

**Municipal Councillors in New Delhi: Agents of integration
or exclusion?**

**Draft Paper to present to a N-AERUS conference
Rotterdam, October 1-3 2009**

Dr. Joop de Wit

Institute of Social Studies

The Hague, The Netherlands

dewit@iss.nl

PRELIMINARY DRAFT PAPER: NOT TO BE QUOTED

Key words:

**urban governance, urban poverty, municipal councillors,
social exclusion**

Abstract

In India's large cities trends can be discerned of increased polarisation between the urban rich and poor, in terms of divergent coverage and quality of services, spatial segregation, and a reduced political influence for the poor. In a potentially positive development, the 74th Constitutional Amendment on urban decentralisation adopted in 1992 brought promises of closer government-citizen proximity, citizen participation, and inclusive local governance. The position of Municipal Councillors – key mediators between the poor and urban governance agencies - was strengthened, and the question arises as to whether they play a positive role as regards the integration and inclusion of the poor and low income areas in the urban social, economic and political fabric, or whether they are in fact gatekeepers, who operate from dynamics of electoral/political self interest, sustaining existing patterns of exclusion. The paper uncovers micro level realities of mediation, representation and inequality by examining the background and roles of councillors and their relations with slums and slum dwellers in New Delhi. The paper concludes that councillors do play a useful role as regards the poor in a limited, incidental and personalistic way, but that, for a variety of reasons, their role in the social inclusion of the poor in terms of structural issues of poverty alleviation, security of tenure or addressing inequality is minimal.

1. Introduction

Debates on the governance of large Indian cities have been addressing multiple governance shifts, resulting from national and global developments, such as the liberalisation of the Indian economy, a related exposure to the forces of globalisation and neo-liberalism, and the increasing presence of vocal middle classes. Changes are reflected in an increased willingness to cooperate in partnerships both with the for-profit private sector and with the non-profit sector, efforts aimed at urban decentralisation, and promoting participatory forms of governance (Baud and de Wit, 2008, de Wit, 2008; Harris, 2005; Baud and Nainan, 2008). This occurs against the backdrop of two diverging trends, one which forecasts a future of Indian cities marked by segregation and an increasing divide between the urban rich and urban poor. The other trend is some evidence that such exclusionary trends are seen to be unwelcome, as manifested in some Government policies and plans.

Let us first consider the increasing concern that processes of segregation and polarisation are emerging where well-to-do middle class and elite groups are growing apart -- both in terms of incomes as well as urban spaces -- from large populations of urban poor (Tawa Lawa-Rewal, 2007; Ghertner, 2008). These trends are seen to be exacerbated by the dominance of the neo-liberal polity that India experiences with a strong role of the private sector, indications of which may be found in the land markets which are increasingly liberalised and opened up for industry and large scale development, and in several Vision Documents and plans for city beautification, as well as in the massive JNNURM (National Urban Renewal Mission) program (Banarjee-Guha, 2009). Within urban democracy, power shifts appear under way benefiting the urban middle-class, leading to gated communities and an urban elite-driven development manifested in an increased role for so called Resident Welfare Associations (RWA). The role of such RWAs is seen as positive by the authorities, and in New Delhi the Government promotes their role under the so called 'Bhagidari Program' (Government of Delhi, 2006).

There are concerns about such developments, for example as voiced by Harris (2006:257) who refers to '*new politics*', entailing a role for civil society and their organisations rather than political parties, new social movements rather than labour organisations, with more promises of genuine participation than the representative democracy of '*old politics*', which, in India, are seen to have become corrupted and fail to solve the many social problems. Banarjee-Guha (2009: 98) is concerned about the impacts of neo-liberal type policies: 'the sweeping transformation of urban governance is meant to create a functional

impotence of democratically elected bodies...'. Likewise, John (2007:3993) argues that: "Initiatives by middle class residents, especially women and retired people, to improve their neighbourhoods in the face of 'the failures of local governance', initiatives that seek to bypass or supplant both the electoral process and popular local politics". The link is made here to a perceived failure of local governance by urban middle classes, who turn away from municipal politics, more concretely the Municipal Councillors in Indian mega-cities, local representatives supposed to further the interests of rich and poor in the wards from which they are elected. However, they do not exactly have a good reputation; they are seen to be corrupt, illiterate, self-interested (John, 2007, Pinto, 2000, Berenschot, 2009). There are indications that Indian urban middle classes hardly vote in municipal elections while avoiding Municipal Councillors and preferring to contact municipal officials directly either personally or in organised forms as in RWAs (Baud and Nainan, 2008:13, Kamath et al. 2009). At the same time, indications are that councillors remain important for the urban poor, and that the urban poor are not successful in organising themselves into effective, broad based organisations which could counter the powers of middle class organisation (Harris, 2005, de Wit, 2009, de Wit and Berner, 2009). So indications are of a drifting apart of rich and poor, both spatially, in terms of services, as well as in terms of representation and democracy. The question arises as to how municipal councillors react to this apparent urban polarisation, and the negative changes amongst the urban poor, which constitute their main 'vote bank'? How do they deal with the fact that part of their former mediation work is taken over by assertive middle class citizens themselves, individually and through the RWAs - and what does that all this mean for local democracy?

However, as indicated, there is another trend, which is reflected in many plans, legal frameworks and policy intentions which aim at pro-poor and inclusive development. One potentially promising general development is the adoption of India's Eleventh Five Year Plan strategy entitled 'Towards faster and More Inclusive Growth'. The plan recognises that all is not well with current Indian growth. Approach papers relating to the 11th Plan bear the vision that 'it is designed to reduce poverty and focus on bringing the various divides that continue to fragment our society' (Suryanarayana, 2008:93). The plan appears framed then to address growing divides in India, not least in its many cities. Another, more concrete and potentially more effective reform includes the urban decentralisation efforts in large Indian cities following the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) which can be seen to aim at enhancing local, neighbourhood level democracy and participatory governance (de Wit et al, 2008, Sivaramakrishnan, 2006). These reforms envision the establishment of sub-city level Wards Committees, consisting of the elected municipal councillors in a specific part of the city, who meet regularly to discuss and decide on neighbourhood level issues. The

Committees are to function as a new layer of urban governance allowing for closer government-citizen proximity and enhanced citizen consultation and participation, with expectations of more inclusive local governance. And even while urban decentralisation has been less than successful in most Indian cities, it appears to have strengthened the powers of Municipal Councillors, especially in relation to municipal officials, as for example documented in another text for Chennai (de Wit, 2009). The question then arises: what is actually the role of Municipal Councillors (MCs) as regards the position and prospects of the urban poor? How and where have they increased their power as a result of India's Urban Decentralisation Act, has it enhanced their effectiveness and performance in terms of supporting service delivery for the poor, for example through increased powers over local level municipal officials? This paper then aims to assess the specific implications of Wards level governance in terms of the relations between the urban poor and municipal councillors. It examines as to whether the latter play a positive role as regards the integration and inclusion of the poor and low income areas/spaces in the urban social and political fabric, or whether they are in fact gatekeepers, who operate from dynamics of electoral/political self interest and so sustain existing patterns of marginalisation and exclusion. If MCs are above all local level brokers, the question arises whether they can they raise beyond the level of brokerage and service delivery and play a meaningful, more structural role in the inclusion of the urban poor: in terms of the critical areas of security of land tenure, employment and general welfare?

This paper is based on long term research into the interfaces between the urban poor, slum communities and urban agencies as for example documented in de Wit (1996). More specifically it is based on research carried out in the context of an Indo-Dutch research project which also considered the evolution and impacts of the 74th CAA urban decentralisation reforms (and which led to the edited volume by Baud and de Wit, 2008, and to Kundu, 2006). Surveys were held amongst numerous Municipal councillors in Chennai, Mumbai and New Delhi and the present paper mostly presents data from the survey held under 26 New Delhi Councillors, as well as municipal officials and a few MLAs. Besides, it makes use of many other sources on the governance of Delhi, including NGO reports, newspapers and as well as a very rich survey on Delhi governance included in Siddiqui (2004). Even while, as indicated, MCs generally have a bad name and a bad press, this paper aims to provide a balanced view and to move beyond the stereotype of the 'corrupt, un-educated, self interested' broker, and allow for multiple voices and perspectives. There will be attention for the expectations as regards MCs, a depiction of their very real limitations which can be partly explained by structural reasons such as dynamics of intra-political party hierarchies and control, inadequate compensation, or, especially as regards MCs elected for the first time - a

lack of knowledge and relevant skills. This paper is definitely ‘work in progress’ and constitutes an initial, preliminary and incomplete review of my findings about MCs in Indian cities. The paper starts with a brief review of the administrative and governance context of Delhi is examined subsequently, after which data are presented and analysed on characteristics and the various activities of the city’s councillors as regards the urban poor, after which the paper ends with some conclusions.

2. Governance and Governance institutions in New Delhi

New Delhi is the capital of India, and has a population of 13,78 million inhabitants as per 2001. Even while the city is wealthy by Indian standards, about 30% of the population is poor, and approximately 3 million people live in the slums – mostly at the city’s outskirts which are called *jhuggi-jhopri clusters* or slum/squatter settlements. In addition an estimated 1,4 million people live in unauthorised colonies (Sidiqi, 2004:191).

New Delhi is marked by an unusual density of Governance institutions. As the Capital of India, it is a Union Territory, and harbours the Government of India (GoI) with its sprawling ministries and offices, as well as that GoI owns and controls parts of Delhi in terms of land (it controls the Delhi Development Authority DDA), real estate and railways. It is also in charge of law and order and the police, and has final power over the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (Ghosh et al. 2005:65). Delhi’s administrative structure was reformed from 1992, when an Act was adopted which envisioned a separate Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers to govern the Delhi Union territory. The Act provided for a seventy-member Legislative Assembly with powers to govern the State of Delhi, but these powers do not extend to law and order, lands and the police- which have remained with GoI. The Delhi State Government has limited powers over the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) (Sidiqi, 2004:201). Elections to the Delhi Legislative Assembly, under this Act, were held in 1993, 1998 and most recently in 2003. So in addition to these two democratically controlled bodies, there is a third one, the most largest civic body to govern Delhi in terms of citizen-focused services is MCD, a large city corporation with an executive and deliberative wing. The deliberative or legislative wing is headed by the Mayor (elected for one year) assisted by a Deputy, and exists of 134 elected municipal councillors, one each for each municipal ward. In addition, there are special members with specific expertise, as well as a number of MPs and MLAs, resulting in a total number of 168 Council members (ibid.:202). It is important to note that MCD has gradually lost many of its initially large number of tasks and responsibilities. Today, its key tasks include public health, sanitation, low income housing and administrating

the slums (JJ colonies) through the MCD Slum Wing. The MCD has no planning powers; these are with the Delhi Development Authority, which resorts under GoI, and there is a general lack of coordination between these agencies (Ghosh, et.al. 2005:65).

Following the 74th CAA, the MCD duly formed so called 'Wards Committees' (WCM) which are sub-city committees consisting of all councillors of a certain part of the city, numbering 12 in all. This implies that each WCM has on average about 11-12 MCs, and that each WCM represents the rather large population of about 1,2 million people. Each Ward has an average population of 80,000 people (Siddiqui, 2004:204). As is the case for the Wards Committees of most large cities (cf. de Wit et.al. 2008, Sivaramakrishnan, 2006), the powers of the Delhi WCMs are rather limited indeed. They mostly pertain to sanction works and plan work in the Zone area up to a certain financial limit. At the same time, in 1997 the MCD strengthened the administration of the 12 City Zones by appointing a Deputy Commissioner with relatively large powers to head each zone, having delegated powers of the MCD Commissioner so as to take major decisions at the zonal level (Kundu, 2006:100-101). On the whole, the degree of actual decentralisation in Delhi has been rather limited indeed, as has been indicated by de Wit et.al. 2008, Sivarakrishnan, 2004 and Siddiqui (2004:228). The latter lists three main reasons for this, a) the system with a strong Commissioner does not allow for delegation as all powers are concentrated at the top; bureaucrats who dominate MCD are not used to a decentralised organisation c) there is a lack of political will and d) nobody wants to share powers and responsibilities.

The fact that Delhi has so many governance institutions (Siddiqui, 2004:216), and that there is an unusual density in a relatively small area of elected representatives (MPs, MLAs, MCs) with overlapping jurisdictions, has clear implications for the role, power and position of the 134 Delhi Councillors. First, there is perhaps an recurring confusion between the precise mandates and responsibilities of the agencies already listed (MCD, GoD, GoI) as well as numerous other agencies (various National and State ministries, but also para-statal agencies which are beyond democratic control) - and which also poses problems for the efforts of elected representatives to support citizens looking for access, support and/or services. In fact, Delhi could potentially benefit much by establishing a so-called Metropolitan Development Committee (MPC) which is envisioned as a key part of the 74th CAA. Such a body is precisely meant to coordinate the activities of all agencies in a given Metropolitan area, while safeguarding democratic control, as the MPC includes elected representatives. However, just like in most cities, Delhi did not form an MPC.

And last but not least, from its establishment onwards, there have been recurring tensions between the pre-existing MDC and the Delhi State Government, if only as the two bodies both administer roughly the same area. One area of contestation has been the very

form and size of MCD, which has arisen partly as a result of a perception that MC is not well-managed. One bone of contention has been a proposal – supported by the Delhi State Government - to split and decentralize the MCD, and to establish a separate agency for slum and urban poverty concerns (Siddiqui, 2005: 231, Kundu, 2006). Unsurprisingly, this proposal was unanimously rejected by the MCD councillors, who, in contrast, urged that the departments of water supply sewer maintenance (now with Jal Board) and electricity (Delhi Vidyut Board which is a para-statal agency) were to be re-integrated with MCD.

In terms of urban politics and democracy, this paper will consider the Indian democracy can be characterised as a ‘patronage democracy’, as depicted by Chandra, 2007, and illustrated by de Wit, 2009, and de Wit and Berner (2009), a system ‘in which the state has a relative monopoly on jobs and services and in which elected officials enjoy significant discretion in the implementation of laws allocating the jobs and services at the disposal of the state’. Rather than ideology or the popularity of a leader it is concrete benefits that are dispensed to people either as *private* or as *club goods*, with a view to influence voting behaviour. In India, the concept of ‘vote bank’ is often used, referring to a group of voters with common characteristics (caste, language and ethnicity). Mathew and Mathew (2004: 22) make the following statement:

‘Clientelism, which has taken new forms after the introduction of modern democracy. needs to be discussed in this context. Political leaders today desire to keep what may be called ‘vote banks’. Favours are granted to those within that vote bank and clientage becomes the most important relationship. (...). The patrons then use their political influence to extend favours, bypassing or even violating laws, rules and norms and even resorting to extra-constitutional means. For many, beginning with the submission of their nomination papers as candidates in the elections, democracy is a convenient instrument for sustaining and perpetuating clientelism’.

3. Urban poverty and social exclusion in New Delhi

In a general sense, social exclusion refers to a negative state or process where individuals or groups are denied access to goods, services, activities or resources associated with well-being. It is a multidimensional concept referring to exclusion (deprivation) in the economic, social and political sphere in the sense of a state or situation, but it may also refer to mechanisms through which people are excluded. Importantly, the focus must be on institutions that enable and constrain human interaction (in terms of organizations such as the state, a ministry or community organisation, as well as in terms of norms and values which underlay human action). However, the exclusion/inclusion distinction suggests a unitary notion of power

where the included are powerful and the excluded are powerless; but in reality power is dispersed, contingent and unstable. Indeed, it does not help if individuals are seen as passive recipients of social exclusion processes, and so deny their agency: we need to keep on applying an actor orientation. For the purpose of this paper, components (or indicators) of exclusion include a lack of access to services; lack of proper employment and lack of voice as in active role on politics and being represented, but it may be linked also to spatial segregation and discrimination (Smets and Salman, 2008:1311). Moving to more concrete issues and indicators relating to social exclusion, Mahadevia (2008: 42) indicates that merely allocating funds is not enough to make inclusive cities. What is needed is addressing the urban land tenure question, institutional development (which, I assume refers to strong urban institutions, 'good governance' and reduced corruption which affects the poor strongest) and 'democratisation of urban governance'. Unhelpfully, the prospects for Delhi's poor to have security of tenure are rather bleak as mentioned for example by Ghertner (2008:57ff) an increasing trends by RWAs and authorities to consider slums as a nuisance, leading to more evictions. Such exclusionary trends affecting the poor – slum dwellers, hawkers and vendors and unskilled labourers as well as those living in unauthorized settlements -- stand in some start contrast to the laxity of the authority to address – let alone take strict action- against the estimated 68 to 93 % of illegal but 'formal, concrete' constructions in Delhi. These were ordered by courts to be demolished by the civic authorities by during 1995-2000 but in fact remained in place (EPW, 2006: editorial, Sept. 30:4097). Besides, in an Indian context it is critical to start any text on urban inclusion/exclusion by noting that ultimately, contributing factors are determined not only – or perhaps not even mostly – by poverty or income, but rather by more cultural factors of caste and ethnicity. Precise data are not available, but as per the 2001 census, 17.4% (7.4 million) Scheduled Castes and 2.4% (one million) Scheduled Tribes live in the identified slums in India, but that then excludes the many unidentified and illegal slum areas. It is certain that (considerable caste discrimination as regards SC persists, where occupational discrimination is more pronounced than wage discrimination (Madheswaran and Attewell, 2007:4153). For Delhi, WaterAid (2005) makes a distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' Delhi. It argues that as many as 70% of the city lives in informal and underserved areas, and that, at the same time, most city budgets in terms of infrastructure, transport, water and sanitation are directly targeting the citizens of the formal city (ibid.:101/2). The 'informal city' dwellers do not benefit from the *Bhagidari* program which is not operational there. Their findings are corroborated by a table from Siddiqui (2004: 250) which focuses on the provision of services to Delhi's poor.

	MCD Mun. Corp. of Delhi	Delhi Jal Board (water & sanitation)	Delhi Vidyut Board (electricity)	Delhi Police	NGOs	CBOs
Knew about Service Provider (SP)	56%	54%	52%	86%	31%	15%
Did not know about SP	41%	42%	43%	11%	65%	81%
Bad Service	88%	67%	69%	69%	5%	14%
Good Service	12%	33%	31%	31%	95%	76%

The table indicates confirm a high degree of marginalisation in that many poor are not aware of/in touch with critical service providers, especially of course MCD which has the mandate to deal with slums/ JJ. Colonies. MCD ranks highest in terms of delivering poor service. What is intriguing is the low awareness of CBOs as service providers, which may mean that people feel that the CBOs which are there are not active in service delivery (but may be active in other fields), or that they are not quite present at all, which would confirm an assumption that people are less involved in horizontally organised collectives than that they use personalistic patronage like relationships to get things organised (de Wit and Berner, 2009). The survey on which this table is based can be see as some confirmation of this, in that the poor themselves think they are not united (Siddiqui: 2004:256): ‘83% were unanimous that the poor were disunited’, and reasons given include that the poor were too busy to survive, they are illiterate, divided along lines of religion, caste and region, that are selfish, easily divided by the rich and that the police disrupt the unity of the poor.

4. Delhi Municipal Councillors: an analysis of data and other literature

The table in the Annex presents in a raw form selected data collected in a survey of Delhi councillors in two Delhi zones, one of them (N=10) the relatively recently developed zone of Rohini, marked by a mixed population of middle classes, presently well established resettlement colonies dating back to the 1970ies, slum (JJ) clusters as well as urban villages. The other zone (N=16) is the Central zone, an older and very well established Delhi zone, with a relatively large share of middle and higher income groups. It must be kept in mind here, obviously, that we cannot simply take the councillors’ responses at face value. Like any

respondent in a survey, and probably more so considering their public function and the constant need to maintain a good reputation, they would be expected to provide 'feel good' and favourable answers, definitely avoiding any reference to the more informal let alone more murky parts of their activities, relations and schemes. After all, as indicated before the general impression of councillors in India is not quite favourable, and the assumption here has to be that things are not much different in Delhi. In the below analysis I will then also refer to other sources, including newspapers, and will start by providing some views on Delhi MCs from three Delhi MLAs we interviewed as well as some officials working at the Zone offices. Here too, we must keep in mind that 'people speak from where they sit', and it can be assumed that politicians of one party will be more critical of their counterparts of another party; likewise, the hypothesis here should also be that, given the on-going power struggle in the Delhi political arena, MLAs will be critical of MCs. Both assumptions are confirmed in this very limited check.

All three MLAs we interviewed were quite negative about the MCs they knew. Says one MLA:

'In MCD everyone from official to councillors is corrupt'. This MLA has a closer contact with 2 MCs: 'Councillor X does not come to meet me. He does not do work. He has got arrested once. The other councillor (a Moslem) is of religious kind. She does not know about politics'. A third MLA (Congress) we talked to said: 'MCD officials are corrupt; there is much talk about this demolition drive (Supreme Courts orders MCD to enforce the MCD rules to remove unauthorised constructions' JdW), but it is actually the duty of the MCD engineers to stop such unauthorised constructions'. He knows two MCs: one, of the BJP party 'he is a builder and is engaged in unauthorised construction'. We actually met this MC, and he was one of those accusing MCD officials of diverting funds, saying their performance had gone down'. Only one MLA was positive about MCs: 'There is no problem of coordination now between the Central Government, the Delhi State Government and the MCD are all dominated or controlled by my Congress Party. So there is no competition between MLAs and Councillors.. they keep on demanding for better services'. He works closely with two MCs in his constituency 'both are Congress MCs, they are good workers'. At the same time he said: 'there is a nexus between MCD corporation officials and MCs'.

General characteristic: MC backgrounds

Our survey tends to confirm the impression that the Delhi MCs are generally rather well educated with quite a few graduates and people with BA and MA. They are certainly better educated, and have a less 'provincial' outlook than the Chennai MCs, as indicated by de Wit, 2009, and Ghosh et.al., 2005:76. John (2009: 3993) says: 'the Delhi MCs are much more elite

than those of Bangalore, and there was much more money involved in the campaigning of the former'. Delhi MCs seem to be fairly well off (for which Ghosh et al. 2005:79 indicate a conditional confirmation, asking whether the Delhi MCs are more eager to display their wealth). In contrast to this, Siddiqui (2004:241) found that the Delhi MCs, especially those newly elected, complain that there was a general lack of training (which he found to also apply to MCD officials). One senior BJP councillor had a low opinion of Congress Party MC who had been elected on reserved seats:

‘the officials behaviour has gone down after 74CAA; officials divert the funds. In the ruling (Cong) party, 90% of the reserved seat MCs do not understand the municipal system’.

It is striking – but unsurprising - that most of the male MCs have some sort of business (11 out of the 16 male MCs), and again 5 of these are in the building/real estate/property & rental business which is consistent with findings from Chennai (de Wit, 2009), and those of John (2007: 3988): ‘business, especially as contractors, developers and factory owners, was the most common occupation among the male councillors in both cities (Delhi and Bangalore), including among husbands of women councillors’. The most mentioned vocation of the women MCs was housewife, and one can suspect a high number of so called ‘proxy representatives’ here as most (8 out of 10) indicate a direct link between occupying a (reserved) MC seat and the presence of a politically active husband, father or son- who might in fact also have a (side) business, like their active MC counterparts. There is no doubt that MCs benefit unduly from their unique position: spiders in a web in the (informal) networks of (dependent) voters, the MCD with its funds and officials, the contractors who are the registered contractors who often obtain lucrative tenders, and finally the land owners/ real estate developers. They take cuts on any money over which they have some claim, and it is not surprising that most MCs claim that are normally fully spending their discretionary MC funds- as it is precisely these funds that are a source of income for all groups mentioned, with sometimes only little by way of actual (and sustainable) improvement or construction visible after some time. One independent MC had the following to say:

MCD uses poor quality materials- no one checks. Out of each Rs. 1.00 only Rs. 0,50 is used; I can complain and get a contractor blacklisted but it is hard to fight the system. If you complain often, they will do no more work in my ward, and I will be ultimate loser. The contractor asked me to take my share and keep quiet. Nobody is there to help the poor people. He told about the case of the proposed eviction of a poor woman which was supported by a Cong leader and despite protests she was evicted one night, losing all she had.

Things may only differ little here with conditions in Chennai (de Wit, 2009:13):

One Chennai official described in some detail how every day municipal corruption works. This centres around the tendering, contracting and implementation of work for any works at

the Zone or Ward level- regarding roads, any building, construction or repair work, and involves both the MC, officials at various levels and the contractor. The contractor normally pays 15-20% of the value of the contract by way of bribe. 10% of this is for the MC, and approximately 5% goes to the AE, and than smaller amounts (1-2% each) to the Ward Officer (AEE), the AE and 1% accrues to the Zone level Assistant Commissioner. In Mumbai, MCs take 25% of all works carried out under their MC funds (interview).

However, not all MC do take such dynamics for granted as the following voices indicate. One MC was quite frank about how MCD works and what her drive is:

‘I wanted to cover a drain but MCD was not interested as they are not going to make money out of it. But residents also have vested interests; they encroach illegally and bribe MCD. We plan facilities and priorities on the basis of vote banks’.

Another MC was critical of the builders lobbies; many powerful builders are well entrenched within MCD and they have strong personal (mutually rewarding) ties with engineers and officials:

‘The Zone officials depend on the MCs for the allocation of funds. Except for the sweepers, they work well. Builders have a strong lobby in MCD. 4-5 Builders are from the same family; are registered with MCS; and take many contracts. If you raise objections, they do not do the work properly. Re-issue of tender means loss of funds and cumbersome process’.

Such dynamics then, ironically, do not detract from the fact – and the survey outcomes - that MCs may indeed be active in the repair provision of roads, community halls and lights etc, but this in a way is a pretext for spending money – and being able to take bribes, which accumulate into amounts of black money used by the party and MC for re-election. The business background of many MCs the does not help much for them to identify with the poor and vulnerable, which is confirmed in the aforementioned Siddiqui (2005) survey amongst the poor: ‘the predominance of the business class amongst the councillors has its implications for distorting priorities against the interest of the poor’ (ibid.:283).

Elections and (electoral) Corruption

Ghosh & Tawa Lama (2005:91) mention that rumours about the amounts of money that aspirant MCs had to pay to obtain a ticket or stand for elections in 2002 ranged from a low Rs. 100,000 to an amazingly high Rs. ten million. The ceiling of election expenses was fixed at Rs. 50,000, but ‘average campaign expenditure is estimated to be closer to Rs. 1,5 to Rs. 2 million’. They (ibid.: 100) indicate that campaigning for women MCs in Delhi was often ‘an aggressive display of the supposed popularity of the candidate’, and was full of latent violence. Elections are seen to be unfair from the perspectives of the poor also, in that elections in the lower middle class and poor Delhi neighbourhoods are characterised by

money and muscle power: ‘during elections, the ‘Dada’s’ (local musclemen) became more active, and the supply of saris and hard drinks from the candidates to the slum areas became quite conspicuous’ (Siddiqui: 2004: 255). One respondent linked the lavish campaign spending to the fact that a lot of the money is black money

‘ it is simply given out, partly by the party partly by the candidate; you can also such expenditure in the larger context of a candidate to show money power, with a view of investment in a longer term career extending to become MLA and possibly MP’.

Corruption generally in the MCD is known to be rife, as can be seen frequently in reports in the Delhi newspapers. A survey by the Centre of Media Studies (ibid.:222) indicates that about 50% of MCD visitors consider the agency corrupt – 40% had given bribes in offices themselves. About 40% of respondents had to contact officials (who were often unavailable) through ‘middlemen’. The survey concludes that the increase in corruption in MCD is ‘undeniable’ (ibid.:223). Such findings are confirmed in the work of Ghosh and Rewal (2005:118) who also state that women felt uneasy about this: ‘the nexus between officials, contractors and councillors was the object of recurring complaints by women MCs against their male counterparts, especially in Mumbai and Delhi’. Ward Officers obtain 25% of all the money that is spent from MC and MLA funds in the ward. MCs of an (un-named) party have to pay Rs 100,000 each month to the state Party leader. (Interview –North 6 April 2005

MCs in relation to Zonal/Wards level officials

As documented in de Wit (2009) for Chennai, urban governance in India has always been very centralised, and this is still the case in the big cities, despite the rhetoric and available potential relating to Wards Committees. In most cities where such committees were actually formed, we may be witnessing a power shift from the historically powerful officials, obeying central municipal orders, towards MCs who have obtained more powers under the 74CAA. Rather than that the Act led to increased public participation or improved democracy (there are actually signs that the quality /level of democracy is decreasing and that elections become increasingly dirty) the most obvious initial outcome has been more assertiveness of MCs to put pressure on Zonal officials to get works implemented, as can be seen amply from our survey data. Indeed, almost all MCs refer to the fact that officials are dragging their feet, that they are ‘lazy’, shedding responsibility, need constant pressurising and monitoring. One MC went as far as to say that ‘in the afternoons no work is done in MCD’. Such pressure is mostly resented by the officials, and there is mutual suspicion and jealousy (ibid: 2009:19) between the two groups- which in fact can be seen as a positive development. Tawa Lawa (2005:12) confirms this for the Delhi MCs who are engaged in the health sector: ‘the conflicting

relations between elected representatives and officials mostly result from the latter's frustration at having to make do with politicians, in a city where bureaucrats have long been very powerful'. She confirms our impression that in the Delhi Wards Committee meetings, MCs have a very precise knowledge of local problems concerning civic amenities, and they put pressure on Zonal officials. However, it appears as if MCs are not quite effective when operating as a body in the plenary Town Hall MC meetings:

'In the MCD Town Hall nobody listens to the MCs. Minutes are useless as no action has been taken on issues'.

As already indicated, in our survey, MCs are overwhelmingly negative about Zonal officials, upon whom they depend to get things done 'to solve local problems'. Some voices:

'Officials only work if there is a threat that a superior will inspect. Officials have the skills but if they don't work properly we need to tell them angrily', and another MC says: 'I normally ask officials politely to do the works, but sometimes I have to be angry if they don't complete work in time; I keep monitoring that. Officials have the skills but don't want to do the work'. Another MC: 'I get officials transferred when they don't perform; MC ensures work is done in his/her areas'.

In contrast, a small survey carried out amongst a number of officials working in two of Delhi's Zonal offices presents a rather more favourable impression of MC-official relationship, by and large rejecting the assumption that officials would be very negative about MCs. I list some responses, starting with Official C-1, who says 'Politicians help speed up cases related to the public, I have no problem with politics or politicians. I listen to the MC problems and try to find a solution. 'in this zone the MCs are well educated'. Official C-2 says: 'my problem is that they put pressure to get things done'; they are constantly in touch with the public', they can solve problems'. But he also says that political interference is too high. C-3 indicates that, 'through the helpful councillors, we know about the people's problems and with the staff's technical input we can do better planning'..... 'MCs have a good contact with the ward population and know about their problems; they are public representatives'. C-4: 'MCs are OK, relations between him and MCs are good. 'they have direct contact with the citizens' From the other zone, official R-1 says:

'Politicians put pressure for getting their work done, and, compared to the pre-74CAA more work is done now. People also come and meet the MCD/Zone office but many times they feel depressed with the officials. Previously, money was not actually reaching all areas but now after 74CAA at least MCs get their work done in their area, and they may mobilise different offices/departments for some work. Still, MCs are first calculating their benefit before helping anyone: they consider implications for their vote banks and whether they can take some

cut'.... 'Politicians want the works to be implemented in their areas so that during elections they can show this to the people..... lobbying is the main factor of work'.

All in all, at least some officials seem to feel that MCs are relatively effective, and that they even play a useful role in identifying local problems and pulling strings to get things solved. This may point to a trend, that, gradually, there is some accommodation between the 'executive' and the 'legislative' MCD wings, even while it is not quite clear whether that does help the general public.

MCs as brokers

Berenschot (2009:113) makes a useful but perhaps arbitrary distinction between the various tasks of a councillor in the city of Ahmedabad. The first task is *brokerage*, 'the facilitation of the flow of information between state institutions and citizens', secondly what he calls *patronage*: 'the practice of exchanging access to state resources for political support and finally *particularisation*; 'the practice of undermining the uniform application of laws and legislation to the advantage of private interests'. All these tasks can be discerned in the daily activities also of the Delhi MCs, but it is perhaps not so easy to separate one from the other: for example, successful brokerage may lead to patronage as in winning votes, and winning votes will depend on the capacity of an MC to bend rules and laws to obtain money for (re)-election. We have seen examples of all three activities in the above, and give one illustration of patronage as defined above, which illustrates the mechanism where people support (pay) a candidate during election campaigning in the expectation of fulfilling a specific request (e.g. de-regularise a housing plot, provide some license, provide some service or job). Obviously, no one can fulfil all expectations: such capacity again depends on higher level ever more powerful politicians and officials.

'I was supported in the elections by many people, and they had developed expectations. After the elections their demands increased; personal equations were destroyed'.

In our review of evidence, the focus is on the brokerage role, of MCs vis-à-vis the poor, starting from the assumption that this is where inclusion – as in access to assets and services and employment. One reason why in Delhi brokers can be expected to be in high demand is the unusual density of agencies and bodies with often fuzzy or overlapping mandates, while coordination between these is widely recognised as a big problem. At the same time this would make solving the day-to-day problems of people more difficult.

'People still come to us with water and electricity complaints even while this is not with MCD. There is also no cooperation or coordination between the Water and Electricity agencies and MCD'.

So there is little doubt that MCs are very critical mediators between the poor and the various city agencies, as they themselves admit: 'In my campaign I said 'both your official and unofficial work I will get it done', and it appears people also expect MCs to mediate and solve problems:

'I try to solve all problems of the common men, but cant solve them all; people may come and fight with me and abuse me publicly.

Such findings confirm what Harris (2005:1045) found for the Delhi poor and especially those with little education. They are especially likely to solve their problems through political parties and through what he calls 'big men' and by participating in demonstrations (where one can wonder what that means: is this that such poor and illiterate people take out a protest march to demand drinking water, or are they paid for the day by one party to sit and protest against another party?). The question also arises here what is meant by big men; are these local leaders, (higher level) slum lords or dons, or party leaders and councillors?

So even while MCs are instrumental as brokers and mediators at the interface between the poor and state agencies, that does not mean they actually do a good job. Indeed, as indicated by many, their interest in linking with the poor is informed perhaps most importantly by reasons of self-interest: what to do to become re-elected (or to become so popular that I can stand to become an MLA), and related to this: what can be earned through the brokerage in specific cases. And then it is found in our survey that the mediation of MCs is predominantly as regards 'hard', tangible matters, as in roads, lights, drains etc. This involves municipal budgets as well as the MC discretionary Funds and the money is spent through contractors, and the already depicted system of bribes and cuts. It must be emphasised that there is also a perverse incentive system here in that MC Funds can only be applied for such hard, contractor delivered services, and that the money cannot be used in unauthorised colonies, where indeed the urgency is highest. Relatively few MCs mentioned issues where no or little money is involved, examples which were listed incidentally including support in obtaining ration cards, school admission, pensions for women and the aged, and this concerned often women MCs.

The survey included in Siddiqui (2004:258) indicates that many Delhi MCs complain about the lack of cooperation from NGOs/CBOs and members of the public to carry out their duties to solve local problems. This, incidentally, confirms that these MCs see their major role in solving *local problems*, and 80% of the MCs claimed some improvement in their wards in terms of environment, water supply, solid waste and sewage disposal, roads and street lighting. Further, when the poor were examined on MCs, the outcomes are not quite encouraging: more than 50% were unaware of any activity by the MC of their ward. Of the 46% who were aware, about 70 % rated their MC performance bad to very bad. This

outcome, is then related to the lack of attention of MCs for the problems of the poor and the lack of such items in the MCs election pledges. It contrasts to some extent to our survey findings where a majority says to focus especially on the slums of their wards – if only out of an interest in the many votes available there- and/or to provide socially acceptable answers.

MCs, MLAs, MPs and RWAs

Generally, all agree that MCs are in all respects inferior in power and reputation to MLAs and MPs. One reason concerns the ‘Local Area Development Scheme’ under which an MP or an MLA is given a lump sum allocation ranging from perhaps Rs. 200.000 to Rs. ten or twenty million to be spent at the discretion of the member concerned for development activities in an urban or rural constituency. The combination of both political and money power renders the Corporation Councillor inferior in status and power to an MP or an MLA. One factor that was shown to hinder the effectiveness of the mediation efforts of MCs was when the MC belonged to another party than the MLA or MP of the area. Consistent with the very particularistic and personalistic nature of India’s patronage democracy (Chandra, 2007 de Wit, 1996 using the model of ‘machine politics’), it is those channels which are part of the ruling party (politicians) that are most effective, and losing an election unavoidably means a period of non-harvest for a politician. One BJP MC says:

‘I asked officials to remove hawkers encroaching on the roads, but the hawkers met the Congress MP and he allowed them to stay; I was overruled by the dominant party MP’. A Congress party MC confirmed what is common knowledge: ‘Congress party MCs only help each other, they do not cooperate with other party MCs’.

Even if an MC would be inclined to cooperate with other party MCs the party leadership would likely frown upon this. On the other hand, two of our Survey women MCs indicated that women across parties could cooperate in the specific case of crimes against women. This is consistent with previous work done in Mumbai with women MCs (de Wit et.al, 2003). A final factor that was shown to affect the effectiveness of MCs was the increasingly active roles of RWAs. Five out of 26 MCs mentioned RWAs, and in three instances remarks were negative, even hostile:

‘People do not know whom to approach and so RWAs get all the credit; Bhagidari is the abuse of power i.e. power without money’. Another MC: ‘Before Delhi was a state MLAs were not powerful. Between MLA and MC there is now always a clash of power. Bhagidari is not good as it takes away MC’s power’.

Kamath et.al, 2009: 373) confirm that RWA's feel that MCs are corrupt and lack vision since they are un-educated, and that slum needs and priorities get sidelined by as RWAs who have political connections with ministers so that the latter's problems get prioritised.

'If, however, public land has been occupied by poor groups and supported by councillors for the purpose of getting votes, RWAs have been more successful in ousting them, particularly if they forge partnerships with government officials' (ibid.: 375).

5. Conclusions: Councillors as agents of social inclusion and integration?

If we now return to the larger question as to whether Delhi MCs play a positive role as regards the social inclusion of the city's urban poor, we need to go beyond the rather random mediation as regards roads, street lights, footpaths, sewerage and the like. It was already noted mediation for and provision of more intangible 'soft', non monetary services was relatively rare- and not even once did an MC organize training classes for women or youth, some exposure visit for slum people, or a demonstration or protest action aimed at some organised group for example a small unauthorised colony. So even while some MCs regretfully note that they cannot spend money in such areas, they seem resigned that this is the way it is. By and large MCs seem to have a more limited outlook, perhaps consistent with their level of representation – but not consistent with their generally relatively high level of education and the potential to use ruling party channels – MLA-MP – and perhaps onwards to the sometimes quite activists Courts -- to open venues and shift boundaries of operation and intervention. This is consistent with the findings by Tawa-Lama Rewal (2005:11), who refers to the generally negative reputation that MCs have amongst the MCD officials- especially in relation to health care provision. 'MCs' perception is limited to their Ward; they lack in planning for the larger area'.

The conclusion will then have to be that MCs play a very limited role as regards larger and underlying issues of urban poverty, inequality and social inclusion. This is consistent also with our survey findings as listed before, as well as by the findings listed in Siddiqui (2005:259). It was shown that most (93%) MCs claimed success in solving local problems, and 87% claimed to have fulfilled their election promises. MCs admitted however, that their 'success was not that spectacular in law and order, housing for the poor and poverty alleviation', precisely which touch in a deeper, more structural way on urban poverty, urban inequality and exclusion. However, it is not that all MCs are happy with that situation, as reflected in some statements:

‘One problem is that I can’t spent my money (MC fund) in the several unauthorised colonies of my ward. He is unhappy that slum people are shifted from one place to another and lose houses and employment’ Another MC: I regret that he cannot get any work done in unauthorised colonies due to High Court rule. One women BJP MC said: ‘In one of my areas many people stay in unauthorised settlements and I cannot use my MC funds (neither MLA funds) there. This is a major problem as I cant solve their problems. Again and again I use my funds for the same High Income people, otherwise they will lapse’.

It appears that multiple factors limit the in fact very urgent role of MCs as regards large and growing numbers of poor people in Delhi. Even while it was shown that not all poor are aware of/ in contact with MCs, they are and remain on the one hand the one and only locally elected representative of a Delhi ward; and secondly, this is also how people see them – the poor know them better for example than NGOs and probably CBOs. The poor vote more in municipal elections than the middle classes and they are much more politically active, and MCs are – should be - their natural allies and foci of representation and action. And, whatever one may think of the 74th CAA/ urban decentralisation legislation, there is potentially an instrument here to enhance the powers of MCs, to enhance participation and local democracy. Indeed, it seems to actually have had impacts in the degree that MCs are pressuring Wards/Zonal level officials to solve local problems, as already indicated. So what are the key constraints hindering MCs to be more effective agents of inclusion and integration, in terms of addressing deeper issues of urban poverty, inequality and exclusion- as some of them seem to want? I may refer to the case of two Delhi MCs:

(<http://newshopper.sulekha.com/topic//municipal-councillors/ news/development-for-the-people-by-the-people-in-delhi.htm> accessed 25-8-9) who have set an example by consulting people before undertaking any developmental work under their MC Fund. Both say they hope others follow in their footsteps and start involve people, in what are basic processes of consultation. But they are worried:

'I don't know if other councillors will conduct such meetings. They will if they start believing in the welfare of the people who choose them,' says one MC, but: 'A few MCD councillors and officials have already started complaining against this model of grassroots democracy because they won't be able to make money in an environment of transparency’.

Probably the key and most formidable factor is the nature of India’s patronage democracy where it appears as if ‘muscle and money power’ assume increasing importance as regards elections at all levels – from MCs to MLAs to MPs. In the fierce competition for seats, money is critical and appears to lead to electoral – and related - corruption in most areas where politicians are involved.

This relates to another factor which is way beyond the powers and possibly awareness of MCs – the forces of globalisation and associated neo-liberalism, where the Indian state opts for new forms of governance by involving both the for-profit private sector and non-profit organisation in modalities of partnership and sub-contracting, as reflected in the massive urban renewal program JNNURM (Banerjee-Guha, 2000) and engagements in Delhi Resident Welfare Associations respectively (Sridharan, 2008:309, Harris 2005). All this does not augur well for Delhi's poor, as the dynamics under way move towards favouring the elites and middle classes, as well as profit making as a motive for the private sector. Harris (2006: 268) captures it well by indicating that 'new politics' tend to be exclusive as regards the poor, and that increasing opportunities for participation may actually increase political inequality, and by Ghertner (2008:57ff) who finds a recent trend in judicial discourse to consider slums as illegal, and that Delhi slums are mostly demolished after petitions from RWAs.

This paper has argued that MC as politicians are basically brokers at the municipal level of wards and neighbourhoods, operating in an omnipresent patronage logic context. In such conditions, mobilising the poor as a group, working towards common more inclusive policies as in legalising unauthorised colonies or enforcing good quality public primary schools is too much to ask. Inclusion in a limited, incidental way only actually occurs on an informal, individual level: people are helped with their personal problem – but probably not those of their equally affected neighbours (de Wit and Berner, 2009). There also is an exclusionary logic in patronage as a resource (cf. Gill, 2007, and Jha et.al, 2007). As the relation should be one of reciprocity, even the client has to offer something, and this may not be possible for the very poor.

The context in which MCs operate is made even more problematic as they are the at the lowest rank of vast network of competing and manipulating politicians in a rather small arena where all 'are fishing in a small pond' which constitutes Delhi. The metropolis has an unusually high density of politicians, and it is a very competitive and intense world. And even while MCs are indispensable as regards the poor, while entertaining links with local level slum leaders and local patrons, they do not always feel recognised, certainly not by the MLAs who form the representatives of the Delhi State Government. Indeed, relations between them are uneasy, and this does not help MCs to operate easily, especially not, of course when another party is in power at the next higher level (Tawa-Lawa Rewal, 2005, 2007). Things might have been more easy had the Delhi authorities given more powers and body to the Wards/Zonal Committees under the 74th CAA, for example creating rather smaller units of 'local self-governance' than the present zones with on average over a million people; and if the act had conferred broader powers relating to poverty alleviation to the Wards Committees

of the Zones which is not the case now (Sivaramakrishnan, 2004). The latter author goes on to argue that the channels of accessing political power by the poor continue to be limited:

‘Squatter and slum settlements have long been regarded as an opportunity and a platform both for politicians and the slum residents to acquire and exercise political power. However, this well trodden path has suffered many diversions caused by fluctuating political loyalties, pressures of the real estate market, land grabbing mafia, rising costs of improvement or redevelopment works and the inability of most governments to be consistent for any length of time. The phenomenon of ‘cut off’ dates whereby slum residents are included or excluded from relocation benefits is one example. In Delhi and Mumbai such cut off dates have been moved back several times (ibid.: 17).

So even while a more ambitious urban decentralisation might have done some good, especially in terms of shifting powers and providing checks and balances one cannot be so optimistic in view of the formidable dynamics of money and muscle power in the context of individualistic and inherently divisive patronage politics. So it is hard to agree with Harris (2005:1048) that many poor people find political parties quite effective; rather, being pragmatic problem solvers, they also stay in touch with politicians and parties just in case some opportunity arises. Yet we should not deny agency to councillors; any reform ultimately also depends on the motivation, mind-sets and capacity of individual MCs; we have seen that they can make a difference if they so desire. Yet, some of them are facing constraints in terms of knowledge and skills, especially amongst newly elected MCs and those on reserved seats (women, Scheduled Caste candidates) - and training could be provided easily. To some extent one can explain (some) corruption as a result of the fact that MCs only receive a token compensation (cf. Ghosh et.al. 2005), which is by no means enough to for an MC to be an effective councillor. Interestingly, this paper has found some evidence as if women MCs may be more easily involved in activities supporting the poor also in ‘soft’ (non-monetary/concrete) support for children, schools, women and widows. It may be that women cooperate more easily across party lines, which is a matter to be investigated further.

Finally, discourses on exclusion warn against the risk of denying agency to those excluded and/or poor, and this paper has not been able to do justice to the myriad acts and strategies of poor men and women who are continuously striving to maintain some level of welfare and to increase it, in line of Harris’ (2005:1046) depiction of the Delhi poor as ‘particularly active problem solvers’- which, I may add, is born out of necessity and not choice. In fact change can only start with them; the poor should claim their fair share and the funds, policies and schemes that are actually all there. But the odds are against them, being (recent) migrants from unpopular states, (semi-) illiterate, low, if not scheduled caste. So even

while they actively participate in politics and hope that councillors solve their problems, for the present the poor risk exclusion in a basically hostile environment.

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