



The Greening of Ahmedabad

An Innovative Urban Community Forestry Model

Ahmedabad is a very dynamic industrial city in India with a long-standing history in the textile sector of India. The textile crisis in the seventies hit this ‘Indian Manchester’ hard, but today Ahmedabad is again known as a city bustling with industrial and commercial activities. The cities ongoing growth has been marked by a substantial influx of population, growth of slums and unauthorised colonies and a subsequent environmental decline. This deterioration of the environment in Ahmedabad is not only visible in the settlements of the poor, but in the city as a whole, and this fostered a process of awakening and awareness about the urgency to introduce corrective measures.

In 1995, the Centre of Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT), with support from USAID, carried out an Environmental Risk Assessment for the City of Ahmedabad. A major finding of the study determined that the city’s ambient air quality was a major health risk to its residents. In response to these findings the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation gradually evolved a comprehensive approach, “the Greening of Ahmedabad Program” which includes efforts in various fronts to tackle the city’s air pollution problems.

Responding to the decline in the city’s environment, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has launched various improvement projects, in infrastructure, slum improvement projects, and initiated the “Greening of Ahmedabad Programme”.

The Greening of Ahmedabad is a concerted effort between the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the Private Sector. It aims to increase the green cover and improving the environmental quality of Ahmedabad. The main components of this Programme are activities like the greening of roadside and traffic islands; park and garden development and maintenance; city forest development; and natural regeneration and wasteland restoration on vacant lots (taking the preservation of the city’s watershed as a high priority).

Through partnership agreements with interested parties, like business and indus-

trial houses, local entrepreneurs, institutes, service oriented organisations and NGOs the greening of the city is increased, developed and maintained. For instance companies such as Syntex Ltda., Torrent Lab., Anil Bakery, Ashima Sintex Ltda etc. are involved in “road side plantations”, “development and maintenance of new and existing parks and traffic islands”. Under the Greening of Ahmedabad Programme, the AMC also launched the Ahmedabad Green Partnership project (AGP) as part of this greening drive.

The AGP has been initiated as an innovative scheme using the concept of ‘partnerships’ and ‘participation’ as its main ingredients. The city has managed to launch this program as an initiative that provides responsibilities and space for innovation to its citizens, to civic organisations and to private sector enterprises. For example, in an effort to increase road side tree plantation, private and public sector institutions were offered to “adopt” plantation units (500 meters long, with trees planted at 5 meter spacing) along the main roads of the city. They provide the funding for the saplings and the tree guards while maintenance is done by AMC. In exchange, they are allowed to advertise their logos on the tree guards. Through this effort, between 1996 and 1997, a total of 16.292 trees have been planted along main roads

Table 1: Parks and Gardens

Size	No. of gardens	No. of traffic islands	Maint. by AMC	Maint. by private s.
Up to 2 acres	38	45	30	15
From 2 to 5 acres	19	-	17	2
Above 5 acres	15	-	12	3
Totals	72	45	59	20

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After 5 years the project will achieve financial sustainability

THE "AHMEDABAD GREEN PARTNERSHIP" PROJECT (AGP)

The Green Partnership is an initiative by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) to utilize empty plots, owned by the AMC, for urban forestry related activities in partnership with NGOs working with poor communities and other citizens groups. This idea took quite some time to evolve into a feasible and beneficial approach for the parties involved.

The approach has been developed with the support of RHUDO/USAID. After the Program Guidelines were developed through several workshops, and agreed a total of 17 plots were allotted to and agreements were signed with 12 NGOs for undertaking an equal number of forestry and other greening related activities in these plots.

Objectives

The objectives of the AGP Project are:

- ❖ To contribute to the greening of Ahmedabad through the development of urban forest and other greening related activities in vacant plots owned by AMC.
- ❖ To facilitate and encourage participation of low-income residents, especially women, through the formalisation of public-private partnerships.
- ❖ To increase, through such partnerships, the income generation possibilities for low-income residents of the city.

Operation and Management

Under the AGP, plots owned by AMC, are offered to NGOs and other organisations for the development of urban forestry and related activities. Plots were allotted for a period of 5 years, with possibilities of extension of other 5 years. The Ahmedabad Green Partnership is managed by the Director Parks and Gardens under the Department of Special Estates, Parks & Gardens of the AMC. The list of available plots was prepared by the State Department of the Municipal Corporation.

Plot demarcation and water connections were provided by the AMC. Fencing, construction of sheds and preparation of the

land was carried out by NGOs. Plantation work started when weather conditions were appropriate (in this case plantation work could only start during the monsoon season).

For the fiscal year 1997/1998 the AMC budgeted Rs. 15 million (1US\$ /34 Rs) for the greening of the city. Yearly provisions of Rs. 10 million have been made for implementation of the AGP in the next four years.

Financial resources are granted by AMC to the implementing organisations for fencing, saplings, tools, fertilisers, a portable shed and other expenditures for the first year. Additionally, the AMC provides one water connection, while the organisations are responsible to provide for wages, maintenance, security and other planned amenities, which were not covered by the grant.

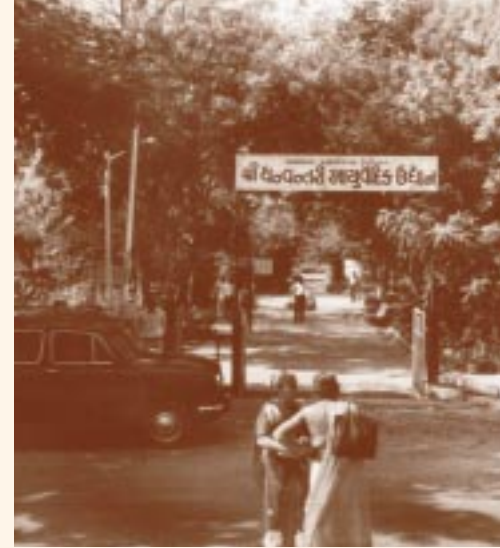
For the second year funding will be available only for items such as watering, weeding and fertilisers. For the third year onwards, 10% to the amount provided for the second year will be granted. It is expected that after a period of five years the projects will achieve financial sustainability.

Projects under the AGP

To give an example of the project activities a number of projects will be described below.

The Centre for Environmental Education is supporting a group of associated students to develop a plot into an urban forest for research and academic purposes. The main objectives are creating awareness and understanding among communities of the importance of green areas in cities, to create avenues, to develop and disseminate information on the diverse species that can thrive as an urban forest.

Akhil Bharatiya Vanaaushadhi Abhyas Mandal is active in propagating ethno-botany and conservation of the environment. They are developing a



plot into a garden of medicinal trees and plants for the benefit of the community and the city.

The State Bank of India Officers Association is the trade union of the bank officers. It is developing a plot into an urban forest, through its Social Service Wing which implements small projects for the benefit of communities and the city in general, while providing a good corporate image to the Bank.

Under the Green Partnership, Self Employed Women Association (SEWA) – an internationally well known NGO and winner of the HABITAT II award for its housing programmes – got allotted two plots, located in residential areas, which are used to generate employment for the members of the unions and to contribute to the greening of the city.

ISSUES FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF PARTNERSHIPS

The following lessons are learned:

In the initial stages flexibility is needed, to give room for identification of potential problems, and the necessary adjustments. Technically realistic criteria have to be set for plot selection, taking into account site-specific conditions, well in advance so that the extra inputs and resources required for its development are known to the parties involved, when the plot is allotted.

Full agreement of the proposals is needed, in order to assess at beforehand, the land uses allowed under the agreement, but also for evaluation purposes. The involvement of residents, in the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of the areas where plots are located is vital for the success of these projects. This process

This paper is based on the Documentation Report of the Ahmedabad Green Partnership Project prepared by the author for the Regional Housing & Urban Development Office (RHUDO) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), New Delhi, India, 1997. With some modifications, it also will be presented in the International Symposium on Urban Agriculture to be held in Berlin July, 2000.

takes time but will prevent confrontations, which only disrupt project implementation.

Projects should further financially be feasible, to ensure sustainability and to avoid or minimise the need for subsidies, as it is the case for the AGP component of the Greening of Ahmedabad Programme.

Since each organisation or project has different characteristics, objectives and approaches. It is difficult for a government office alone to monitor day-to-day needs and provide the assistance required. This is why it is advisable to count on the mediation of an appropriate institute/organisation to act as a mediator between the municipality and the implementing agencies.

For most of the grassroots organisations, the partnership arrangement is a completely new experience. They are motivated with the perspective of deriving some benefits, while contributing to improve the green cover of the city. Assistance in technical matters and in the development and implementation of participatory approaches will greatly help to maximise the resources and outputs of these projects.

RELEVANCE OF THE AGP FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

The AGP includes very relevant and innovative features, which can radiate very positively when they are adopted and/or

included in the development policies of a city. From this particular case there are three aspects we would like to highlight.

Urban Agriculture as a Strategy

Urban agriculture and forestry, and other greening related activities could be feasible strategies towards improving sustainable city development. In this particular case, both, the parties involved and the city environment are benefiting from the decision to include urban agriculture activities within the urban development framework. Private institutions create the opportunity to a socially responsive oriented outlook while sharing benefits and responsibilities with the municipal administration. The latter in turn, combine the solution of environmental problems with working on economic and social problems. The green coverage of the city further decreases air pollution and creates a healthier urban environment. Finally, a substantive amount of jobs and incomes can be created.

The Partnership Approach

This experience shows that the partnership approach is indeed a viable alternative to supply an efficient service at lower costs. Important to note, is that the joint effort is understood as an opportunity that benefits all the parties involved but at the same time entails clear responsibilities. The development of transparent

tools, like in this case a very simple and clear contract and an expedite, red tape free, application and plot award process, has encouraged the participation of the private sector partners. Apart from the commitment, the partners must have the capacity and skills necessary to fulfil their responsibilities. In certain cases, technical assistance may be needed. Success further depends on realistic planning and programming.

Planning for Urban Agriculture

A first step is that urban agriculture and urban forestry activities are considered as

A substantive amount of jobs and incomes can be created

part of the strategy in urban sustainability. Then the city needs to plan for it to happen. Sanctioning of land is a requirement to formalise further implementation. City managers and planners need to take into account that trees and crops are long-term products and that these investments need proper time to yield benefits. This is especially valid for those plots that belong to the municipality; the private partners need the certainty that there is time to recover their investment.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of partnerships for the development and maintenance of public services is paying good dividends to AMC. The Ahmedabad Green Partnership Programme demonstrates that when the rules of the game are clear, partnerships between governments, NGOs, CBOs and other citizens groups are viable development options, which offer benefits for all parties involved.

With transparency, commitment, continuity and efficient administration from the AMC, the private sector, including low-income residents, have been encouraged and enabled to respond and support the government in making Ahmedabad a healthy, green and less polluted city.

Urban agriculture, urban forestry and other greening activities need to be recognised by urban managers and planners as viable development alternatives. Especially those aimed at improving the living conditions of the urban poor will help to develop better cities of which not only we but future generations can feel proud of.