The challenge of training India's city leaders

With cities growing rapidly, especially in developing countries, the question arises not only how to finance and build the right infrastructure but also how to train people to manage the increasing demand for services. **Kirsty Tuxford** looks at capacity building in India to find out how governments are preparing their local officials for the task of managing cities

Poor urban planning has contributed to over half of Mumbai's residents living in slums

Photo: Indi Samarajiva

More than half of Mumbai's residents live in slums. This is the result of poor urban planning and policy – in the 1960s and 70s, the city government decided that the population should be limited to around 7 million and then went on to design the urban infrastructure to cater for a population of that size. But people kept coming to Mumbai in search of work and today the population is more than 14 million. As a whole, India's urban population is projected to rise from 350 million at present to 800 million by 2050. Putting aside the extraordinary US$1.2 trillion required to finance Indian infrastructure development by 2030, the country is already facing the uphill task of training officials and putting in place governance and fiscal structures to enable cities to be properly managed to be the engines of growth and development which the country needs. Urbanisation is an opportunity for India, which already generates 66 percent of its GDP from cities, but management of those growing cities is key.

"The problem in India is that officials have general knowledge backgrounds in the public sector and they often move from one sector to another," says André Herzog, Senior Urban Specialist at the World Bank Institute (WBI), which focuses on urban training and capacity building. "There's no specialisation – one year they are dealing with health and the next with urban transport. On an aeroplane passengers feel safe because they know the pilot is certified. Managing a city shouldn't be any different. In India you can count on your hands the number of urban institutions and the number of good professionals working in that area. They are completely overwhelmed."

WBI began a pilot project in India in 2005, helping to develop six-month urban management courses at two training institutes where cities could send their senior staff. the Administrative Staff College of India [ASCI] in Hyderabad and the Yashwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration in Maharashtra. This was the first time India had ever run such courses.

In December of the same year, the Indian national government launched the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)– its flagship urban programme for reform in major Indian cities, which offers central and state grants for urban investments. The aim is to provide incentives to states to build capacity and to finance infrastructure development. The US$22 billion programme has financed over 500 projects in 65 cities, including a bus rapid transit (BRT) system in Ahmedebad and slum upgrading in Mumbai.

The first seven-year phase of JNNURM drew to a close in March, and while it was the first time the government had required cities to provide detailed urban plans in order to qualify for loans, the funding available for capacity building was "barely dispersed" according to Herzog. "People don't want money for capacity building, they want money for roads and buses and so on," says Herzog. "Yet evaluation shows that capacity building is critical."

Phillip Rode, Executive Director, LSE Cities, believes many cities are guilty of neglecting capacity building. "Cities certainly spend too much on the wrong infrastructure projects. We see certain kinds of infrastructure implemented too early in relatively poor cities, such as costly high-tech transport systems. Big bridges and highways aren't necessary when the basics have not been provided. When it comes to training people or providing support, we are talking about such small sums of money compared to infrastructure. It's just not that expensive to train people."

In the second phase of JNNURM, capacity building is a main pillar and the Indian government is proposing to allocate double the amount of funding to it, and has asked WBI to advise them on the formulation of a capacity building strategy.

In addition, the World Bank granted India a US$60 million loan for capacity building in the urban sector in December 2011. The funds are to serve as credit for the capacity building of select Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), which is expected to improve their urban management skills and reduce urban poverty. The project is part of the Government of India's larger vision for urban development in line with JNNURM and the Rajiv Awas Yosna (see box), the flagship programmes for urban development.

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Tailoring the training
Building on the early Urban Management Certification programmes which began in 2005, the Indian government requested that WBI scale up its programme and the government is now financing five new urban resource institutions in five states, with the World Bank Institute acting in an advisory role to support the establishment of these new centres.

"The existing approach was wrong because officials were going around looking for hectares in rural areas to build institutions without having thought about their business model first," says Herzog. "And training is now more action oriented – participants learn things like how to increase water supply in cities."

Professor Dinesh Mehta of CEPT University in Ahmedabad agrees that the training needs to be more coordinated with urban development plans. "There is a need to coordinate training efforts with ongoing reforms envisaged under JNNURM as often the training programmes have very little to do with the set of reforms that the cities are required to carry out."

One institution making a vital link between the training of officials and the tasks they face in real life is the All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIILSG) headquartered in Mumbai. It was established in 1926 and is a premier autonomous research and training institution with 28 regional centres offering several training courses in urban development management and municipal administration, which are recognised by the Government of India and several state governments. The courses serve to train and empower professionals and to date, more than 1.5 million students have passed through its doors. The Institute also works with regional local government organisations such as UCLG ASPAC and shares best practices with other cities.

Ranjit Chavan, Director General at AIILSG, admits that part of the problem facing Indian local governments is that officials change roles frequently, but counters that "after the transfer of one official from one department to another, an officer of equivalent cadre of knowledge is placed in the position".

Dinesh Mehta, Professor at CEPT University, Ahmedabad

Professor Mehta says the problem of changing roles is really confined to smaller towns whereas in the larger cities this is less of an issue.

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Managing informal settlements through knowledge sharing

An innovative South-South cooperation platform between India, Brazil and South Africa is bringing national policymakers, city managers, urban practitioners, academics and slum dwellers' organisations together to share knowledge and experience. In October 2011 in Pretoria, South Africa, the IBSA Working Group on Human Settlements, together with the World Bank Institute and Cities Alliance convened a high-level workshop to discuss the challenges of slums and how to include the poor into the urban fabric.

The event launched the IBSA-Human Settlements Knowledge Exchange virtual platform (within WBI's Inclusive Cities website) to support continuous discussion between members in real time. The three countries also agreed to launch a virtual debate series on financing slum upgrading, resettlement policies, monitoring and evaluation of national programmes, and scaling up capacity through national programmes.

WBI's Herzog says: "Public housing is one of the areas in which India could learn more from international experience. The few examples of integrated in-situ upgrading are being replaced by massive public housing constructions, which very quickly deteriorate, and deepen poverty, as they do not address the multifaceted dimensions of urban poverty, and in fact deepen poverty as they cannot cope with the scale and pace of informal urban development."

In 2009, the Indian Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation launched Rajiv Awas Yosna (RAY), a progressive national programme for the urban poor, which sets the financing and policy mechanisms for addressing slums in a sensible manner including providing central government support to states that are willing to assign property rights to slum dwellers.

WBI has helped with the formulation of RAY through a series of South-South Knowledge Exchange activities including facilitating exchanges between Indian officials and their counterparts in Brazil, Colombia and Peru on the scaling up of slum upgrading programmes. However, the sub-national institutional framework, mentality of urban planners and political incentives are not there yet. "The challenge is to enhance the capacity at city level to both address the slum challenge at scale, and with the right principles and instruments," says Herzog.

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Professor Dinesh Mehta, CEPT University, Ahmedabad

construction permits, to water supply and drainage, so the lack of specialised staff in smaller towns is a problem in service delivery," explains Mehta. "However, in larger cities, this is not a problem. There are many specialised staff members and the issue for them is to keep up with changing technology."

Knowledge sharing

Technology in fact has an important role to play in capacity building as knowledge exchange platforms for policy makers and practitioners have become one of the most effective mechanisms for capacity development. India's government took

action in 2007 when the National Institute of Urban Affairs established the first city network – The Peer Experience and Reflective Learning Programme (PEARL) which links the 65 mission cities of the JNNURM.

The programme seeks to enable peer-to-peer sharing of best practices and knowledge between cities of similar socio-economic profile with similar growth patterns and challenges.

The WBI and Cities Alliance have added their support to this initiative to help strengthen its reach. "WBI helps to set up workshops and we give advice – for example, we helped with

the Urban India Portal that cities were using to share knowledge," says Herzog. "Part of our scaling-up plan is to have a platform where practitioners can learn from each other."

There are pros and cons to PEARL. "The mission cities have limited capacity to implement urban reforms and adopt innovations for increased urban investment efforts," says D. Ajay Surf, Senior Programme Officer, South Asia, World Bank speaking on behalf of Cities Alliance. "But PEARL offers a great opportunity for cities to learn from each other and also from the global good practices shared by the Cities Alliance members and partners with the mission cities through their learning network."

The World Bank Institute has developed an e-institute to offer global facilitated, interactive online learning. By the end of 2012, there will be nine online courses specifically on urban planning – at the moment the courses are in the pilot stage. The ideal scenario is that participants from a given city come together from different agencies and departments and study how to work on planning problems as a team – as they would in real scenarios such as disaster risk management for example.

WBI advertised its e-learning courses in urban management to local governments globally and attracted a wide range of participants. However, from 1st July 2011 a fee of US$100 per module (one module is one week) was introduced for facilitated courses. "We have found that for local governments, that fee is too high," says Christine Kessides, Urban Practice Manager at the WBI. "It's an issue under review. In some cases we got feedback saying that US$600 is way too high in relation to the salary of a city official but then the officials shouldn't be paying for their own training." It is expected that fees will be reduced significantly starting July 2012, and this will be announced on the WBI e-Institute website.

Professor Dinesh Mehta says some of the courses are helpful but Indian officials need to be galvanised to take the training. "The WBI courses offered through ASCI and YASHADA are

general urban management and not directed to any specific skills but the online courses are useful. Some of the courses offered by our university are quite popular but the challenge is to get the local government officials to take these courses."

Christine Kessides, Urban Practice Manager, WBI

"The national governments need to see local governments as essential and important"

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The challenge is also to convince governments of the long-term rewards that can be reaped from paying to train such officials. "The national governments need to see local governments as essential and important," says Kessides. "It would be better to make these programmes part of a strategy for capacity development for the city, rather than advertising them to individuals, so that the government pays. Also the people responsible for the management of cities are not just in local government, there's also the formal and informal private sector – capacity building has to involve everybody, not just local government."

The battle in India is to change the way governments think, not just in terms of cost but also in terms of governance and decentralisation. Herzog adds: "The problem is that there's weak downward accountability. The people who run the cities in India are not elected. It's very top down and there's very little critical mass in society on urban issues – very little discussion and public debate."

For Mehta, the lack of accountability and fiscal decentralisation, whereby local governments have the financial clout to deliver services, is as big a factor as poor capacity building in making it difficult for Indian officials to properly manage urban services.

"Over time, cities have become more and more dependent on state governments and central governments for grants not only for capital investments but also for operating expenses," says Mehta. "Cities have limited authority to set appropriate tariffs and in some states even property taxes, the mainstay of municipal finance, have been abolished by state governments."

A multi-faceted approach delivering professional training from practitioners combined with peer-to-peer learning provides the best method for empowering officials to manage their cities. The greater challenge in India lies in shifting national governments' focus from short-term, 'vote-winning' goals such as building roads and bridges to realising the far-reaching benefits of investing in the people who run cities, and giving them the proper fiscal and administrative powers to be effective. This needs to be combined with more participation by citizens in the planning process.

The signs are positive with a greater commitment to civic participation under the new phase of JNNURM for which the Indian government has increased funding by 75 percent. India needs an integrated approach combining improvements in capacity with better governance. As Mehta says: "Accountability, transparency and citizen participation, these are the other key challenges for cities in India." ■