



New Forms of Urban Governance in India- Shifts, Models, Networks and Contestations  
Edited by I.S.A. Baud and J. De Wit  
Sage Publications

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Decentralisation initiatives in India are often considered to be purposefully adopted as a result of various political, social and economic factors. However, it is also considered that decentralisation is a fall out of the globalisation and liberalisation process. Much of the literature on decentralisation is based on industrial countries and assumes the existence of institutions that are usually very weak in developing countries. Urban decentralisation, which means devolving powers and responsibilities to the municipal bodies, is a result of increasing urbanisation, particularly in the larger cities.

New Forms of Urban Governance in India: Shifts, Models, Networks and Contestations, looks at the impact of decentralisation on local governance arrangements and citizen participation in urban democracy processes in India. It examines how local governments work together with other actors in governing mega cities in India, especially in view of globalisation and other internal transformation processes. It analyses whether new forms of governance open up opportunities for more participatory urban governance and improved service delivery, with positive implications for the poor in the cities. The essence of the discourse presented in the book lies in the opening phrase, "The global population is becoming more urban than rural."

The multiple opportunities and challenges that arise with urbanisation are discussed. India's emerging urban landscape is studied through various case studies that analyse the issues related to lack of infrastructure, basic amenities and the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment in 1992 has brought about a paradigm shift in governance, decentralising the responsibilities to local governments and reducing the role of the national and state governments. As a response to this issue, the role of state in urban governance is increasingly being balanced by other players, such as the private sector, local and international non-governmental organisations. More importance is being given to the role of citizens and civil society organisations. Issues around bringing the government closer to citizens through decentralisation, and private-public partnerships for providing urban services, participation of the rich and the poor in local democratic process and the expertise of the state in handling the challenges of effective city governance are focussed upon.

The book is one of the products of the research project on 'New forms of governance in Indian megacities- Decentralisation, Financial, Management and Partnerships in Urban Environmental Services' that was carried out as part of the Indo-Dutch Research Programme IDPAD. The changing role of state has given rise to three different themes in urban governance which is presented in 12 chapters divided into 3 parts viz. models and instruments of decentralization, multi-stakeholder arrangements in public services, and contestations and urban governance.

The first section of the book explores the implications of urban decentralisation in India with experiences from Mumbai, Kolkata, Siliguri and Bidhan Nagar in West Bengal; and cities in Kerala particularly focussing on ward committees. In a majority of the cases the performances of Ward Committees have been far from satisfactory, as their efficacy is largely dependent on political will. The introduction of ward committees for groups of several wards is often regarded as an extension of the central municipal office rather than securing people's participation. There are the vested interests of stakeholders, and raging corruption, however, it is anticipated that the decentralisation process would gain momentum in future, as cities grow further in size leading to the requirement of more competent service delivery to citizens.

The second section of the book deals with another theme on which urban governance is primarily spearheaded by the private sector and civil society groups who provide services to citizens. This is known as multi-stakeholder arrangements (MSAs) or multi-actor arrangements (MAAs). Examples from Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad are presented to assess the key factors that affect the performance of MAAs. Some authors put forth their view that within MSAs, different models are required to suit different urban scenarios while others suggest that high level of citizen participation is required to promote more equitable distribution of services and higher accountability of stakeholders.

It is mentioned that MSAs face a major roadblock in achieving the desired level of efficacy due to political interference and corruption. The discussion concludes that further reforms in multi-actor arrangements are required to attain the desired standard of quality and equitability in distribution of urban services across citizen groups. Baud and Dhanalakshmi analyse performance and accountability in multi-stakeholder arrangements for providing specific services such as sanitation or sewerage in Chennai. Lorraine Kennedy gives some insights about the emerging and aggressive role that the corporate sector has assumed and its influence on planning and development in a fast growing city like Hyderabad.

The third section of the book discusses the emergence of various forms of contestations and conflicts which these new models and approaches have given rise to and their effects on urban India. Through cases from West Bengal and Kerala it is demonstrated that contestations may take place within various government departments or can be induced by the government where there are multiple actors. This often leads to marginalising the poor by excluding them from access to basic services as well as in the decision making processes. The authors talk about judicial intervention and argue that the judiciary today is more vocal about urban governance issues. The higher judiciary which devised public interest litigation with the intent of helping the indigent and the powerless has itself let it become the vehicle for safeguarding the interests of the elite. A Textile Mills Land case in Mumbai is highlighted, where the policy has shifted towards accommodating the elite by seizing the entitlement of the poor to housing compensation. The authors strongly advocate recognition of the poor in urban planning, both in terms of social context and their contributions to urban society.

This book is a compilation of papers written by Indian and foreign scholars after research and analysis. It talks more about shifts and contestations than on the new forms of governance. The authors provide examples of the systems and processes which are biased against the poor and highly vulnerable to corruption. The book concludes that citizen participation is one of the most important instruments in ensuring equity in service delivery and accountability of the service provider. It is a useful read for researchers and students of urban planning, development, and governance.

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