Engaged Citizens - Responsive City
Stories of change

Compiled by PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia),
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Engaged Citizens Responsive City is a four-year long intervention supported by the European Union which focuses on strengthening civil society of the urban poor to participate in planning and monitoring of sanitation services. The project works across 3 cities in India (Ajmer in Rajasthan, Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh, and Muzaffarpur in Bihar). It primarily engages the urban poor through capacity building activities to enable them to become active citizens, and to use the new skills learnt to participate in planning (at city level) and monitoring (at the ward level) of sanitation services.

Partners in this change include urban poor and middle-class residents, with leadership of young women and men; mayors, elected councillors and related government departments; traders and market associations; civil society, academia and media; and women sanitation workers.

These stories of change document the process of engaging the urban poor, organising them through Settlement Improvement Committees (SICs) in each informal settlement, training young women and men SIC members to take leadership and generating city-wide community-led data of sanitation services. The consequent demand by citizens has resulted in their municipalities becoming responsive to their needs.
“Setting off on the road of development”

Bijoli is a settlement populated largely by inhabitants belonging to Scheduled Tribes. It was carved into the side of a hill and the 73 families with 270 people that live there have been subsisting without basic infrastructure, services or government assistance for the last 50 years. There was only one dysfunctional drinking water hand-pump in the settlement, and no approach road. People defecated in the fields as there were no toilets. The drains were always clogged and residents lacked access to sustainable livelihoods.

When the formation of an Settlement Improvement Committee (SIC) was first discussed here in April 2016, no consensus emerged among the residents. Even after several rounds of meetings, they continued to express great pessimism. They said that they were very poor and had no time to do anything unrelated to their daily livelihood needs. They also said that everyone in the settlement practiced for open defecation. It seemed like they were convinced that no progress was possible in their settlement.
It was an uphill task for the PRIA team to convince the community of Bijoli otherwise, but they finally agreed to come together as a group when they were promised that PRIA would continue supporting them through the first phases of their development. The SIC was formed with 8 men and 6 women, including 9 young people.

After the formation of the SIC and sustained discussions, the first success that members secured was that of having the hand-pump repaired. They did this by calling on a toll-free helpline number of Jhansi Municipal Corporation and submitting their complaint. This gave them not only satisfaction but a sense of achievement and self-belief. On the strength of this, they spoke to their Ward Councillor about the state of their drains and the need for roads in the settlement. He informed them that he, too, had been trying to meet their needs, but the Municipal Corporation had not accepted his proposal for action yet. The members of the SIC then took the matter up with the Director of the Engineering Department of the Jhansi Municipal Corporation, but even this effort did not meet with any success.

The residents of Bijoli continued to live with their problems, but they did not stop visiting the officials and talking about their issues. They also submitted two applications to the Municipal Corporation, issues that were placed on the backburner because of the upcoming UP Legislative Assembly elections.

Finally, in May 2017, they achieved some degree of success when the construction of the road and drains commenced on the Councillor's instructions. It was not just a road, but a ray of hope after a 13-month-long struggle.

New obstacles came up, such as the matter of figuring out how to lay the drain in the settlement, but an experienced contractor's recommendation that it be laid along a slope in the direction of a nearby factory solved the problem. The residents of the settlement came forward as volunteers, overseeing the construction work themselves. This put in place the foundations of a strong SIC, one whose members now had the experience of working together and had realised that they needed to focus on more issues, including that of open defecation.
“Our SIC has given us things, we do not know we could hope for”

“When we were leaving for the Jal Sansthan, many people in the settlement regarded our action as a joke. We ourselves didn’t know whether our plan would work or not, but it did and now all of us genuinely believe in ourselves”

Shashi, SIC Member

Bundelkhand region is known for its droughts. As summer approaches, the city of Jhansi becomes a hotspot for water-related conflicts. Local potentates maintain illegitimate control of the city’s water supply. Things are especially worse in the informal settlement of Karguan, where water tankers do occasionally turn up, but it is a bitter fact that the water that reaches the settlement is far less than required. This has led to several conflicts in the settlement, weakening the community’s sense of solidarity. However, there were some people in Karguan who were organisationally oriented, and wanted to do something to solve the problems.

The Settlement Improvement Committee (SIC) of Karguan was formed on May 16, 2016 with 14 members, including 11 women. It began on a positive note, with members learning to use the toll-
free helpline number of the Jhansi Jal Sansthan and ensuring that hand-pumps were repaired. They also submitted written applications to the water and sanitation department, as a result of which the mechanical parts were made available for free to repair the hand-pump. Having not known this earlier, they had been in the habit of collecting money from families to buy all the parts.

The united efforts of the SIC members led to progress in the settlement, in terms not only of hand-pump repair, but also electrification and construction of toilets; three electricity poles and the foundations of four household toilets under the SBM came up in due time. The SIC also helped 19 households submit their applications for housing subsidies under Pradhan Mantri Shahari Awas Yojana.

The experience of 2016 served as sufficient encouragement for the people of Karguan to continue working collectively. A subsequent incident in early 2017 only gave their efforts more of a fillip. Towards the end of April 2017, when the hand-pumps in the settlement had dried up, the SIC wrote an application and submitted it to the Chief Engineer of the Jhansi Municipal Corporation. There was no response.

But the SIC members knew better than to remain silent. The success of the previous year motivated them to take determined action. They wrote another application, this time to the Jal Sansthan, requesting a water tanker for Karguan. Seven women members of the SIC went to the Jal Sansthan and demanded a water tanker for their settlement. There were no men in this delegation as they were away on work.

The officials responded by saying that arrangements were being made to send a tanker to Karguan in a few days. However, the SIC members were resolute in their insistence that it be sent that very day, failing which they would stage a protest at the Jal Sansthan and rope in others as well. The women said that they needed water immediately because there had been no water in the settlement for days.

In response to their grievances and demands, the Jal Sansthan issued an immediate order for the mobilisation of a tanker; it reached the settlement within an hour.

There was a great sense of victory among the women who had gone to the Jal Sansthan when they reached Karguan and saw the water tanker. The residents of the settlement were also overjoyed at the development and cheered for the victorious women. In a sense, one could say that it the SIC had quenched the thirst of Karguan. The month of May saw water tankers arriving there with unerring regularity, benefitting the 62 families and 288 residents.

While remembering the moment when the collective efforts of the SIC had secured water for Karguan; Janki, the President of the SIC, said, “This was the moment that cemented our courage and confidence to engage more with the government and other people from outside.”

Sadly, the water crisis has resurfaced as it is a perennial problem in Jhansi. The municipality does not send the tanker every time, and private tankers take a lot of money. There are three hand-pumps in

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1 Jal Sansthan is a department under the aegis of Municipal Corporation and looks after water supply in the city.
the settlement, but in the summer, the water level tended to fall. The SIC is not sure of a good solution, but will continue to work with the municipality until they find one.

The second half of 2017 saw some developmental work on the part of the government, especially before the municipal elections. This work was related to the electrification of some parts of the settlement and the construction of the road. The SIC members made their presence felt by keeping a watch on the quality of work. Karguan is now a settlement with a clean road and street lights.

While the women who have led the charge deserve all the credit, they are quick to share their success with PRIA. As one woman said, “We kept a watch on whatever was happening in our settlement. All the while, PRIA was helping us stay involved in monitoring to ensure quality in the work.”

The SIC members have also helped the families of Karguan, especially those with no toilets, fill up and submit application forms for financial assistance in the construction of toilets under the SBM. They also followed up with the concerned department, and with the Ward Councillor. Twenty-two families have got Rs. 4000 each for the construction of toilets. However, one problem that has emerged is that people do not construct the toilets because of the high cost of materials. The cost of sand has especially gone up, after the government banned sand mining.

The SIC hopes that the cost of sand will come down soon and its members have discussed this with the Ward Councillor and some officials of JMC. Financial assistance is not a possibility, and it is unclear when sand prices will return to their earlier rate.

Despite these setbacks, SIC members are filled with determination and self-confidence. They are also in continuous touch with PRIA. The SIC President, Janki, calls whenever she hears about a government scheme or a community issue arises. She says, “The three things we have learnt through our SIC is community monitoring, better follow-up, and collective action.”
"If neighbouring SIC can do it, why can’t we?"

Bharti, SIC member

"The yearlong struggle has borne the fruit the SIC had desired. All the women of the settlement are especially happy about this development."

Gaya Prashad, SIC member

More than 406 people (106 families) residing in Talpura had become accustomed over time to defecating in the open. The Talpura SIC was formed on June 13, 2016. In its early stages, during initial meetings with political leaders and municipal officers, the SIC raised demands for a cleaner settlement and for the construction of toilets. The SIC then repeatedly raised the issue during the Participatory Urban Assessment and Independence Day flag-hoisting event, and at the oath-taking ceremony of the Ward Councillor, Anand Sahu. Alongside these efforts, an application was also submitted by the SIC to the Municipal Commissioner, requesting that the existing community toilet in the settlement be reconstructed and inaugurated.

After a couple of visits to the Municipal Corporation, the SIC members learned that the transfer of money from the Corporation to the contractor who was selected to renovate the toilet had been halted for reasons that ranged from the release of payments to settlement of bills and lack of communication. Unavailability of sand was cited as the reason for the delay by the contractor. The municipality on the other hand had blamed the contractor for failure to procure it.

The Mayor of Jhansi was informed of all this by the SIC members, but that did not have the desired effect. Sensing the palpable frustration, PRIA took it upon itself to pacify the SIC, advising its members to work with patience and tact. During their November 2016 meeting, the members decided to visit the municipality and the Ward Councillor every month. Local media was harnessed to make officials cognisant of the issues. Swadesh, a local daily, played a particularly supportive role in highlighting the issue in its April 27, 2017 edition.

As the tussle between the corporation and contractor entered into its second year, the SIC, which had already struggled for a year with nothing to show for it, continued to follow up every month. Meanwhile, PRIA engaged with the officials and the political leaders to garner their support. The issue of the community toilet was raised at a cluster training for 3 SICs in July 2017, at which Mr. Sahu was present. Sensing that pressure was building again, the officials at the Municipal Corporation resolved their dispute with the contractor, and on July 13, the reconstructed community toilet was finally inaugurated by the Councillor and the members of the SIC.

2 Geeta Devi is the present ward councillor who got elected in the JMC elections held on 29 November 2017
This success was highlighted as a joint effort of the SIC and PRIA in the local dailies, especially in the *BPN Times* and *Samay Jagat*, in their July 15, 2017 editions. While media and a very active intervention by the Ward Councillor had also contributed to their success, the SIC members learned a great deal about the effectiveness of continuous civic pressure on service providers.

Most of the residents of Talpura are now free of the compulsion to defecate in the open. The 33 families in the settlement that could not have toilets built in their homes due to a lack of space, have been the greatest beneficiaries of the community toilet. As a result, more than 150 people who used to defecate in the open have stopped this practice.

While everyone in the settlement is using either their household toilets or the community toilet, there are some small children who still do defecate in the open, near the railway tracks. With the addition of the new toilet, which had been under construction for more than 2 years, there are 3 community toilets near Talpura. They benefit more than 175 families in the adjoining vicinities.

This SIC has also provided an example that can inspire another SIC, especially the neighbouring SIC of Talpura Ward 8, where some families do not have household toilets but are not able to use any of the new facilities because they are too far away. The SIC has been working to get individual toilets constructed for these residents, with support under the SBM.

Leaders like Sannu Kinner and Gaya Prasad from Ward 8 are focused on this; they expect continuous support from PRIA. They have already begun to mobilise themselves, with Sannu Kinner leading a protest march to convey the power of the SIC.
“The residents of Laxmigate have found a path to freedom from open defecation”

“After a long struggle, we got the municipality to construct our community toilet. For the building and water, we had to visit the department offices several times. The SIC played the most important role in seriously taking up the matter, submitting the application, and conducting follow-ups. The common people of this settlement also came forward in support. The women and girls of our settlement had undergone untold distresses in going to the patch near the drain to defecate in the open. Finally we have found a solution to this problem. Our hard work has not been wasted.”

Manorama, President of the SIC

“Without the intervention of the SIC, no one knows how long it would have taken.”

Anita, Vice-President of the SIC

After years of struggle, the settlement of Laxmigate finally felt the joy they had been denied all this while, when the inauguration of a community toilet ended the daily inconvenience of open defecation that about 200 of its residents had to deal with. No more would any resident have to carry boxes to the side of the drain for their bodily needs, a practice they had become accustomed to over the years.
This success was made possible by the efforts of the Laxmigate SIC, whose members had for months been in direct contact with the Municipal Corporation and administrative officers. Initial SIC meetings had established open defecation as the biggest problem that the settlement had to address. The members of the SIC kept up their unflagging correspondence with the municipal officials, the Mayor and the Ward Councillor until their toils came to fruition on March 22, 2017 - after 8 long months, the Ward Councillor and Mayor inaugurated the community toilet. It had taken more than 2 years to complete the construction of the community toilet, at a cost of Rs. 15 lakh.

The next problem, however, was that the toilet had no water supply. The SIC pushed for this, as it went without saying that the community toilet would not be used if it had no water. Political leaders and officials announced that the water shortage needed to be negotiated by using drinking water, which is supplied for 1 hour a day to the settlement. This arrangement would continue until a permanent solution was reached. Two fibre water containers were soon installed on the roof of the toilet.

The residents of the settlement took upon themselves the responsibility of cleaning and maintaining the toilet. They decided that they would pool in funds amounting to Rs. 100 per household to this end.

From the point of view of security, some of the members of the SIC have raised a demand to rein in the gambling that is rampant in some of the alleyways of the settlement. If the gambling were to end, women would feel secure about visiting the community toilet even at night. This was relayed to the Mayor as well.

The SIC of Laxmigate was formed on September 12, 2016 and consists of 17 members: 6 men and 11 women. Besides their success in getting the community toilet constructed and securing water supply, the SIC has helped 8 people acquire Aadhaar Cards and 15 families obtain birth certificates from the municipality.

Leaders like Manorama and Anita lead the development process in the community with commitment and strength, focusing on the cleanliness of the settlement. While people no more gamble in or around the community toilet, they continue to do it openly in by-lanes. This contributes to fear in the community; this is the SIC’s next challenge, towards which it is working with the twin objective of involving the community’s youth in working for the betterment of their home.
“Our people can now do what they were not able to”

This well of Meri with its contaminated water is the main source of drinking water. For the SIC, it is a challenge and the opportunity

The women in Meri are free and fearless. Parvati Devi - the eldest member at 65 - is very active, energetic, angry, rebellious, loud and clear. She represents the dissatisfaction of the community, and says, “I do not care anyone, not even highly ranked officers.”

Before
“So many people have come to this place, but they have not done anything. What can you do? You too cannot do anything, and nothing is going to happen here; you had better go.”

After
“It is PRIA’s efforts that are bringing changes to our settlement, and our people now believe that they can do what they were not able to..”

Ramsiya, a woman from Meri

The informal settlement of Meri in Ward 10 of the Jhansi Municipal Corporation (JMC) was previously a Gram Panchayat. Meri covers a large area of land, but PRIA is working in 2 hamlets notified as slums, namely Imli Mohalla and Indira Colony. There are 103 families in the two settlements; its population is 507. The men and women of Meri are engaged in daily-wage labour, although women are largely confined to performing household chores. Bidi-making while at home earns them some subsistence as well.
The PRIA team visited Meri in July 2017, contacted the people there and organised a meeting. There were discussions on different issues, including water, sanitation, road, illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. When people were asked about possible solutions, it became clear that a sense of hopelessness reigned in the settlement, for which they held the government accountable. When PRIA asked the community what role it could play in their development, the answer was silence. And when the team broached the idea of forming an SIC, the response was reluctance.

The men said they had no time, but women could do it as some spent large parts of their day in the settlement. In the same month, another meeting was organised, which was only attended by women. However, it did not prove easy to motivate these women to organise themselves; their experience with the government and with NGOs that had contacted them in the past had left them legitimately mistrustful.

PRIA’s persistence paid off in due time. Ragini Verma, a PRIA animator, persuaded them by saying, “You need to trust us first. Please allow us to work with you. Forming an SIC is the way forward, and we will help you in developing your community organisation. There will be progress. If we cannot help you, we will leave Meri before you ask us to.”

This assurance led to a show of interest from the women. Finally, in August 2017, the SIC was formed with 12 members; all of them were women. SIC meetings are held once a month; some months, there are two meetings. The meetings are held in an open space near a dugwell of the settlement. Even women who are residents but not members attend the meetings. As the women are illiterate, the PRIA team helps them in maintaining and keeping records of the meetings.

When PRIA and the SIC performed the Participatory Urban Appraisal (PUA) exercise with the community and the findings were shared, residents of Meri became more aware about themselves and the people they were living with. The PUA led to discussions and awareness about Meri’s issues: water, toilets, garbage, and solutions, including the need to go to the municipal offices and pitch their demands. PRIA assured them of assistance in identifying the government departments they could approach for their work and in understanding how to conduct interactions with the officials.

The SIC decided to help families without toilets apply for IHHLs, which would contribute to ending open defecation in the area. After guiding residents in filling up application forms and submitting the same to the Jhansi MC, PRIA’s working relationship with the municipality helped in establishing a connection between the municipality and community and getting the applications processed in a timely manner. The SIC encouraged the applicants to follow up by visiting the municipality and demanding to know what progress had been achieved.

Their hard work paid off when some women applicants received money for the construction of toilets. Six months before this, there was rampant open defecation. Out of 103 families, 41 had no toilets. People were sensitized about the harms of open defecation and were advised to build household toilets by making use of the SBM.

By December 2017, the first instalments of Rs. 4000 were received by 12 families and their toilets began to be constructed. Ten families, having received the full financial assistance of Rs. 8000, have completed the construction of their toilets. As a result, more than 50 people have started using these toilets and have completely stopped open defecation.

The SIC of Meri is a new organisation, less than 6 months old in December 2017. However, the experience that they have gained in this short span has provided them self-belief, which is expected to contribute to their further emergence and success.
The women have also been awarded and appreciated for their work. They were invited to an event organised by JMC on the occasion of World Toilet Day on November 19, 2017. During the programme, they got a chance to meet the higher officials of JMC. The officials appreciated the role of the people in contributing to the cleanliness of their communities, and provided the assurance that there would be more progress in Meri. It was a great moment for Moolwati, an SIC member who was awarded by JMC, for being the first to complete and use the toilet, supported under SBM Urban.

In the next 6 months, the SIC of Meri wants to work on 3 things:

1. Their number one priority is the construction of all the remaining toilets so that Meri achieves ODF status. Out of 41 families that had applied for IHHLs, 19 families are yet to receive it. There had been no progress in their applications due to the elections, but now that the elections are over, the SIC will follow up with the municipality.

2. They want to work on ensuring consistent water supply. There is an acute shortage of water in Meri. People draw water from a dugwell, which is not safe for drinking and most other uses. SIC members, along with other members of the community, are planning to meet their newly elected Ward Councillor to demand a handpump.

3. Garbage on the bylanes is another issue that the SIC plans to work on. As people throw garbage into drains, it overflows and spreads to bylanes. While some people clean the part of the drain in front of their houses, SIC members are planning to organise a meeting to request that cleanliness be maintained in the settlement. The SIC is aware that the municipal sweepers visit other areas and people of the settlement are willing to pay Rs. 40 per month for a municipality vehicle to collect garbage from the settlement; they are angry that Meri is not offered these services. They have decided to meet the Ward Councillor about this.
“Change has come after the SIC was formed”

Now all the members of the beneficiary families are using the toilets and free from the trouble of having to defecate in the open – Meera, SIC member

Sagar Gate is an old but small informal settlement in Jhansi. The 55 families that are its inhabitants live in conditions of high population density. The Sagar Gate SIC was formed on February 12, 2017 with 16 members, out of whom 13 were women.

During the initial SIC meetings, the women raised two issues: cleanliness in their settlement and the need for a toilet. They said that about 6 months ago, 17 of the settlement’s residents had submitted their applications to the Municipal Corporation, putting in a request for the construction of a toilet, but no one had received any money.

When the SIC members followed up with the authorities, they were assured that the money for the construction of the toilet would shortly be credited to the accounts of the applicants, but this did not happen either.

When a discussion was held about what could be done to ensure action, the SIC decided to continue applying pressure. They went again to the Municipal Corporation to demand that the applications be processed. In March 2017, some SIC members went to the municipality and met with the officials from the concerned department, familiarising them with their travails.

The municipality was happy and surprised at this new activism that they had never seen before. They responded with alacrity this time. Very soon after this, the 5 approved applicants received the first instalment of their monetary assistance. Construction work began more or less immediately, with 3 toilets ready and in use by the end of April 2017. This was a very quick success for the SIC, the beneficiaries and for the whole community, building confidence and trust in the SIC. Two other toilets were constructed later; thus, 5 toilets were completed by December 2017. There were no applications pending, with the applicable families completely stopping open defecation.

Meera and Geeta, two SIC members who were part of the successful delegation, were of the opinion that a little proactivity on their parts had made all the difference. If they had waited around for the
promises of others to be fulfilled in due course, or for the government to take its own sweet time, nothing would have happened.

They had also written to the Ward Councillor about the need for a sanitation worker to visit the settlement regularly and for regular supply of drinking water. Regarding the latter, the Councillor informed them that it was difficult to propel drink water up to the rooftops of houses because not enough force was being generated to pump out water from the tanker. Regarding the former, they were assured that the main road of Sagar Gate would be cleaned regularly.

There was no progress on this promise by December 2017; one of the reasons for this was the municipal elections, which are known to defer or put a halt to development work. Such conditions can serve as opportunities for SIC members to demand and demonstrate that in democracy life does not, and should not, stop.

Now that the elections are over, the SIC members are discussing these issues in their meetings. They are still learning how to work with the municipality and how to make officials work. They also admit that celebrating their small successes gives energy to the SIC.
"We now have the strength that comes from being organised"

“The opening up of the community hall has been very useful to us. Now we can organise meetings and cultural activities there. Once the toilet is supplied with water and made functional, the settlement will be free of open defecation.”

Rajesh Bharti, SIC member

“The formation of the SIC inspired us and made us organised, and the results have come promptly. Now, as a member of the SIC, I am always thinking about how to advance the interests of the settlement.”

Safina Khatoon, SIC member

Ambedkar Nagar is a settlement of 618 people (a majority of them belonging to the Scheduled Castes) distributed across 80 houses, situated on narrow lanes and made for the most part of temporary materials. On account of being situated next to a pond, this settlement is flooded during the monsoons. The main occupation of the residents is daily wage labour, though some of them run small businesses and are engaged in private jobs.

Out of the 128 families in Ambedkar Nagar, 116 have toilets. The members of the families without toilets practice open defecation. However, none of them have applied for individual household latrines (IHHL), for the simple reason that all of them are on government land and therefore restricted from construction activities.

Lakhs of rupees were spent on the construction of a community hall with a community toilet here in 2014. This was of great importance to the residents. They had demanded it, showing a desire to organise cultural activities and recognising the need for a toilet to serve the community at these events. Moreover, this would be of special benefit to the 12 households without toilets. The demand for a community toilet had also come from 29 households with poor quality temporary toilets; the wastewater from their toilets was drained out into the pond.

However, as soon as the construction work was completed, both the hall and the toilet were locked up. To prevent entry into these two structures, boundary walls were erected around the buildings. Residents, who were at a loss to understand these developments, tried to meet their MLA and Ward Councillor to apprise them of the situation, but things remained at a standstill for 3 years.

PRIA arrived in Ambedkar Nagar to help its residents establish their SIC under the ECRC project. The consent of the community was readily obtained and the SIC was formed on January 8, 2017 with 5 men and 7 women. There are 6 youths in this 12-member SIC.
After the formation of the SIC, its members decided to prioritise the issue of the community toilet. To this end, they wrote applications to the former MLA, the Councillor, the Mayor and the Municipal Commissioner. All of them promised action, but when nothing actually happened the residents realised that a better and more organised way was needed.

In March 2017, the SIC members got other residents together and about 40-50 men and women of the settlement went to the office of the Municipal Commissioner with photocopies of all the applications they had written. Since it could not be disputed that they had a justified reason, supported by all the necessary documents, the Commissioner immediately passed an order for action to be taken. The residents continued to follow up until they had the walls around the community toilet removed. After that, stairs were also built in the community hall with the help of the Municipal Corporation. Having achieved these positive changes, the SIC took upon itself the responsibility of looking after the upkeep of the hall. As per their request, the Ward Councillor engaged a person for cleaning and maintenance of the community hall.

Since then, the advice and persistence of the SIC has led to a primary school being started for the children of Ambedkar Nagar within the community hall. The Ward Councillor was instrumental in providing support for this.

The SIC saw another success in July 2017, when it got the Municipal Corporation to install a drinking water pipeline in the settlement. In June 2017, the SIC members (along with other community leaders) had met their MLA, Suresh Sharma, and communicated this problem to him. The issue was resolved through mobilisation of the MLA Funds.

While the settlement now has water supply, the municipality has not been able to supply water to the community toilet. Although 5 families have been using it by carrying water from their homes, open defecation continues in Ambedkar Nagar. On being asked by the SIC about this state of affairs, the Councillor informed them that the fund for water supply to the community toilet fund had not been approved. He, however, promised them an alternative arrangement soon. The SIC has also submitted a proposal in this regard to the Muzaffarpur Municipal Corporation.

Just like other settlements, Ambedkar Nagar is saddled with a number of issues, but their recent successes have made them believe they have the power to change things. A large chunk of the residents are now aware of their rights, how to demand action and how to access government services. The SIC has also showed the way to other residents of the settlement; it is hoped that they will be inspired to join the efforts to strengthen the SIC.
ECRC - Stories of change
“The cleaning of our settlement has changed its face completely!”

Sharda Devi, SIC member

Getta Devi, SIC member

Some of the changes that occur in our everyday lives may seem small in scale and therefore ordinary, but each small change assumes significance as a step to a larger one. In an informal settlement like Bharat Mata Chowk, whose residents had been forced to tolerate filth on the streets and in the drains all their lives, the removal of every trace of that filth is a monumental achievement even though it goes unrecognised in the outside world. What makes a success of this nature even more special is the fact that it was a proactive community initiative.

The total population of Bharat Mata Chowk is 429 persons. There are 80 households in the settlement; OBCs constitute the predominant majority with 51 families. Besides, there are 23 SC households and only 6 families belonging to the general caste. The main occupations of the people in this settlement are daily wage labour and petty businesses.

Like any other informal settlement, Bharat Mata Chowk also had infrastructural and sanitation issues. As they neither had access to basic services nor the municipality, the residents willingly accepted PRIA’s offer of help in forming an SIC. The SIC was established on July 5, 2016, with 4 men and 6 women, including 5 youths.
The SIC has been the source of awareness regarding a number of issues among the residents of the settlement; these issues are regularly brought up and discussed at monthly meetings. Through these meetings, SIC members have tried to find solutions to the problems faced by the community.

The deplorable condition of the settlement in the absence of proper waste management was one of the prominent issues that arose at the very first meeting on August 4, 2016. It was decided at this meeting that an application would be written to the Circle Officer in this regard. The application was submitted on October 25. Soon after; the Circle Officer instructed the sanitation worker to regularly collect garbage from the settlement and clean the drain.

The members of the SIC had taken it upon themselves to go a step further. When they noticed that the sanitation worker’s rickshaw had separate compartments for ‘dry’ and ‘wet’ waste, they wondered why they could not segregate the waste themselves. To this end, the families began disposing of dry waste in separate plastic bags while using the dustbin at home for wet waste.

With people themselves coming forward to segregate waste material in an organised way and bearing a sense of responsibility to the community, the cleanliness level of the settlement has improved beyond belief. What is particularly impressive is that the SIC neither took any help in this initiative from the Municipal Corporation nor undertook any professional training in waste management for this purpose.

Another huge problem for the settlement was that of open drains, into which there was always a danger of falling in. After SIC members wrote an application to the Ward Councillor demanding action on this front, cement slabs were promptly installed on January 3, 2017 to cover the drains.

Apart from the issues of waste management and open drains, the use of bamboo poles to support electricity cables was a source of constant threat. In September 2016, an application was submitted by SIC members to both the Ward Councillor and the Power Department. After sustained follow-ups, the application finally resulted in the instalment of a utility pole in the settlement in March 2017. Four more poles have also been allocated. To keep the settlement well-lit at night, the Ward Councillor responded to an oral request by the SIC members and had an outdoor LED bulb installed.

The women members of the SIC are proud of these positive results. The fact that so much change has come about in such a short span of time through their own efforts is very encouraging for them.

Beauty Kumari is a young member of the SIC. She studies in Class XII and helps with writing applications and recording minutes of their meetings. She claims that becoming a member of the SIC has made her aware of her social responsibilities, and more knowledgeable. SIC has taught her many things that books haven’t. She is confident that she will be able to use her new learnings in everyday life.

The SIC has played some other roles also. It has helped a senior citizen avail her pension, expedited the issuance of voter cards to 4 people, filled up ration card forms for other residents of the settlement and submitted applications on behalf of 7 families to the Muzaffarpur Municipal Corporation (MMC), demanding the release of the second instalment of funds so as to allow the construction of their toilets under the SBM to be completed. They have also submitted a proposal to
the Nagar Nigam on behalf of one family for sanction and release of the first instalment. After completion of the above toilets, the settlement will be completely free from open defecation.

The changes in Bharat Mata Chowk since the formation of the SIC have given its residents hope for a better future, making them conscious of the need to be proactive about their settlement’s development. It is all thanks to the SIC that Bharat Mata Chowk is scripting its story of success as its people are fast becoming aware of their rights and have learnt to take action for their own well-being and that of the larger community.
“We have understood the importance of sanitation”

“The men of the settlement used to make all the decisions, but since the formation of the SIC, the women have started going out and participating in decision-making too.”

Saraswati Devi, SIC member

“The small lanes and the practice of littering everywhere thoughtlessly had made it very difficult to move through the settlement. What a difference the installation of a few small dustbins has made!”

Niharika Kumari, SIC member

Bad sanitation and waste disposal practices are causes for the spread of diseases. This is particularly true of informal settlements, where the lanes are narrow and the piling up of trash is a source of great inconvenience. Kahar Tola is no different. Situated in one of the main markets of Muzaffarpur, Kahar Tola was in such a state of filth that its residents were perennially falling ill to various kinds of diseases.

Kahar Tola is home to 288 persons. While 28 of the 48 families belong to SCs, there are 20 OBC families living in this. All of them are engaged in daily wage labour for their subsistence. The SIC was formed on April 18, 2016, with 5 men and 5 women, including 9 youths. As people were struggling with the sanitation issue, their search for a solution became the direct trigger to volunteer to form the SIC when PRIA approached them.

After the formation of the SIC in Kahar Tola, sanitation was one of the first issues that the members wanted to address. The settlement had a community toilet, but due to the lack of upkeep and maintenance, it remained unused. Residents relied on a pond behind the settlement for open defecation. With support from PRIA, the SIC submitted an application to the Circle Officer, through which they had appealed for the community toilet to be cleaned and a system to be put in place for proper disposal of waste from the settlement. The community toilet was cleaned promptly, but the bigger concern for the residents was its upkeep and maintenance. With no support from the municipality, the SIC decided to pool maintenance money from all the residents every month. As a result, the toilet was cleaned on a regular basis every month. However, this initiative came to naught when the community toilet was closed due to internal politics within the municipality.

As the SIC knew about the fate of the community toilet, they had mobilised people to apply for financial assistance for the construction of individual household toilets (IHHLs) under the SBM. SIC members had also submitted applications for IHHLs to the municipality on behalf of the families that did not have toilets. With the construction of these IHHLs, Kahar Tola became completely open defecation free (ODF). This success was a good example of active facilitation by the SIC and of the participation as well as contribution of the residents in bringing a big change to the settlement.

The issue of the community toilet provided another opportunity to the SIC to strengthen itself, and earn a good reputation. The IHHLs were found to be of poor quality as they got choked; people found it difficult to use these. SIC members reported this to the municipality and stressed on the need for
the community toilet. While the municipality understood the situation, they had to first resolve the community conflict that had caused the toilet to remain closed. Now the community toilet is being reconstructed.

In March 2017, the Corporation’s waste management campaign for informal settlements brought blue and green waste bins to Kahar Tola. The residents of the settlement are now disposing of their dry waste in blue bins and wet waste in green bins, helping the Municipal Corporation in its waste management efforts. To manage waste disposal better, every family in the settlement has placed a dustbin outside its house. The residents have stopped littering recklessly; they now use the dustbins for their household waste. These steps have also received encouragement from the Municipal Corporation. The SIC played an important role, working with the municipality and mobilising and motivating people to keep their dry and wet waste in separate dustbins as provided by Municipal Corporation.
"Toilets have given us dignity"

“My parents had got me married off to a family that had no toilet, and I was silent. But when the time for my brother-in-law’s marriage came, I opened my mouth. I said that there would be no marriage in this house without a toilet. No bride should come here if we cannot build a toilet for her,” said Santoshi Devi with a sense of pride.

I have seen many fraudulent finance companies that have lured people and made benefits. So, initially I was not willing to let my wife join the SIC. Later, I understood that PRIA is working for our slum, and they only need our support for the benefit of our community. Since then, I have always encouraged my wife’s participation.

Mithilesh Paswan, husband of Santoshi Devi

People now understand the importance of sanitation. Besides using the IHHLs, the people also do not throw their garbage on the open. There has been an increase in the awareness and behaviour of people. Now we want to focus more on education in our informal settlement.

Santoshi Devi, SIC member

Construction of IHHLs has given us dignity and freedom from open defecation. Besides, we have been able to increase our awareness. We now feel more empowered.

Shweta Devi, SIC member
Santoshi Devi lives in a small house in Kanu Tola. This informal settlement, established in 1965, is home to 79 families and a population of 374 persons. There are 48 SC families and 28 OBC families, besides 2 families belonging to the general caste.

When Santoshi had come to Kanu Tola as a bride, 18 years ago, there were only 10-12 houses. The settlement had not a single toilet; everyone practiced open defecation. The lack of toilets had been the cause for a lot of distress for Santoshi, which remains fresh in her mind: “My mother-in-law would send me to the open ground at around 10pm. She would also awake me at 3am in the morning for defecation, irrespective of whether I needed it. ‘Bad’ incidents with women were very common. Men stalked us, made indecent comments, pointed lights towards us from their torches or vehicles. Because of all this, there used to be regular conflicts, fights and violence. Some women were did not even eat during the day so as to avoid defecating before late evening.”

Santoshi Devi continuously pressured the elders of her family to have a toilet constructed, but they thought it unwise to spend money on this, especially if there was a free and open place. The idea of constructing a toilet was completely submerged under the predominant priorities of ‘wisely’ spending their very limited money to feed the many members of the family. When Santoshi came to know about the government scheme for financial support for individual household latrines (IHHLs), she applied for it. However, she still does not know what happened to that application. No one came to tell her to submit a new application or to rectify the old application.

She now knows that her application was incomplete because of the lack of necessary documents. PRIA’s arrival at Kanu Tola was a great event for Santoshi; she was desperately looking for an opportunity to make positive changes to her life. When PRIA helped establish an SIC in the settlement, Santoshi volunteered to become a member. The SIC was formed on July 11, 2016, with 11 members. There are 2 men, 9 women, and 9 youths. Her husband was not at all interested and discouraged her, but Santoshi had understood the purpose of the SIC and took the effort to convince her husband about it. Despite his suspicion that she would be cheated because of her lack of education, he was persuaded by her interest level to attend some SIC meetings. He also came to see his wife during the training programme of the SIC members. It was here that he became truly convinced, after speaking to programme personnel from PRIA.

In one of the first SIC meetings, Santoshi emphatically raised the issue of open defecation by 13 families of the settlement. The SIC decided to deal with this issue as the very first priority. She also invited the sanitation supervisor, who explained the risks involved in open defecation to SIC members and other community people.

The SIC then sensitized the community further, meeting concerned families and their people individually and advising them against the practice. Santoshi played the leading role in this by going door-to-door and educating the people. She kept it up for 4 months, with PRIA’s animator providing continuous support.
As a result, people showed interest in applying for financial assistance to construct toilets under the SBM. But they were not familiar with the process; they had no knowledge or information about what documents to submit, from where to get those documents, how to fill up the forms, and where to submit them. The SIC, led by Santoshi, requested the Ward Councillor for help. The Ward Councillor asked one of his representatives to work with the SIC and the general people of Kanu Tola. He helped them in terms of obtaining and filling up the forms and issuing and collecting documents like residential address proof and identity cards.

After the applications were submitted, the SIC began to resolutely follow up on them. As the approvals came in one after the other, the constructions began in February 2017. During the process, one IHHL was also constructed in Santoshi Devi’s house.

In Kanu Tola, only 4 families remain without IHHLs today. These families have not yet received any support and open defecation. However, what is a matter of concern for the SIC, and especially Santoshi is that there are 3 families who still go for open defecation despite the fact that they have their own toilets. On World Toilet Day, the SIC had organised a community meeting during which people were sensitised about the need to use their IHHLs. While SIC is still working to understand why the 4 outlying families could not apply for the toilet or get the approval, they are also celebrating their success. For Santoshi, it is clearly a dream come true.
“Clean drinking water is our right”

Earlier we used to struggle to collect water. It would spray from the pipelines and cause filth to accumulate, through which we would somehow have to wade to get our share. Now there is a tap, which allows us to fill our vessels and wash our clothes with much more ease. At least we have gained something from showing our resolve and raising our voice. Our drains need attention too; we will focus on that. The municipality ignores us because we live on railway land. We are a part of the city when it comes to garnering votes, but not when it comes to benefitting from development work!

Balarama Kumar, SIC member

The formation of the SIC has brought people together to talk about their problems. These issues are not the problems of individuals anymore, but of the whole community.

Baby Devi, SIC member

Clean drinking water is a basic necessity for everyone. Lack of access to it is the reason countless Indians fall prey every year to debilitating and life-threatening diseases like cholera, jaundice and diarrhoea. The government has been talking about measures to ensure the delivery of potable water and prevent its contamination for many years, but does this concern show on the ground? The people and the SIC of Maalgodam Basti are an example of how to make sure it does.

Maalgodam Basti has a population of 158 people from 36 families. There are only two castes in this informal settlement: 26 families belong to the Scheduled Castes and the remaining 10 families are...
from Other Backward Classes. Its residents are mainly employed in low paying private jobs or as daily wage labour. They live in huts and are not serviced by functional roads, drains or water pipelines.

Maalgodam Basti, on account of being situated illegally on land owned by the Indian Railways, is not a beneficiary of municipal services. Out of 36 families, not one has a toilet. Because of the unauthorised occupation, there is no provision for individual household latrines (IHHLs) for them. This, naturally, means that the residents have to deal with untold varieties of water and sanitation-related issues. They are aware that they are being denied basic necessities, but have not had the courage to demand action to change this state of affairs. Ignorance and structural hindrances had compelled them to live in unhealthy and hellish conditions, and they had lost the will to conceive of solutions to their problems.

The situation started to change on January 22, 2017, when Maalgodam Basti witnessed the formation of its first community institution: their SIC. This became possible when some residents volunteered to work with PRIA, and began talking about what could be done about the problems they were suffering from. The SIC was constituted by 11 members: 7 men and 4 women. There are 8 youths among them.

The first issue the SIC wanted to address was their water wastage and deprivation. Their drinking water pipelines were laid in such a way that they passed through the settlement’s drains. Not only were there no structures elevating the pipelines, they were also riddled with holes that allowed drain water to enter into them and mix with the drinking water. It was but inevitable that consuming unclean and contaminated water would result in frequent illnesses in the settlement.

The SIC decided to meet their Ward Councillor and take the issue up with him. The Councillor, who was appreciative of the initiative shown by the community, promised to personally provide cement and ballast. But more was required for building the stand posts. The SIC members realised that they had to buy a pipeline and a tap. The animators suggested the SIC collect money from within the community and acquire the resources themselves. The SIC then collected the funds through individual donations and made the purchases. They also contributed their own labour.

The result is that the water pipeline in Maalgodam Basti is now fixed and the residents are accessing clean drinking water. Stopping the leakage of water from the pipelines has also brought an end to the occurrence of pools of dirty water, mud and filth in the settlement.

There has been a behavioural change in community as people have started to keep their surroundings as clean as possible. While the people in Maalgodam Basti are sanitation workers, they were not taking care of their own sanitation. After the formation of the SIC, it raised this question and sensitised people, motivated them to stop littering in the open and throwing waste into the
drains. The result is that the people keep their waste in a designated place, from where the sanitation worker collects it. SIC has indeed played a crucial mobilising role in this regard.

Drawing inspiration from their first success, the issue of education was addressed next. With motivation and mobilisation by the SIC, parents have started sending their children to the Aanganbadi Centre and the nearby school regularly.

It is thanks to the SIC that people have become aware and come together. In the process of coming together, residents of the settlement have found the courage and confidence to take action and solve other problems that plague them. As evidence, they have written an application to the district magistrate for their rehabilitation.
“When everyone contributes to change, you feel proud”

After the formation of the SIC, we decided to put an end to the practice of littering, which was making it impossible to keep the settlement clean. We wrote an application to the Circle Officer and since then the rickshaw has been regularly coming to collect garbage.

Noorjahan, SIC member

The SIC is a platform that we can use to speak to each other about our problems and figure out ways to address them. Working together has helped us understand what it means to be part of an effective community organisation.

Israt Bano, SIC member

The usual view of an informal settlement is predictable: houses made of temporary or semi-permanent materials such as thatch and mud; narrow roads further obstructed by large piles of garbage; the sounds and sight of women returning with heavy loads of water from far-off sources, children in tow. The picture is one of poverty and stagnation, and a socio-economic prison that it is difficult to escape from. Till one year ago, Muskaan Gali, an informal settlement established in 1918, had perfectly fitted the above description.

There are 80 people living in this settlement in 18 families; 13 families belong to the Muslim community. The main occupation of the people of Muskaan Gali is daily labour, though some people are self-employed like street vendors and shopkeepers.

The people in Muskaan Gali were extremely unhappy with the unhygienic conditions they were living in. Littering had reached the stage where there was little or no space left on the narrow lanes and bylanes to walk. Not only was the stench unbearable, the drains were clogged with trash as well. This had led to constant water logging in the settlement and the spread of various kinds of water-borne diseases among the residents.

As lack of cleanliness was the biggest concern for the settlement, its people had made requests to some political leaders for action, but nothing had happened. The residents had given up hope of a positive change or a better future. To make matters worse, they were not on good terms with their Ward Councillor, as he was under the impression that Muskaan Gali had not voted for him. Because of this, the people clearly did not know what to do or how to go about securing...
PRIA's advent gave the community hope. They immediately agreed when they realised that organising themselves in the form of an SIC would give them a platform from which to work on their issues. The SIC was formed on March 30, 2017, with 5 men, including 3 youths, and 4 women. The picture of Muskaan Gali started to change with the formation of their SIC.

A series of meetings made it clear to them that discussing issues together could yield solutions. The SIC members came to the conclusion that the sanitation crisis could be handled if the Municipal Corporation were to arrange for a rickshaw to arrive regularly for garbage collection. They also discussed how residents could be convinced to dispose of their trash in the rickshaw, and nowhere else. It was also decided that a good relationship with the Ward Councillor and the Circle Officer was a must.

The SIC members went to the Ward Councillor with their problem, but he was reluctant to do anything about it. The very next day they went to the Circle officer (sanitation in-charge of the zone) and submitted an application demanding a garbage collection rickshaw in the settlement. The Officer was helpful, taking action immediately. A rickshaw now regularly arrives in the settlement for garbage collection. The SIC's collective efforts helped them address their long-standing and biggest problem in just 3 days! As no one litters anymore, Muskaan Gali looks clean. The residents of the settlement learnt from experience that they could achieve what they wanted only if they came together; this strengthened their determination to approach other problems in a similar manner.

The immediate other problem was the deplorable state of the utility poles in the settlement. The wires that dangled down from the wood or bamboo poles were life-threatening. When the SIC members approached the Ward Councillor, they were informed that taking care of this was the responsibility of the Power Department. Accordingly, on November 16, 2017, the SIC submitted an application to the Department. However, the officials at the Power Department were of the view that until they received a directive from the Councillor, they could not act on the application. After several visits to various offices over 1 ½ months with no relief, the SIC members finally decided to pool in their own money at the rate of Rs. 1500 per family. Having done so, they could get new poles installed in their settlement. It was again evidence of collective action and unity of purpose catalysing success. The settlement needs more utility poles and the SIC has a plan to ensure that they are installed.

The residents of Muskaan Gali are now staunch believers in the strength of a focused collective. Their successes have given them hope and they intend to work towards getting a water connection for the settlement. The SIC members spoke to the Ward Councillor regarding this on September 22, 2017. The Ward Councillor said that it would be done in coming months. Unfortunately, the process is taking longer than usual because the residents refused to pay him Rs 2000 per household for this.
basic service.

In Muskaan Gali, 14 families have toilets. While two families use shared toilets, two other families practice open defecation. The SIC has helped them submit applications to MMC for financial assistance in constructing individual household latrines (IHHLs). A response is awaited from the MMC.

The 18 families now live in the settlement with better awareness of their rights and responsibilities. The SIC is working on other aspects of development in Muskaan Gali. The members are motivating the youths to enrol in different employment-related trainings so that they can get regular jobs. Most importantly, the people who were reluctant to participate in governance processes have now started to talk and demand services. They have learnt to take collective action.
“The SIC has been formed by us to help each other”

I have learned to sit with 10 other people and discuss issues that affect all of us. We do not sit around anymore thinking that nothing will happen.

Noorjahan Khatun, SIC member

Within the SIC, we help each other without thinking about the benefits for ourselves. The good of the settlement is the good of all.”

Gulnaaj Khatun, SIC member

One of the biggest problems afflicting the informal settlement of Muslim Tola is the narrowness of its lanes and bylanes. Passing through the settlements is extremely inconvenient, and the situation worsens when its roads are covered with overflowing water and trash. Needless to say, the drains along the roads are always piled high with garbage. The residents, in the absence of toilets, use the open drains for their bodily needs. The typical condition in which the residents of Muslim Tola live their everyday lives gives rise to a persistent dissatisfaction as they see a better world just outside, a world that pays them their daily wages.

There are 140 households in Muslim Tola, totalling 785 people. While Muslims constitute the vast majority of the population, with 117 families, there are 23 Hindu households. All 140 families belong to Other Backward Classes.

A prevalent sense of distrust and disillusionment with the government and its schemes among the residents had prevented them from sending applications to the municipality or interacting with representatives or officials. This negative outlook was clear during discussions about the formation of
the SIC. However, PRIA took it as an opportunity to motivate people to come forward collectively and work for the improvement of the informal settlement. With the consent of the people, the SIC was formed on July 22, 2016, with 6 men and 5 women. Of the members, 7 are young people.

Immediately after its formation, members of the SIC went to the Ward Councillor and functionaries of the Municipal Corporation, who were in charge of this settlement, and invited them to hoist the national flag in the settlement on Independence Day. After the event on August 15, the residents and Councillor sat together for a discussion on the issues the settlement was facing. Subsequent to this discussion, the SIC members decided to take their grievances, especially the issue of the unhygienic condition of the settlement, to the Circle Officer. The Circle Officer, who already knew about their new community organisation, instructed a sanitation worker to sweep the settlement. The sweeper has been coming to Muslim Tola from September 2016 onwards.

While 88 families in Muslim Tola had their toilets, 52 households had no toilets of their own and 38 of these 52 families used to share the toilets of their neighbours while 14 households practiced open defecation, including in the drains. As a result, excreta in the open drains was another major source of distress. An application requesting that the drains be covered with concrete slabs was submitted by the SIC to the Councillor, the Mayor and the Vice-Mayor in January 2017. The SIC also followed up on this by visiting the officials of the Municipal Corporation to alert them to the urgent need for a positive response. As a consequence of their persistence, the work to cover the drains began within 15 days of the submission of their application.

It had emerged through SIC meetings that many of the families in the settlement were unable to avail government schemes because they did not have Aadhaar cards. To address this, the SIC arranged for an Aadhaar registration camp in the settlement in February 2017. This helped 55 residents register for Aadhaar cards at the camp.

In order to end open defecation, the SIC has also mobilized the community to avail financial assistance for constructing household toilets under SBM; the SIC has helped 14 families with their applications. Its members have already submitted applications on behalf of 4 families. However, these applications have not been sanctioned yet. The SIC members have contacted the Ward Councillor in this regard, and he has assured them that matter will be looked into soon. The other 10 households face other issues, such as large family size and lack of space in their houses for constructing toilets. Some of them do not have land in their names, which is required to construct the individual household latrines (IHHLs). The SIC needs to find a solution on this.

The greatest success to emerge from this process of getting organised, working together and achieving some results is that the residents of Muslim Tola have now started to believe in the effectiveness of government institutions and to take their rights and responsibilities seriously. The SIC is happy that there is an increase in community awareness regarding municipal services as their biggest concern was to make residents conscious of their entitlements, rights and responsibilities.
“We now have the courage to make our voices heard”

Roads and drains were the biggest problems of our settlement. The lanes would be flooded with knee-high water during the monsoons. The construction of this road will go a long way in easing our troubles. Children will not face any difficulties in going to school and this time around, we will face the monsoon with peace of mind.

Chittaranjan Das, SIC member

We never used to think about going to the Municipal Corporation or the Ward Councillor for anything. Now we know that if we want development, we must work for it ourselves. The formation of the SIC has given us the courage to voice our concerns clearly.

Manju Devi, SIC Member

The narrow, congested lanes of informal settlements, unpaved, crumbling and lined with open drains, make for hellish conditions that the residents are forced to live in. Police Line Durgapuri has been one such settlement for approximately 50-60 years. To reach the settlement from the main road, one must travel along 300 meters of unpaved road that was the cause for a number of problems. Most of the houses in the settlement are made of temporary materials and the primary source of livelihood is daily labour.

There are 94 families living in Police Lines. While 68 families are SCs, 24 are OBCs. There is only one family belonging to the General caste and only one ST family. A total of 491 people live in this
settlement, but the residents say that they have not seen any development work in Police Lines in 15 years. There was a lot of anger against the government system due to the past experiences of the people. They were reluctant and unenthusiastic about interacting with the Municipal Corporation and the Ward Councillor.

The SIC was formed in April 2016, with 9 members, including 4 men and 6 women. It has 6 youths; 3 men and 3 women. People agreed to this as they were looking for some help from external sources. They decided to work with PRIA on sanitation issues. The SIC meets on the 28th of every month now.

However, regularity was not observed initially, and for the first couple of meetings, the members of the SIC took time to understand the functions of one SIC. The findings of the mobile surveys that PRIA had facilitated in the settlement were shared with the residents at a meeting to which the Councillor was also invited. The dialogue that was kicked off at this meeting gave the residents, particularly the SIC members, some resolve to do something for the community.

Following this, in December 2016, the members of the SIC submitted an application to the Councillor for the construction of their road and drain. After it was approved by the Councillor, it was submitted to the Municipal Corporation. However, on account of no work being initiated until February 2017, the SIC members submitted another application to the Municipal Commissioner. This time around their efforts proved successful, with tenders for the construction of drains and a road connecting the settlement to the main road being passed by the Municipal Corporation. The construction of the road was completed in March 2017; the road was completed in April 2017.

In April, 2017, it was discovered that in Police Line, 14 families had no toilets. While some people with no toilets used their neighbour’s toilets, others practiced open defecation. In May 2017, the SIC submitted applications to the Municipal Corporation seeking support for construction of individual household latrines (IHHLs) for the above-mentioned families. The first instalments for toilet construction have been received by 11 households: 4 toilets have already been completed and 7 are in progress. 3 families have not yet got their first instalments.

Although toilets have been constructed in 4 households, about 20 people have stopped open defecation. However, 10 people continue with the practice; most of them are senior citizens who do not prefer going to the toilets. Behavioural change is required and SIC members are working towards this. However, whatever success has been achieved is because of the efforts and strong follow-up actions of the SIC.

The story of success of the SIC is not only about the road or drain or toilets. The SIC members have also arranged an orientation programme on the causes
and treatment of diarrhoea, at which information was disseminated (among other things) on the use of the Zinc tablet and ORS, which were also distributed among the mothers. 24 female participants attended the programme.

An important outcome of building the SIC is that the togetherness and work of its members has established a direct communication between the service provider and the beneficiaries. For example, after the municipal elections got over this year, the SIC organised a meeting with the new Ward Councillor and Vice-Mayor to ensure that they were informed of the grievances of the residents of Police Line. People have now begun to place their demands before those who are accountable to them. Moreover, they better understand their responsibilities as citizens, including their role in their development and for the place they live in.
“How a road builds the foundation of SIC”

After the formation of the SIC people saw how working together brought about change. They worked for the development of their settlement and trusted PRIA. While attending the meetings, they found out the problems and worked to eradicate them from their settlement.

Rajiv Kumar, SIC Member

The informal settlement of Durga Colony is situated near Maliyan Sarvodya School in Jonsganj. This settlement, located near the railway station, is more than 20 years old and consists of 25 households, with a population of 108 people. The majority of the people in the settlement are Hindus and belong to the Scheduled Caste.

Every house in the settlement is pucca and legally registered with the land and estate department of the government. The main issues in the settlement include poor road and drainage systems, which caused flooding and made it difficult for residents to move around, especially affecting the daily commute to work. In the face of these challenges, the formation of the SIC here in August 2016 has brought about an improvement in local living conditions.
SIC members worked energetically with the municipality for infrastructural development in the settlement. The first and most basic of the changes was that the sweeper was made to visit the settlement daily. The SIC submitted an application to the Ward Councillor and the Nagar Nigam demanding this.

The two subsequent actions were the cementing of the roads and the repair of the broken drains. These were taken care of within 6 weeks of the applications being submitted. As a result of the efforts of the SIC in 2016, the settlement went through a visible transformation. The prompt response of the authorities also made the settlement a cleaner place and solidified residents’ faith in the efficacy of the SIC and collective representations.

With the experience, encouragement and energy from the first year’s success, SIC members discussed the issues of 2017 and how the SIC could address these problems. The major problems identified were the lack of a road leading to the settlement, its drainage and sanitation situation, and potholes.

The first course of action was to write an application to the AMC and speak to the Ward Councillor. The SIC members visited the Councillor’s office four times. They also twice met Mrs. Anita Badel, an MLA from Ajmer and Minister of Women and Child Welfare, Government of Rajasthan. Writing letters and continuous follow-up with the officials and political leaders proved successful. The construction of a road began on September 19, 2017. It proved a great relief for the community, and a source of confidence and encouragement for the SIC.

However, the SIC members recognise that it would not have been possible without the support of their energetic animator. As one SIC member put it, “PRIA indeed supported us as per the need and our expectation.”

The problem in the settlement was the lack of a proper drainage system. Because of this, waste water often accumulated in the roads of the settlement. During the monsoon, it was difficult for the community to access roads because of the inevitable rise in water levels, a situation also responsible for many sanitation issues and the spread of disease, especially skin diseases.

To address this problem, the SIC wrote an application to the AMC, and also to Mrs. Anita Badel, requesting a meeting with her. She agreed and listened to the SIC members, but said that building a new drainage system would need a big contract and a lot of time.

In response, SIC members requested that she help keep the settlement’s existing drainage system clean to prevent water from entering their homes, to which she responded by calling
the health inspector, Mr. Rupa Ram, and asked him to take care of the settlement’s needs. The health inspector, in turn, called Mr. Sitaram Joshi, the sanitation inspector, and told him to work on cleaning the drain.

September 21, 2017 was a big day for the SIC, when a team from the AMC came to the community and cleaned the drain by using a machine to remove a lot of dirt and debris.

After the fulfilment of two basic infrastructural needs, members of the SIC started to believe in themselves. The SIC’s second successive year and the second successive achievement in the year 2017 created a sense of community togetherness and organisation. After seeing the success that comes with working together, they now conduct their meetings twice a month.

As of December 2017, there were six families that had not yet benefitted from the new road and renovated drain. These households are likely to face difficulties during the monsoon. The SIC is working to provide specific benefits for them; it plans to extend the road and the drainage system upto their houses, while also working on addressing their other issues.
“Success needs patience and persistence”

“If we want success, we need joint efforts to follow up on applications.”

Rukma Devi, SIC Member

“If we sit in our home, no work is completed. If we work together, work is completed”

Mohini Kanwar, President, SIC

Hari Nagar is situated in Ward 48. There are 89 households and 428 persons living in this informal settlement. The majority of the people in Hari Nagar belong to the Hindu religion. Hari Nagar is geographically divided into two parts, one on the slopes and one on the hilltop. The people in the sloping area typically work in government jobs, whereas the residents in the hill-top area engage in daily wage labour.

In March 2016, the PRIA team met with residents of the sloping area to discuss the formation of an SIC. However, they discovered that the people in this part of Hari Nagar had access to basic minimum facilities. They were content with the municipal services and did not show any interest in forming an SIC. Instead, they said that most of them were jobholders and would not be able to give time to this. Even though the PRIA team attempted to explain that settlement-focused local people’s organisation
could play a vital role in community development including need-based lasting solutions, they did not come forward. They, however, referred the team to the hilltop area by saying that the people there had real problems and needed support.

As the residents of the hilltop area of the settlement lacked these facilities, the PRIA team took efforts to organise a meeting with them, and managed to hold the first one in November 2016. During this meeting, community issues were discussed with the people and the concept of an SIC was introduced. Community members identified low water pressure, lack of household toilets, roads, drainage, and open dumping as the issues in their area. They identified low water pressure and lack of household toilets as the two top priority issues.

On Jan 2, 2017, the SIC was formed with eight women and four men. On February 9, 2017, the SIC met for the second time and decided to submit an application to the Ward Councillor requesting the installation of a new piped water connection. Initially, the Councillor dismissed the application, for the stated reason that it was not possible to install a pipeline in the area. Powered by PRIA’s support, the SIC visited the Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED) on March 5, 2017 to submit another application for water pipeline. During this time, the SIC members also visited the AMC to follow up on applications they had submitted previously, seeking support for household toilets.

The SIC again followed up with the concerned department and officials by phone and in person, but in spite of this, no work commenced. On May 9, the SIC visited the Jan Kalyan Camp to submit another application, but even this did not produce results.

During the cluster level training of SICs, it came up that the Hari Nagar SIC had not been successful. SIC members shared that they felt disheartened. However, members from other SICs encouraged the SIC of Hari Nagar to persist, which proved to be a timely intervention.

After this advice and encouragement, the SIC members regrouped and visited the Junior Executive Engineer (JEN) to discuss the status of their applications. The SIC shared with the JEN that only five people had come to the office to request a piped water connection, but the whole settlement was suffering. They also declared that if no action was taken, all of them would stage a demonstration in
the PHED office. This activated the department, and a water pipeline was installed on August 26. However, it was installed in the sloping area, which already had adequate access to water, not the areas from where the requests had originated. On August 31, the SIC followed up again with the PHED and explained the need for a pipeline in hilltop parts of Hari Nagar, but the PHED contended that it was not possible for JCB machines to enter the hilly area, therefore necessitating manual work by the labourers. It would take some time.

They went again to the PHED office on September 11, 2017. An official shared that a contractor had been hired and the project would begin within 2-3 days. It finally did begin on September 25 and, a few days later, was completed.

After fighting so hard for the pipeline installation, 29 families now have access to household piped water connections. Their persistent follow-ups had not only impressed the officials, but also encouraged the members themselves.

For the immediate future, the SIC plans to work towards acquiring government support for the construction of individual toilets, solid waste management, and construction of the roads and drainage. Six families of the settlement have no toilet facility, and their issues would be taken up. This issue was not taken up earlier as the SIC members had decided to push for only one issue which had affected the whole community. They are confident that, given the experience and lessons from the first exposure to the government, this they would achieve future success more quickly.
“We took our efforts to the next stage”

“Our members are interested in going for registration of the SIC. While we want sustainability and independence; we would like to continue our association with PRIA.”

Astar Khan, President of SIC

Kahar Basti, situated along the Ajmer-Mumbai railway tracks, has been inhabited for the last 40 years by 71 families and has a total population of 449. There are 19 Muslim families and 52 Hindu families, and while the majority of the Hindus belong to the Kahar caste, a mix of castes is found among the inhabitants of the settlement. The main occupation is daily wage labour, vegetable sales or private sector jobs. Most of the households are pucca structures.

The main issues in the settlement include absence of approach road and dysfunctional drainage systems. This issue becomes particularly apparent in the rainy season, when the settlement floods, creating unsanitary conditions and accessibility challenges.

The community, initially, did not show a great deal of interest in PRIA’s efforts for the constitution of SICs and promoting urban sanitation practices. Participation in the first meeting held in September 2016 was underwhelming, as a result of which a second meeting was held to share information on the role the SIC could play in improving the settlement. It needed extensive convincing; people felt that PRIA was simply another NGO out to conduct a survey. It was shared with them that surveys were important for them to develop critical knowledge about their issues and possible solutions. People began to show interest when PRIA explained to them that it would only help them in building a local people’s organisation, after which they would freely manage their own issues. This impressed them as they were assured of ownership, leading to the commencement of a relationship between the animator and community members. When the participatory urban appraisal (PUA)\(^3\) was completed as a next step, the foundation for the SIC was already built. It was formed in October 2016 with 29 members including 14 males and 15 females. More than 50 percent of the members are youths.

During its very first meeting in November 2016, the SIC identified road and drainage infrastructure, household toilets, dustbins, and general cleanliness as the main issues. Members also decided to prioritize road construction and general cleanliness of the settlement as action points.

\(^3\) Participatory Urban Appraisal (PUA) is a set of methods or tools that enable people to express and analyse the realities of their lives and conditions, to plan themselves what action to take, and to monitor and evaluate the results.
The SIC submitted an application to the Ward Councillor regarding the listed issues. After a period of time during which the Councillor proved unresponsive, there was progress when the SIC submitted an application to the Mayor. The Mayor was responsive to the requests of the SIC members and sent the Ward Councillor to attend the next SIC meeting. For the SIC members, it was an empowering experience; Astar Khan, the President of the SIC, says, “It was our usual experience and expectation from the politicians; but this time PRIA was there with us to take us to the next stage. It has helped us to get from writing applications to giving connections.”

The Ward Councillor also showed a lot of interest in the SIC, and attempted to know its origin and future roles. He explained that he could not construct the road as because it was not budgeted in the 2016 plan, but he promised to factor the road into the next budget in April 2017.

In April 2017, the SIC members followed up with the Ward Councillor, who said that road construction would begin shortly. When no action was taken on the assurance. The SIC members grew frustrated, but did not relent. Their persistence paid off when road construction began in October 2017.

Through this process, the SIC members have learned the power of unity and perseverance. With this success, the SIC hopes to work toward the construction of drains and solid waste management. They also plan to engage with people who habitually practise open defecation even though they have toilets. While four families have no toilets, two of them have applied for financial assistance; the SIC is following up on this. The SIC members are also thinking of Pappu Kahar, who got the first installment of Rs. 4000/- for constructing his toilet, but has given up as he has run out of money. Kahar Basti has a lot of issues, and a willingness to solve those, with support from PRIA, has bound them together.
“We are willing to evolve as a longterm organisation”

A Khanpura Road – Before and After

“There was a frustration, but PRIA was around to help with everything, from writing new applications to keeping our patience.”

Rajan Bhora, President of the SIC

Khanpura is located along Beawar Road near Saras Dairy in Ajmer. It is an approximately 50-year-old settlement and, while the majority of its residents belong to the Hindu religion, there is also a significant Muslim population among the 74 households and 449 individuals living there. The houses are pucca; the roads vary from semi-pucca to kuchha. Some of the housing plots are legally owned and registered with the Sub-Registrar’ of the Registration & Stamps Department of the government, while other houses have been built on the encroached land of the government. Khanpura has an anganwadi and a primary school within the settlement.

As expected, this settlement also has road and drainage issues, creating many problems for the people inhabiting it. During the raining season, a large part of the settlement becomes inaccessible as it becomes difficult to move in the flooded conditions, with the roads submerged. Besides the mobility challenge, the standing water creates unsanitary conditions and puts people at risk of disease. These problems have not all been solved yet, but there has been a change in the lives of Khanpura’s residents after the formation of the SIC.
Before the Khanpura SIC was formed, PRIA had conducted a participatory urban appraisal (PUA) which helped the community come together and identify common issues. Many people had participated in the PUA and wanted to learn more about PRIA’s work. During this time, the people had spoken about their road and drainage problems with PRIA staff, and sought their support. They showed interest in developing their own organisation after being oriented by PRIA. The SIC was formed in December 2016 with 31 members, including 19 males, 12 females and some youth members. These members were recruited based on the own interest of the people and the nomination of the socially active people in the community. The SIC leaders felt that it was good to have more members as some members could lose interest and leave the SIC. They also said that when there were more members, there is a possibility that more people could be mobilised for a community activity or for visiting a department.

The first priority of the SIC was to address the road and drainage problems of the settlement. During the very first meeting, they wrote an application to the Ward Councillor, requesting redressal of the problem. However, the Councillor rejected the application, contending that he did not have the budget for the work.

The rejection united the community in a stronger way. They immediately convened a meeting, sought the help of PRIA and decided to take the matter up to a higher level. As decided, the SIC members went to the District Collector; they also submitted another application in the presence of the media. Their problems and the protest were well-documented by the media.

While the SIC, supported by the community and guided by PRIA, waited for the district administration to respond, they did not keep quiet. They then went to the Mayor, who was responsive and spoke to the Ward Councillor. However, lack of funds remained an intractable barrier.

The SIC members did not lose hope, though. Their problems and the reliability of PRIA’s support had created a determination in them. They decided to meet with Mrs. Anita Badel, the Minister of Women and Child Development, Govt. of Rajasthan. This was easier said than done; during their fourth visit, they met with a member of the Minister’s staff and submitted an application, only for it to be denied because it was claimed that the SIC members had not provided specific details, data and issues.

A household sanitation survey of the settlement was completed around the time the SIC’s application was rejected. In the subsequent meeting, PRIA shared the survey data and explained how data was important for the SIC as a community organisation. The SIC members admitted that they were not earlier this aware of the precise nature of their own problems. They decided to write a fresh application using the data from the survey.
The data showed, among other things, that 25 households had water flowing out into an open area, creating a pool of dirty, smelly water in the midst of the settlement. And, all the five lanes had water-logging issues. When the fresh application was submitted with the above data, it caught the attention of the Minister.

Upon reviewing the data, the Minister immediately surveyed the area and asked the Mayor and the Ward Councillor to address the issue. Work started immediately. It was a great success for the SIC members, who learnt how hard work, persistence and patience can pay off. They have also learnt how to work with the government, that things don’t change if people remain silent.

Paving work on two lanes in the settlement began on September 22, 2017 and stood completed on September 28, 2017. Three lanes still remain unpaved, towards which the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA) has committed to provide funds; the work is due to begin soon. SIC members are not worried; they are ready to visit the ADA office in case of an unexpected delay.

The SIC members now have their next target: to improve the drainage system in the settlement. The SIC also looks to evolve as a long term organisation that can provide community leadership, resolve issues, and bring progress to Khanpura.
“We do not see the problems, now we see solutions”

A Krishna Colony Lane – Before and After

When PRIA came to us, we did not trust it. But they explained everything to us, and worked with us. They have now own our hearts.”

Ramplaji Soni, SIC member

“Before the SIC, we weren’t thinking of our problems. After PRIA’s intervention, we have not only identified our issues, but are also thinking about how to fix them; this has helped us in achieving some of our goals.”

Prakash Samasya, Youth SIC member

The majority of the people in Krishna Colony, a settlement of 42 households and 226 individuals, belong to the Scheduled Caste category. The men generally engage in construction work and other daily wage work, while the women, who also do work as daily wagers, are largely confined to their homes and perform household chores.
When PRIA first visited Krishna Colony, the settlement already had a group of elders from the community who deals with petty issues in the community and organise functions on important occasions. Knowing that they did not have to build an SIC from scratch, PRIA requested some residents to organise a meeting, also visiting the group of elders from the community and motivating them to join attend the meeting, which was scheduled for October 6, 2016.

The meeting was held in the Panchayat Bhawan⁴, the usual meeting room of the settlement. In this meeting, participants were introduced to PRIA’s objectives and activities and engaged in a discussion about how the community could benefit from PRIA’s intervention and the need for an SIC.

The participants warmed to the idea quickly and volunteered to form their SIC. It consisted of 19 members, including 12 males, 5 youths and 7 females. While the 12 male members were all present at the meeting, the women were nominated in their absence. As per the tradition of the community, women do not attend community meetings because decision-making is considered solely the prerogative of the men. It was in response to PRIA’s requested that they agreed to nominate the women.

At the first meeting of the SIC, its members shared issues that concerned the settlement as a whole, as well as issues that were local to each by-lane. The main problems identified by the community were related to roads, drainage, lights, cleanliness, food security and individual toilets. After generally discussing these issues, the SIC identified the main drain (nala) running through the settlement as a priority, as it was damaged. Several children, while engaged in play, had fallen into the drain because it was not bordered by a wall. Moreover, the waste from the settlement was dumped in the drain, which affected the flow of sludge and clogged the channel. As a site of sanitation and safety challenges, the drain seemed an appropriately urgent issue.

In March 2017, the SIC submitted an application to the Ward Councillor. After waiting for a response, the SIC followed up with the Councillor in April 2017, this time obtaining the promise that work would begin in June.

Come June, the Ward Councillor said that there were issues on account of which the work could not be initiated, instead giving an assurance to the effect that the work would begin in the following month. However, halfway through July, no work had begun and this time the SIC decided to visit the Jan Kalyan Camp organised during August 2017 to submit another application. At the camp, the SIC members spoke with the Mayor, who accepted their application. After the camp was attended and much follow-up action with AMC officials, work on the drain finally began in September 2017. It took a month - the work was completed in October 2017. Now the flow of sludge in the drain is smooth, the wall has protected children from falling into it, and there is even a seating area for people.

While the members pursued a solution to the drainage problem, they also discussed the need for repairing the approach road to the settlement. The municipality felt that it would be better to simultaneously reconstruct the road while repairing and cleaning the drain. As a result, the settlement has both a renovated drain and a new road. The road and by-lanes look clean as the municipal sweepers now visit twice a day.

The SIC has also given the people a sense of unity. Kauram Soni, a member of the SIC, said, “In the beginning, we had gone to the Ward Councillor several times. But he had neglected us and did not

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⁴ Panchayat Bhawan was built here when the area was under village panchayat. But after inclusion into municipal corporation, it still known by this name
meet us. Suddenly, one day, he himself came to us. He came because he knew that we had an organisation and we were united.”

Now the Ward Councillor is supportive. He has also helped SIC members fill up application forms for household toilets. Three families have received financial assistance of Rs. 8000/- each and have completed construction of their toilets. Five families have received the first installment of Rs. 4000/- each; their toilets have also been constructed. And in the midst of all this, there were no cases of open defecation in the settlement. Even when Mr. Premchand had no toilet, he chose to share his brother’s toilet. Now all the 42 families have toilets.

The SIC members are proud of their efforts and want PRIA’s continued support and guidance to improve conditions in their settlement.
“Coming together and discussing issues is the first step to change”

The Situation - Before and After

Conversations about our problems have begun and everyone is participating. As a result, our grievances are reaching the Councilor’s ears and things are changing for better.

Ramswarup Bhand, SIC Member

“People came together to talk and discuss their issues. It resulted in writing and submitting proposals and brought about changes in the settlement. The settlement is clean now. We need to maintain it.”

Ratna Bhand, President of Longia SIC, and member of Ajmer SIC Federation

The people of Longiya Basti, located on a hill near Ajmer’s Delhi Gate, have been living in the area for the last 25 years, and yet the settlement is not notified by the Municipal Corporation of Ajmer Development Authority (ADA). No family in the settlement has patta or registry. The community is comprised of 48 households, with a population of 263 persons. There are 34 Hindu families and 14 Muslim families. A great majority of the Hindu families belong to the Bhand Samaj (Dholi community), who are the traditional caste of drummers.
Before the formation of the SIC here, the community was unorganised and unable to raise its voice against the issues they face, which included no access to basic services like toilets, paved roads, sweeping, drainage and garbage collection.

After PRIA explained the role of an SIC to the community, its members became eager to begin the process of forming it, and many people voluntarily joined it. The SIC in Longiya Basti was formed in November 2016 with 16 members – 6 males and 11 women. An SIC meeting is held regularly every month. However, men in general do not regularly attend meetings as they have to earn on a daily basis. Men in this community work as daily wagers and drummers, while women stay at home or work as housemaids in the locality. The women find it easier to find time for the SIC.

Initially, the SIC discussed several issues faced by the community, including lack of toilets, paved roads, drainage and garbage collection. Because all members of the community had faced the same or similar issues, they were keen to share their experiences and cooperate with one another to find solutions. The community was particularly disturbed by the heaps of rubbish on the streets and the clogged drains, both of which had made it challenging to move through the settlement.

During the first SIC meeting in December 2016, the community choose to prioritise the cleanliness of their area as the most urgent issue. They worked together to submit an application to their Ward Councillor, requesting that the municipal sweeper be sent to their settlement. After receiving the application, the Councilor spoke with the SIC members to discuss the overall sanitation situation. The latter shared with the Ward Councilor that they had formed a local community organization for their own development, and would work with the municipal corporation to improve conditions in the settlement. The Ward Councillor was happy to know this, appreciated their efforts, and promised support and action; this was an encouraging experience for the SIC.

In January 2017, the trash heaps were removed from the by-lanes of the settlement. Immediately after that, a sweeper started visiting the community regularly and garbage collection began on a daily basis. This was the time the SIC experienced the real fruits of collective action and were happy about it.

As the houses are on a hillside, the garbage collector does not carry his trolley door-to-door. People come down to the main road to hand over their garbage. There is also a dustbin on the main road. If the waste is dry, people accumulate it and set it on fire.

Seeing the supportive and quick response from the Councillor, the SIC members grew optimistic and committed to continue working together under the umbrella of their SIC to address other issues in the settlement, both present and future. They said that they had been living there for a long time, but had not seen such changes in their situation. They appreciated that it was possible only through the formation of their SIC, and also gave credit for this to PRIA.

The members then decided to put in a request for the construction of stairs in the settlement to the Ward Councillor, to facilitate climbing up and down their houses. They also submitted applications for constructing drains alongside the steps leading to community. The Councillor knew the problems the community was facing in the absence of basic infrastructure, and immediately agreed to the proposal. However, he needed some time before he would be able to take action.

Meanwhile, the SIC members continued meeting with him and following up. Finally, their efforts came to fruition when the stairway was built with the drain by its side. It was constructed between October and November 2017. This addition has given a new look to the settlement, and life has
become a lot easier for the residents of Longiya Basti. The SIC members have earned a lot of respect from people.

There is also a community toilet being built 500 meters away from the community; it is on the verge of being completed. The SIC members had gone to the authorities to submit their request for this. Unfortunately, one of the problems with the plan for the toilet is that it does not have a water connection. The municipal officials are yet to find a route through which the water can be drained out. Once the community toilet starts functioning, about 100 people from 20 families would get the benefit and they look forward to having access to it. It would contribute to ending open defecation to a great extent.

The SIC is engaged in supporting people to apply for financial assistance towards the construction of household toilets. It submitted 12 applications for toilets, all of which were sanctioned. While 6 families have received both the installments and completed the construction, the remaining 6 families have received the first installments of Rs. 4000/- each. Their toilets are under construction. Presently, they share their neighbours’ toilets.

Although the community has a long way to go before securing all the basic services it needs, the SIC has helped to show that working together is an integral part of the process. An important benefit for the SIC members is the courage, confidence and communication skills that they have gained.
“The SIC is a medium through which we can address the many problems in our settlement”

There are many problems. No cleaning happens and people litter all over the place. We need to install dustbins, and fix all the septic tanks. The SIC is a medium through which we can do this.”

Rani, SIC member

Community members in Panchsheel Lohar, a settlement of 504 households, have learned a lot about the power of organisation. A majority of the residents work as blacksmiths. The settlement was notified by Ajmer’s Urban Improvement Trust (UIT) in 2011. The flats were constructed as housing for urban poor, those who were homeless or living in different slums. The flats had been purchased at a concessional price of Rs. 12,500 per flat. As the houses were built by UIT, they came with access to basic infrastructure, like roads, drains, water supply and household toilets in every house. However, residents complain that basic infrastructure was neither properly constructed nor maintained. The community receives basic services such as water and electricity, but even these services are disrupted often times.

An SIC was formed here in October 2016, consisting of 12 men and 4 women. The first interventions following the formation of the SIC were related to addressing the community’s electricity problem. Despite the existence of an authorised connection and being located in close proximity to a transformer, the community faced regular power outages. This raised concerns over safety and presented challenges in the performance of basic household activities after dark. During the SIC meeting, members discussed potential causes of the electricity problem, and potential solutions.
Incidentally, there was a 3-day power outage which made the SIC members resolve to undertake meaningful collective representation. They went to the Ward Councillor, who suggested they visit the Madar Power House and speak to the Assistant Engineer (AE). This is where the SIC members learned why their electricity supply was so unpredictable. The AE explained that some members of the community were accessing electricity illegally, thus overwhelming the capacity of the transformer. This had resulted in frequent transformer breakdowns, leaving the community in the dark.

It was in this manner that the SIC learnt that the problem was within the community and created by people themselves. They suggested that the Assistant Engineer take action against those causing problems for the entire community. Agreeing to support the electricity department, the SIC also submitted an application to the Madar Power House, for the transformer to be fixed. A Junior Engineer soon visited the community, fixed the transformer and also installed streetlights throughout the settlement. The electricity department and the SIC agreed that henceforth if anyone found stealing the power would be penalised including no supply of electricity in future. This was also communicated to all the families in the settlement. The SIC members also informed the families that they were keeping a watch, and would inform the electricity department in case of any illegal connection.

Before organising themselves into a collective, the community was unaware of what had caused frequent power outages and consequently did not know how to solve the problem. Now, the community understands the issue and also the importance of their SIC, which has also developed a very good working relationship with the concerned authorities.

After successfully addressing the community’s electricity problem, the SIC began to work on the other issues. Since most of the people live in government quarters, toilets are installed in all households. However, due to improper maintenance, many septic tanks are broken, forcing people to resort to open defecation (OD). To address this issue, the SIC held a community meeting to identify the households that do not have working septic tanks. After assessing the extent of the problem following door to door visit, it was found out that 9 families had broken septic tanks because of which they were doing open defecation. The SIC sent an application to the UIT in March 2017. Upon receiving the application, the UIT sent a contractor to address the problem. “This was one more quick success which better projected the SIC as a true representative of the
community,” said Jagdish Kumar, the President of the SIC, who was unanimously elected by the members. People preferred his based on his contacts with the government departments.

While solving the problem of the septic tanks, the SIC discovered another problem. During door to door visit they found out that 12 households had no water connection. Another set of applications was sent to the Water Department and half of the applications were soon approved, providing water access to 6 of the 12 homes. The SIC is working to ensure that water connection for the remaining houses is established at the earliest.

There was one more opportunity which led to further acceptance by the community of the SIC. This happened when the SIC helped the Rajasthan State Livelihood Development Cooperation (RSLDC) organise a training workshop for the community. The SIC members approached the RSLDC in April 2017, under the Mukhya Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana. While the scheme aimed at training the youth and the unemployed, the SIC aimed at consolidating its own position. The SIC hopes that the RSLDC will provide more opportunities to members of their community.

Moving forward, the SIC wishes to help community members get their basic documents and services, such as government-issued identity cards, birth certificates, bank accounts, and ration cards. After survey in the settlement, SIC is now aware that the settlement has 31 families without ration card. Besides there are 71 children above the age of 9 who have no birth certificates; 114 persons above the age of 18 having no voter cards, and 214 persons having no Aadhar cards. In particular, the SIC hopes to provide birth certificates and identity cards to all children in the settlement so that it is easy for them to access educational scholarships from the government.

They also strongly feel that there should be schools near the settlement, due to the lack of which children are being deprived of their right to education. Besides studies, the SIC members strongly feel that ‘safai’ (cleanliness) is something that both the community people and the authorities need to address on an urgent basis. All of them agreed that their settlement was very dirty, with overflowing blocked drains and pools of water on the road. They are uncomfortable with garbage being flung around the settlement, but needed some definite action on the solid waste mismanagement. While the SIC members think that it is their and general people’s responsibility to make the make the community clean, they expect PRIA to help them in awareness and sensitisation.

However, the community is happy with the changes since the formation of the SIC and hopes working together will continue to benefit the community development.

A major challenge for Panchsheel Lohar takes the form of a political and administrative identity crisis. None of the community leaders is sure whether their locality comes under the jurisdiction of Gram Panchayat, the AMC or the UIT. While leaders from all the bodies visit the settlement, whenever there is a problem, each body sends residents scurrying to the other ones. After PRIA raised the need to identify who the real authority for their area is, the SIC members have agreed to work with the three authorities to reach clarity on this question. For PRIA, it is a unique opportunity to organise this community.
"We have never expected this type of change in 70 years"

Cleanliness drive by Ajmer Municipal Corporation in the settlement

"Hum 70 sal se yaha rah rahe the lekin kabhi laga nahi ki hamare ghar me toilet banega. PRIA se judne se bharosa mila aur humne milkar koshish kiya. Uska fayda sabhi ko hua. Basti me Pani Aur ration ki vyavastha ke liye kaam karenge."

"Though they have been living in this settlement for the last 70 years, they had never hoped to witness a positive change in their settlement. “But an association with PRIA gave us confidence and our efforts have yielded fruits. Building on this, SIC will pursue other issues like steady water supply and regularizing ration from PDS system”

Santra Maharaj, SIC Member

The Rajendrapura Colony is a notified settlement located in the centre of the Ajmer city. There are 36 families and 183 persons residing in the settlement. Residents are largely employed in daily wage work and scrap collection as their main occupations, while women primarily work as housemaids.

PRIA’s first interactions with the Rajendrapura community happened in July 2017. Residents welcomed the entry of PRIA as they were desperately looking for an agency to help them. The people were really concerned about the worsening sanitation conditions of their community. They knew that NGOs could help in the kind of issues they had, especially when the municipality was not doing the job, and they also had no access to the civic authority. The initial interactions focused on
identifying the leaders and also the issues in the community. The SIC was formed on July 25, 2016. The membership included 10 women and 12 men; there were 4 youth members.

As proper garbage disposal was not being practiced, this had resulted in the accumulation of solid waste, littering the streets and blocking drainage flow. The SIC deemed it necessary to approach higher officials to discuss the changes that must be made in terms of proper solid waste management within their community.

The PRIA team was able to connect the SIC with the Sanitation Inspector in charge of ward 51. The Inspector attended a meeting with the SIC in Rajendrapura Colony, where he studied the littered streets and the blocked drainage. He responded by first discussing the absence of a safai karmachari (sweeper) in the settlement, and the adverse effects this could have on overall sanitation maintenance. The inspector took action to resolve this problem by contacting his supervisor (Jamadar) and arranging for a safai karmachari to make daily visits to the community in order to properly collect and dispose of garbage. By the end of the day, the garbage was collected, and the drains were unblocked and cleaned by the municipal authority.

In addition, the inspector stressed the need for community involvement in maintaining proper sanitation, and drainage systems. The inspector, along with the PRIA team, requested the community members to use household dustbins, and empty the bins when the safai karmachari came every day. Now the SIC is actively involved in this as its members keep a watch on the practices of people. This first success led to the second one, which was much bigger.

This highly congested settlement was devoid of any household or community toilets; all its members used to practice open defecation. The lack of an open space near the settlement had also required them to go to a place away from home. Above and beyond the sanitation and health hazards of open defecation, women and girls also had to deal with safety problems and privacy issues when using open spaces to defecate.

The SIC of Rajendrapura Colony also discussed life without latrines and the practice of open defecation. They decided to approach their Ward Councillor, Mr. Anil Moyle, to voice their concerns in the hope that, together, they would be able to generate a workable solution. Through the help of the Councillor, the SIC connected with Mr. Anil Mehra, a junior engineer in charge of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) who visited the community on January 10, 2017.

He also agreed that the main challenge in constructing toilets in the one-room houses of Rajendrapura Colony was that of space. However, since the homes in the community include reinforced cement concrete (RCC) roofs, the engineer proposed that they construct toilets on the roof.
Considering this, the SIC members decided to apply for the construction of individual toilets under SBM, which would also involve placing a sewerage line in the settlement. 21 households submitted applications for individual toilets and pursued the matter with the Ward Councillor and the Municipal Corporation.

While the authority approved the applications, the SIC members expressed the concern that the financial assistance of Rs. 8000 was not sufficient for the construction of a household toilet and they were incapable of bearing the additional cost.

The Councillor listened to their plea and discussed it with the concerned department. The authority decided to take construction work into its own hands, arranging for materials and workers. This is one example of homeowners not having to do anything for the construction of their houses; in other cases, people contribute their labour and an additional expenditure of about Rs. 15,000/- to complete the toilets. When the construction of all 21 toilets was completed in March 2017, it was a great image-building event for the SIC.

As space was a constraint, toilet outlets were connected to the sewerage line passing through the settlement. In the meanwhile, SIC members, with the support of PRIA, were involved in regular interactions with the community to bring about behavioural changes that would allow for successful usage of toilets. This was done by discussing and promoting the numerous personal and community benefits of regular toilet use.

Rajendrapura is now open defecation free.

Furthermore, the SIC has helped in enhancing the community’s capacity to contact municipal officials and other stakeholders as a means of resolving any concerns that fall under the jurisdiction of municipality. The community has put in a significant effort to maintain proper garbage disposal and drainage systems, besides eliminating open defecation.
About PRIA

Established in 1982, PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia) is a global centre for participatory research and training based in New Delhi. Currently, PRIA has field offices in several states of India and partnerships with 3000 NGOs across the global North and South to deliver its programmes on the ground. Over 35 years, PRIA has promoted ‘participation as empowerment’, capacity building of community organisations, and people’s participation in governance. Initiatives are undertaken in the overall perspective of ‘making democracy work for all’ – in the political system; democratic culture in families, communities, and society; and participatory democracy with active citizenship. PRIA’s programmes on the ground focus on promotion of participation of the poor, especially women and youth, to claim rights and basic services.

Through building knowledge, raising voice and making democracy work for all, PRIA realises its vision – of a world based on values of equity, justice, freedom, peace and solidarity.

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