserved for future sale, the estimated market value of which was enough to cover project costs and generate resources to develop and manage the riverfront. Designating a portion of the reclaimed land for commercial sale made the project self-financing and financially viable.

3.3 Pragmatic planning and managing of urban expansion

While slum upgrading and the provision of basic services to slum settlements are progressive initiatives, they are also reactive policies, illustrating the failure to provide housing and basic amenities for migrants and poor people. High rates of urbanisation highlight the need to plan for urban growth, but municipal governments in India often fail to coordinate policy across water, energy, transport, land-use planning and waste-management sectors (Allen et al., 2006; Connors, 2005). The incorporation of peripheral areas into the urban fabric and investment of basic infrastructure can help with slum prevention.

Ahmedabad has outperformed most other Indian cities in its integrated approach to urban planning and the integration of peri-urban areas into metropolitan Ahmedabad under the planning control of the Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA). While the AMC is responsible for the provision of basic services within city limits, areas within the urban agglomeration beyond the city limits are administered by other rural and urban local governments. AUDA was established as a parastatal body in 1978 with a mandate to prepare the Development Plan and town planning schemes, regulate development and execute infrastructure projects for the wider Ahmedabad Urban Region, such as the laying of water supply pipes, sewerage and storm water drainage. While AUDA is responsible for providing basic infrastructure services and amenities, it relies on local government and the private sector to maintain public assets.

Ahmedabad's urban planning process has two stages: a citywide Development Plan (DP), prepared every 20 years, and Town Planning Schemes (TPS) for smaller portions of land, to change land use and plan for amenities. While Development Plans are drawn up in all major cities, very few are implemented. In contrast, 89% of Ahmedabad's 2002 Development Plan has been implemented. The DP-TPS mechanism coordinates the extension of infrastructure to urban and peri-urban areas in a proactive rather than reactive manner. This enables better planned and mixed-use urbanisation, with key amenities continuing to be available as the city grows.

Superior urban planning has also played a crucial role in containing urban sprawl. Under a TPS land is acquired by the local government and development authority for the development of essential amenities (roads, social amenities, green spaces) and also to provide affordable housing for the urban poor. Over the past decade, for example, about 153 square kilometres have been taken up for TPSs across

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14 The SPV is usually a subsidiary company with an asset/liability structure and legal status that makes its obligations secure even if the parent company itself goes bankrupt.

Table 4: Land appropriation in 103 Town Planning Schemes prepared by AUDA (2002-2010)

Use of land	Area (square kilometres)	Area (%)
Roads	21.78	14%
Land bank/land for sale	12.05	8%
Public utilities	4.69	3%
Affordable housing	4.52	3%
Gardens and open spaces, playgrounds	4.45	3%
Public purpose (education, health, etc.)	1.01	1%
Total land appropriated	48.5	32%
Returned to owners as final plots	105.28	68%
Total	**153.78**	**100%**

Source: Ballaney (2013).

AUDA's limits. Around 8% of the land is retained by the authority for sale to finance infrastructure on the plots of land. In addition, a certain portion is designated for public areas such as gardens, health centres and early childhood and education centres (Table 4).

The stipulation for allocating land for affordable housing includes the explicit recognition of the need for inclusive urbanisation. While implementation has not kept pace with the official recommendation and need for affordable housing, there have been some clear successes: between 2004 and 2009 alone, AUDA built more than 11,000 houses for poor people on land obtained through the TPSs. More recently, the new Development Plan 2021 has included an affordable housing zone to provide housing to economically weaker sections.

A further benefit of this process is that land for roads and public amenities is sourced through a land-pooling system, with all land owners within the area of a town planning scheme surrendering a small portion of their land and benefiting from better access to services. This contrasts with the process in most other cities, where land for such amenities is procured by the government under 'eminent domain' from landowners whose property lies where the planned amenities are to be built. In this regard the DP-TPS process is far more equitable.

While the two-stage process of the DP-TPS established by the Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act (GTPUDA) 1976 addressed some of the challenges of unplanned urban growth and established the possibility of land pooling, actual implementation of Town Planning Schemes was limited until the 1990s. Since 2000, AUDA and the AMC have sought to plan urban expansion proactively, with a large share of landowners volunteering their land to be taken up under TP schemes. Between 2000 and 2009 AUDA developed more than 200 sq. km of land

using the TPS, twice the amount developed in the previous 25 years as the city has grown rapidly (Annez et al., 2010).

The TPS offers several benefits in terms of managing urban expansion and has been praised for being more inclusive, participatory and reflexive than traditional land-acquisition methods (Patel, 2007; Ballaney and Patel, 2009; Nair and Ahluwalia, 2010). Compared with other cities where land for urbanisation is acquired under the Land Acquisition Act, the land pooling mechanism in Ahmedabad allows the original landowners on the outskirts of the city to benefit from the process of urbanisation.

Before 2001, the TP scheme allowed public agencies to appropriate private land for rights of way and other public facilities, such as schools and green spaces. Roads, water supply and sewerage infrastructure were financed through an impact fee, which was difficult to collect and monitor and which failed to provide sufficient financial resources to implement or complete networks (Clarke-Annez et al., 2012). The amendments to the Act in 2001 allowed the implementing agencies to acquire an additional percentage of private land and create serviced plots for sale in the free market. Authorities auctioned these plots to raise money for the development of basic infrastructure.

One of the overarching benefits of the DP-TPS approach has been the overlaying of a degree of policy coherence that tends to be absent in India. The DP, which maps out the expansion of Ahmedabad, clearly allocates land for a number of uses. Most Indian cities have been beset by institutional fragmentation and an inability, or unwillingness, to coordinate across a number of sectors. Ahmedabad is one of the few cities where coordination across a number of municipal functions is established.

3.4 Community mobilisation and joint partnerships for action

Much of Ahmedabad's progress has been bolstered by the development of its vibrant civil society. The role of philanthropic industrialists has left an indelible imprint on the city, while the Gandhian tradition of dispute resolution through dialogue forms the basis of negotiation rather than conflict between its different actors. A number of civil society organisations have become increasingly prominent in mediating the relationship between municipal government and the urban poor while providing services that the government and/or the private sector fail to provide for this section of society.

3.4.1 Participatory approaches

One defining aspect of the SNP was its participatory approach and the impetus it gave to the mobilisation of slum communities to contribute actively to the physical, environmental and social conditions of their neighbourhoods. Community-based organisations formed during the lifespan of the SNP have continued to evolve and interface with the AMC, demanding access to services under schemes such as 500-NOC and advocating for benefits such as early childhood education and health facilities and livelihood training under various government schemes. MHT continues to work with slum communities across the city and has enabled the formation of new community-based organisations.

The SNP demonstrated a successful 'home-grown' approach to extending water and sanitation services to poor areas of the city in a truly collaborative manner. It paved the way for the AMC's slum improvement policies and programmes, which recognised the needs of people in informal settlements and acknowledged communities' ability to organise, build consensus and demand legal services as well as their ability to contribute towards these services. Even after the SNP came to an end, the AMC continued this approach of extending basic services to the urban poor living in slums.

These initiatives represent innovative ways to extend services to slum households and poor communities in the city without having to address the complicated political issues related to tenure rights. The provision of civic utilities has had a social, environmental and cultural impact, improving living conditions, health, education and self-esteem within the communities they reach.

3.4.2 Civil-society organisations

Civil-society and community-based organisations have played a crucial role in facilitating improvements in the conditions of those living in informal settlements and enabling dialogue between the government and informal workers. Membership of organisations like SEWA has increased substantially, and civil-society organisations have evolved to address a broader range of concerns. Both SEWA and Saath have established sister organisations to expand their remit to address issues relating to livelihoods, education, health, governance, child rights, housing, and micro finance.

In addition, community based organisations, particularly the Vikasini Federation (Women's Development Federation) where women come together to form a city-level peer-network, provide a platform where people can learn about and work on city-level programmes. The Vikasini Federation undertakes surveys and community engagement activities and has been engaged by the AMC to carry out a household survey across slum settlements in the city.

MHT and Saath have extended their activities into other cities and states, and their role has expanded from mobilising local communities to influencing urban development, housing policies and programmes to benefit the slum communities. For instance, MHT is now part of the State Government advisory committee that guides matters related to land use, master planning, affordable housing and slum redevelopment.

Together, this range of participatory approaches and civil-society organisations have been critical in driving and further supporting much of the progress that has been made on improving the well-being of slum dwellers in Ahmedabad.

4. What are the challenges?

Sunset over rooftops in Ahmedabad. Photo: © Kiwi 3rd, via Flickr.

'The voices challenging the new conception of "development" proposed by the government can't be heard, and the breakdown of trust is overshadowing collaboration' – Sociologist

While there have been significant gains for poor people across different dimensions of well-being in Ahmedabad, several key challenges continue to hold back progress. This section outlines four of the main challenges:

- inequity in access to services and opportunities
- centralised approaches to implementing urban policy, leading to increased social dislocation
- increasing social tension driven by both population growth and religious polarisation
- environmental damage

4.1 Inequity in access to services and opportunities

While the AMC has introduced policies to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers, recognition of slum settlements and their rights remains an issue across India and within Ahmedabad. The perception of 'urban advantage' in services can obscure great differences among and within urban populations (Jones et al., 2013). This has been shown to be true in Ahmedabad: the city scores well in terms of service-level benchmarks for water and sanitation, but significant sections of the population, particularly the urban poor, continue to either lack services completely or lack access to services of good quality.

Similarly, while the city has performed well in terms of the construction of housing for low-income families under the Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP) component of the JnNURM, which has often been used to house those displaced by large infrastructure projects, such as the BRTS and Sabarmati Riverfront Project, there have been several challenges in implementation.

The sites selected to rehabilitate displaced slum residents tend to be far from the city centre, often in poorly developed or industrial areas, with poor access to transport links (Mahadevia et al, 2014). As a result, many people are unable to continue with their previous occupations, while others need to spend more travel time and money to reach their place of work.

A study of the impact of those displaced by the Sabarmati River Front Project found that among the children of displaced families relocated to BSUP housing, about 18% of students dropped out of school and an additional 11% lost school attendance (Patel et al., 2015). Those that stayed in school spent more time and money commuting to school as relocation sites were often at a greater travelling distance and had poor transport links to schools.

Similarly, access to health facilities is also often poor. Although primary health centres are to be constructed on all occupied BSUP sites, they have often been found to not be functional (Desai, 2014). Moreover, drinking-water in many sites has shown high concentrations of chemicals and coliform bacteria, which have contributed to illness among residents (Patel et al, 2015).

In addition, the allocation of families to housing units has generally been based on a lottery system. This often negatively affects their social networks and contributes to greater social isolation and lower access to informal insurance. As a result, families often return to the city to live in slums. For instance, a study on the relocation of households to low-income housing found that 34% of those who were allocated housing did not move into the assigned housing, and 32% of those who moved eventually returned to their families and friends (Barnhardt et al., 2014). While the number of houses produced in Ahmedabad under the JnNURM has been impressive, several challenges prevent it from meeting the needs of the intended beneficiaries, and indeed relocation has often reduced their well-being.

Regressive moves in terms of the opportunities for livelihoods among street vendors have also been recorded. According to SEWA there are about 100,000 street vendors in Ahmedabad (Desai, 2014). The street vendors in Ahmedabad are restricted and regulated by five laws, making them vulnerable to eviction, confiscation of their goods and continuous harassment.

The government invoked a National Policy on Urban Street Vendors in 2009 to recognize street vending as an integral and legitimate part of the urban retail trade and distribution system. The centrepiece of the policy is the formation of a city or town vending committee, which includes representatives of street vendors, and which registers street vendors and manages vending spaces (Mahadevia, 2012). The policy recommends that the municipal authorities provide street vendors a range of civic services. However, as noted in Section 2.4, the urban poor have been reduced to forcing the implementation of policies in their interest through public interest litigation.

In the case of street vendors SEWA filed a case in the Gujarat High Court to demand the rights of street vendors.

Even in urban planning for city expansion under the Development Plan – Town Planning Scheme (DP-TPS) there are some concerns over whom the process actually includes. Ahmedabad involves landowners in the planning process and performs better than most cities where land is still acquired without consultation. Yet, the DP-TPS process only consults official landowners. This excludes many other people that depend on the land being incorporated into the urban areas, notably labourers, people renting land and also landowners that purchased land informally – who are probably poorer and more likely to lose from the process. Many of these groups lose their land and source of livelihood. While the AMC stated it would reserve 2% of TPS areas for street vending, as of December 2011, this had not been implemented (Mahadevia, 2012).

4.2 Increasing centralised approaches to implementing urban policy

While the JnNURM marked the first step in terms of recognising the need to invest in urban areas – more recently the 'Smart Cities' and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation has taken this forward – increased funding has meant the increasing adoption of a top-down, project-driven and deterministic model of development with minimum community input. Whereas the JnNURM included, as an essential component, governance reforms to strengthen municipal capacity, most cities have struggled on this front. Ahmedabad, which has had strong municipal governance even before the JnNURM, too has failed to provide voice to citizens and has not yet created ward sabhas (assemblies at the lowest level), which were mandated as JnNURM reforms.

In addition, while cities with poor municipal capacity have struggled to absorb funds under the JnNURM, in the case of cities such as Ahmedabad there has been criticism that the inflow of money has reduced incentives for local resource mobilisation (stakeholder interview – public finance expert). While the AMC previously raised money through innovative mechanisms, such as through issuing municipal bonds, such initiatives have been crowded out.

The rapid inflow of money has also contributed in part to the change in approach from slum upgrading – which involved more effort and time – towards the construction of new housing units. Of course, the availability of subsidies need not mean the end of local programmes. City authorities can leverage public funding to augment the development of city-wide infrastructure while continuing a community-driven approach to make this infrastructure accessible to slum communities. Yet, attention has been diverted from local, cost-effective programmes, like the SNP, that were built on a collaborative and incremental model of development.

In fact, in the case of Ahmedabad, there has been increasing control by the state government – with a stronger focus on attracting private investment at the cost of involving communities. This goes to the heart of what is meant by 'development' in developing countries. In Ahmedabad, and indeed in much of urban India, there has been a shift in the conception of development from inclusive growth to the creation of 'global cities' marked by capital-intensive projects, such as the Sabarmati Riverfront project, that often neglect the concerns of poor people (Mahadevia, 2011). This was raised by several interviewees in the course of this research, who identified the need for debate on what is meant by urban modernity – particularly in the context of the planned 'Smart Cities' (stakeholder interview – academics, civil society and NGO representatives). The abandonment of slum upgrading in favour of a return to old policies of the resettlement of slum dwellers has accentuated the exclusion of the urban poor.

Even though Ahmedabad has had progressive programmes in place that involved cooperation between the local government and poor communities, over time the government has failed to engage with the poor and there has been a breakdown in trust. For instance, the 'development' of two of the lakes as gated recreational spaces led to the demolition of two of the slums upgraded under the SNP. As brought out in our interviews this raises pertinent questions about whom the development process seeks to benefit, and importantly it contributed to a breakdown in trust between communities and the government (stakeholder interview – representative from civil society organisation). As a result, dialogue at the city level has decreased and interaction between the government and civil society has become strained and increasingly confrontational.

4.3 Increasing social tension

Ahmedabad has a long history of socio-religious violence and has been one of the most riot-prone cities in India. Since the 1960s Ahmedabad has witnessed several instances of ethnic violence, and conservative elements have led several agitations in Ahmedabad as well as more widely in the state (Patel, 2002).

Around 1,500 people were killed in the city's first major riot in 1969 – 90% of them from the Muslim community (Shah, 1970). Many smaller communal conflicts took place over the next decade, with a major riot in 1985. In most cases the police were unable to maintain order, and they were even known to take part in violence against minority groups, according to government enquiry commissions and citizen tribunals (Chandhoke, 2009).

Over time many Muslims have moved out of the old city and mill areas of eastern Ahmedabad to the western periphery of the city, to an area commonly known as Juhapura. With the communal divide increasing in the wake of each riot, and access to housing for Muslims in

other parts of the city becoming more and more difficult, an increasing number of Muslims have left for Juhapura. Their flight was particularly marked after the violence escalated in 2002, with mobs administering a 'near pogrom of the Muslim inhabitants' (Chanhoke, 2009), which is reported to have left 1,000 people dead (Concerned Citizens Tribunal–Gujarat, 2002).

Since 2002 the city has become increasingly divided along religious lines (Mahadevia, 2007). Many of those who fled the centre of the city are now living in areas where there has been no town planning and, as a result, they have poor access to basic services. There has been a very marked segmentation of residential space in the city since 2002, with the 'ghettoisation' of Muslim communities.

The core (or walled city) houses both Hindu and Muslim communities that have become increasingly distanced from each other. The industrial area on the eastern side is largely occupied by lower caste and Muslim families, while the western side is occupied by the rich and middle classes in gated communities interspersed with pockets of migrant labour and social housing created under the TPS. As discussed in Section 4.1, there are evident inequities in access to basic services: the western side of the city has the highest level of basic services, public spaces, schools and universities, and other institutions and amenities (Mahadevia et al., 2014). On the other hand, the eastern side and its periphery has much lower levels of amenities, exacerbating inequalities in living standards and opportunities.

4.4 The environmental impact

With Ahmedabad continuing to expand, both in terms of its population and geographic size, increasing pressure is being placed on its available infrastructure. While the AMC has been able to maintain the coverage and efficiency of public amenities, the continued expansion of the city presents challenges.

While the AMC has high coverage in terms of water supply, it only supplies water for two hours each day, with most housing societies constructing water storage to access water through the day. Many middle-class residential societies maintain their own bore wells to supplement the water supplied by the AMC, with usage remaining unmetered and thereby depleting the groundwater levels. Anecdotal evidence suggests that several industries in the city are also drawing groundwater in significant quantities. The AMC lacks the means to monitor private wells, so it has limited information on groundwater being drawn privately.

Ahmedabad once had sophisticated water management structures, such as stepwells and rainwater harvesting and storage systems, but these structures now lie derelict. The AMC lacks a strong water management policy. While the Development Control Regulations (DCRs) require that all new developments above a certain size should either capture rainwater for direct use or collect

it in a percolation pond for filtration and recharge of groundwater sources, this rarely happens in the absence of effective monitoring and enforcement.

Integrated water management, including the sensitive use of groundwater resources, is essential to achieve long-term environmental sustainability. Yet, despite the AMC's efforts to source and supply water from surface sources, the groundwater table in Ahmedabad is being depleted year on year.

Water pollution is also a big concern in the Ahmedabad region. One major cause of pollution is the discharge of inadequately treated industrial effluent directly into the river, much of it from the textiles, dyes, chemicals and ceramics industries along its banks. Most of these come under the aegis of the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC), a Government of Gujarat enterprise to promote industrial development, and the AMC lacks any planning or monitoring authority over GIDC-controlled areas.

5. What lessons can we learn?

Residents of Ahmedabad at a stall. Photo: © Chris Martino.

'A "smart city" needs to first and foremost take care of all its people' – Civil-society representative

It is estimated that the number of urban residents in India has grown by 160 million people over the last two decades (Registrar General of India, 1991; 2011). While much analysis has focused on the negative consequences of rapid urbanisation, an increasing body of literature highlights the role of urbanisation in addressing a number of long-standing development challenges.

Ahmedabad is a city that points to some of the ways forward. With statewide levels of urban poverty dropping from 28% to 10% in less than 20 years, and a reduction of the city's population living in slums, clear progress has

been made. Not only has the material well-being of some of Ahmedabad's poorest residents improved, but gains have also been made in the environmental conditions surrounding urban sprawl and in water and sanitation. In terms of political voice, many of those living in slums have become organised and made their voices heard, and the city's Government has made strides in opening up space for consultation. That said, there are signs that some of these gains are now being challenged and that the pace of progress across these fronts has slowed.

What drove progress across these various fronts? Our research has found four key drivers of progress: the strengthening of municipal governance and financial capacity, investment in and development of infrastructure, pragmatic planning for urban expansion and stronger partnerships between government and non-governmental bodies. The major and continuing challenges include inequity in access

to services, overly centralised approaches to urban planning, increasing social tension, and the ever-deeper environmental footprint of a growing urban population.

Five key lessons can be learned from Ahmedabad's experience, both for other cities in India and for other countries experiencing high rates of urbanisation:

- **First, extending public utilities to slum communities, regardless of their tenure, is an important step towards their integration into the wider urban community.** Most local authorities in India are unwilling to extend water and sanitation services to slum areas as it is often viewed as the first step towards legalising slums and providing tenure to their households. Providing tenure security is a complex and time-consuming process that requires political will and multiple approvals from different government agencies and departments. Providing tenure security on lands other than those owned by the local government is even more difficult. This lack of resolve over tenure issues excludes slum communities from legal access to basic services. The AMC has overcome this paralysis by detaching tenure from the provision of services. The AMC's policy decision to extend basic services to slums is based on the premise that the local authority is mandated to provide water and sanitations services to 'all' its citizens to safeguard the health and safety of the wider population. The AMC provides slum households with a 'no objection certificate' that authorises them to access basic services, even if the authority cannot provide tenure security. Extending basic services to slums, regardless of tenure, is an important step towards improving living conditions in these communities and integrating them into the wider fabric of the city.

- **Second, the involvement of civil society, working alongside government in policy and planning, can contribute to improved access to services and better housing for poor urban people.** Poor or weak urban governance mechanisms or processes diminish the benefits of urbanisation and magnify its costs (both material and non-material). Ahmedabad has a history of charitable institutions and there are more than 30 registered NGOs working across various sectors, such as women's rights, shelter, service provision, livelihoods, education and health. The strength of these organisations has had a positive influence on the way the AMC conducts its business, and it has actively engaged with them to implement slum improvement programmes. The NGOs, in turn, work closely with communities to mobilise, organise and build support for various government programmes, mediating between the poor and local authorities and advocating for policy change that will benefit slum communities. Ahmedabad is also home to several technical institutions which provide technical expertise and programme support for various

development initiatives. India is witnessing a rise in citizen-led organisations that are playing an important role in ensuring accountable and transparent governance. The Ahmedabad example illustrates how the willingness of the AMC to engage with such organisations has contributed to a socioeconomic improvement in the living conditions of the urban poor.

- **Third, creating incentives for partnerships involving government, the private sector and civil society to plan together is a key part of effective town planning.** Ahmedabad is one of the few cities in India that has been able to implement its Development Plan and manage urban expansion with some success. The AMC and AUDA have been successful in opening up serviced land (with basic infrastructure) for development using the TP scheme for micro-planning. The TP mechanism adopts an equitable approach to planning and the provision of services by appropriating a percentage of private land for public services and to raise funds for the construction of infrastructure. Elsewhere in India it is still common practice to appropriate private land for public use through land acquisition. With cities fast growing into peripheral areas and the consequent escalating land values, urban authorities find it difficult to acquire land to provide for infrastructure once development has occurred. There is a growing interest among state governments in exploring the town planning scheme mechanism as a way to better manage the development of urban areas. The Nagpur Improvement Trust, a parastatal organisation in Maharashtra, has used the land pooling and readjustment framework to plan and implement infrastructure improvements in the Nagpur urban area. Private sector experts from Ahmedabad were engaged to prepare Nagpur's Development Plan and build consensus around the TP scheme process (Ballaney, 2013).

- **Fourth, leveraging limited public funds to access alternative financing for urban infrastructure can play an important role in urban development.** Financing urban infrastructure, including water and sanitation services, is a major challenge for most local governments, which do not have the adequate funds and capacity to invest in these services at the pace required. Recent urban infrastructure programmes have relied heavily on subsidies from State and National Governments. In 1998 the AMC successfully financed a large part of a major water supply and sewerage project by issuing municipal bonds, proving that market-based financing is a viable option for funding urban infrastructure projects. The AMC also funded the SNP by sharing the cost of infrastructure development with implementing NGOs and participating communities. As a result, Ahmedabad offers important lessons on options for innovative financing of urban infrastructure.

- **Finally, although well-intentioned, top-down urban development policies can exclude poor people and damage relations between the government and civil society.** Ahmedabad has employed many mechanisms that make it a 'smart' city. It has also inherited a vibrant civil society movement and grassroots mobilisation that has engaged with the government since its central role in Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent struggle for India's independence. However, while the AMC has traditionally employed a more inclusive and consultative process than other Indian cities, the changes of recent years represent a challenge to this legacy.

These changes raise big questions about the direction of urbanisation in India, the world's fastest urbanising country. The concept of development has increasingly shifted towards the creation of 'global cities' marked by capital-intensive projects. As mentioned in one of our interviews, 'the development aesthetic now is less human and more economic, aiming for homogenous megacities that have no room for poorer sections.' In turn, poor and marginalised social groups are being pushed out of the heart of what was once their city.

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Children in Sarangpur Darwaja, Ahmedaba. Photo: © Francisco Martins.

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