

**Beneficiary? Stakeholder? Consumer? Citizen-State Dynamics in  
Bangalore's Urban Reforms**

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### Abstract

As neoliberal reforms aiming to enhance cost recovery and efficiency transform urban service delivery in India, the relationship between citizens and the state is also being reconfigured—although in ways not always intended by reform proponents. In fact, the imposition of market-driven, rational, and technologized strategies for providing services and “simplifying transactions” opens up new opportunities for political influence, resistance by different groups, exclusion and differentiation, and intra-governmental tension, all of which have implications for urban citizenship. Based on ethnographic research in Bangalore and its peripheral zones, this paper traces the rationale for reforms involving municipal services such as water and sanitation. It shows how such strategies have the intention of transforming a political relationship between the governing and governed into a non-political one between a business and its customers. This is chiefly to achieve certain benchmarks of “good” urban governance, such as accountability and transparency. The paper reveals, however, that when this is attempted, not only are those benchmarks seldom achieved, but the relationship between citizens and state develops a different set of tensions—those that were likely unforeseen by reform trustees. The paper asks two main questions: 1. How do reforms *intend* on changing the relationship between citizens, service providers, and the state, and why? 2. How do reforms *actually* change this relationship, and what new conceptions of urban citizenship are being constructed as a result?

This paper examines these questions in the context of Bangalore and its newly added periphery. Already facing stiff software competition from other cities in India due to crumbling infrastructure, increasingly prone to fickle coalition politics, and formally tripling in geographic area in early 2007, the “IT City” romance of Bangalore is fast giving way to sobering realities. International organizations, state agencies, and NGOs are focusing attention on the newly incorporated urban periphery of Bangalore—including 110 villages and 8 towns—where adequate water and sanitation continue to elude most of its 1.2 million residents. Two strategies are examined in detail: a) computerized grievance redressal implemented through statewide municipal reforms and b) beneficiary capital contributions in the Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project. Both approaches are representative of current rationalities and technologies of governing embedded in the India’s new national urban reform program—the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission.

Drawing on Foucauldian critiques of governmentality, the paper first lays out theoretical frameworks for interpreting why the urban citizen has come to the fore in today’s good governance agenda. Next, the paper uses recent ethnographic fieldwork in Greater Bangalore to describe the modalities of beneficiary fees and complaint redressal. The workings of these approaches are compared with ways in which citizens have historically interacted with elected councilors, frontline water engineers, and bureaucrats in order to trace transformations in citizen-state relations. Finally, the paper explores emerging notions of urban citizenship, and suggests that belying de-politicized categories like “beneficiary”, “client”, and “stakeholder”—prone to use by reform proponents—are a set of relationships that are politically negotiated and rife with tension.

## I. Introduction

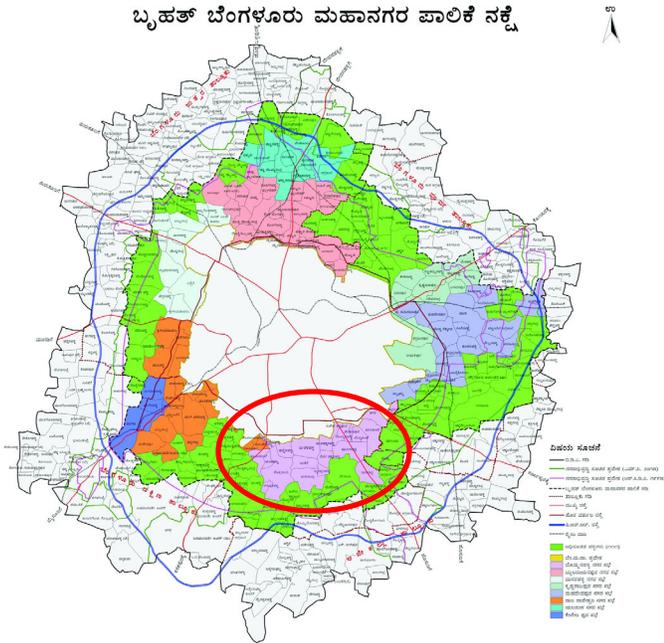
*Simplifying transactions involves reengineering the relationship between citizens and agencies at the point where they interact. –Reforming Public Services in India, The World Bank, 2006.*

*For the first time in GBWASP [the Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project], we thought we'd also collect beneficiary contributions. The purpose is to make citizens – or beneficiaries – also stakeholders in this project, so that ultimately, they could also be brought in in matters of administration of service. –Senior official at the Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation (a special purpose vehicle charged with the implementation of multilateral loans and urban reforms), July 2007.*

As neoliberal reforms aiming to enhance cost recovery and efficiency transform urban service delivery in India, the relationship between citizens and the state is also being reconfigured—although in ways not always intended by reform proponents typified in the quotes above. In fact, the imposition of market-driven, rational, and technologized strategies for providing services and “simplifying transactions” opens up new opportunities for political influence, resistance by different groups, exclusion and differentiation, and intra-governmental tension, all of which have implications for urban citizenship. Reform strategies reproduce varied categories and subjectivities of urban citizenship that continue to be divided along geographical, class, and income lines. Based on ethnographic research in Bangalore and its peripheral zones, this paper traces the rationale for reforms involving municipal services such as water and sanitation. It shows how such strategies have the intention of transforming a political relationship between the governing and governed into a non-political one between a business and its customers. This is chiefly to achieve certain benchmarks of “good” urban governance, such as accountability and transparency. The paper reveals, however, that when this is attempted, not only are those benchmarks seldom achieved, but the relationship between citizens and state develops a different set of tensions—those that were likely unforeseen by reform trustees who fiercely embraced what Tania Murray Li (2007) would call “the will to improve”.

The paper asks two main questions: 1. How do reforms *intend* on changing the relationship between citizens, service providers, and the state, and why? 2. How do reforms *actually* change this relationship, and what new conceptions of urban citizenship are being constructed as a result? This research is situated in Bangalore in the state of Karnataka, a city whose preeminent position as India’s software capital is under pressure because of its inability to cope with infrastructure challenges. As a state that has embraced economic liberalization, Karnataka’s towns, in particular, have been crucibles for reform experimentation and international loans from the World Bank, USAID, AusAid, and Asian Development Bank (ADB). These loans have been provided for water and sewer systems, solid waste management, and road networks, and tied to conditionalities of increased user charges, the removal of subsidized or free water, computerized systems for processing citizen grievances, greater property tax collection, and private sector participation in the management of services.

My fieldwork was concentrated in the transitional, peri-urban area of Bangalore consisting of 8 smaller municipalities and 110 villages that have recently been incorporated into the Greater Bangalore City Corporation (as of early 2007) (see map below). In this larger expanse, I focused primarily on the southwestern municipality of Bommanahalli, a collection of 33 wards and villages scattered on either side of a congested highway connecting Bangalore to India's premier information technology (IT) hub, Electronic City. IT companies, high-rise condominium complexes, and export promotion parks are exploding the boundaries of the city, making the periphery a site for rapid change and instability. This change manifests not only in terms of the widening disparities in access to basic services like water and sanitation, but also because of the governance and administrative changes the area is undergoing, and the multitude of new infrastructural investments being undertaken here. From the perspective of a critical ethnography inspired in large part by theories of governmentality, the periphery offers the chance to examine the discursive construction of infrastructure and governance "problems", their technically-oriented, reform-driven solutions, and the lived experiences of local government, civic organizations, and residents.



Map of Greater Bangalore showing core (white area in the middle) and periphery (colored areas). Bommanahalli is circled. Source: BBMP (2007).

I examine two projects in detail: Public Grievance Redressal (PGR) in the Nirmala Nagara reforms (2003-2007) and beneficiary capital contributions in the Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project or GBWASP (1999-on-going). The Nirmala Nagara (meaning "Clean City" in Kannada) program of the Department of Municipal Administration implemented several reforms in 57 urban local bodies (ULBs)<sup>1</sup> across the state. The program scaled up innovations first implemented by the short-lived Bangalore Agenda Task Force (2001-2004), a public-private partnership for improved governance between prominent corporates and bureaucrats. Funded jointly by the ADB and state government, Nirmala Nagara's goal was to improve local

<sup>1</sup>Urban areas fall under four main classifications depending on population size: corporations are the largest, followed by city municipal councils (CMCs), town municipal councils (TMCs), and town *panchayats* (TPs). The local government in each of these classifications is referred to as "urban local body" or ULB. The executive arm of ULBs is headed by a commissioner who is appointed by the state government. Various mid to lower-level managers (engineers and accountants) assist the commissioner in the everyday running of the ULBs. Management positions include a superintending engineer, executive engineers, assistant executive engineers, an environmental officer, a community affairs officer, an assistant revenue officer, and a health inspector. Each ULB also has a council, overseen by a president. Councils consist of elected representatives (known as councilors in CMCs and TMCs and corporators in corporations) who hold office for five-year terms. The council is a policy-making and oversight body of ULBs.

government by “process reengineering” municipal budgets, property tax collection, and complaint management (Personal interview 2007). Today, the Karnataka Municipal Reforms Project (KMRP) loan of the World Bank (approved in 2006) aims to further scale up Nirmala Nagara in 74 more towns in the state (Personal Interview 2007). Nirmala Nagara is hence a critical case to analyze because several of the strategies it contains are being replicated on a massive scale throughout the country. In my field site, I examine how an attempt was made to restructure the collection and processing of citizen complaints—one of the main modes of interaction citizens have with bureaucrats and elected representatives—and the implications of this restructuring.

My second case study, GBWASP, is a mega-project to provide piped water and sanitation to 1.2 million people living on the periphery of Bangalore. Financing for the project is derived from a number of sources: municipal bonds raised on the market, state government grants, loans, and, importantly for my case, upfront beneficiary capital contributions (BCCs). BCCs are fees for piped water connections structured on the basis of the dwelling area and dwelling type (commercial or residential). That is, based on square footage calculations, those living in smaller properties must pay less than those living in larger properties. Those making late payments must pay a penalty depending on how late their payment is. Populations living on the periphery are thus quantified, categorized, disciplined, given the promise of reward, and invited to be “stakeholders” in new investments laid down for their benefit. Certain groups that are most in need of water, such as people living in unauthorized slums not recognized by the Karnataka Slum Clearance Board, are not currently eligible for water connections through GBWASP. BCCs exemplify what Aihwa Ong would call “neoliberal calculation as a governing technology (2006: 4)” which invariably reveals “exceptions”—or the purposeful exclusion of certain populations from governmental choices.

Taken together, both projects are representative of strategies upheld by the ambitious national reforms agenda known as the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) launched in 2005. JNNURM promises \$11 billion for infrastructure and basic services in 63 major Indian cities in return for a host of reforms such as the institution of e-governance in government processes, property tax based on formulas for self-assessment, private sector participation, and user fees in urban services, among many others. JNNURM, KMRP, Nirmala Nagara, and GBWASP all deploy technologies of “self-governing”—that is, modes of regulation that intend to shape the conduct of citizens and transform them into responsible customers. This mode of regulation has profound effects on urban citizenship. In the next section, I discuss two opposing theoretical formulations of citizenship: citizenship as conceived by reform proponents and citizenship that actually results in sites of urban transformation.

## **II. Citizen-state relations and citizenship around urban services**

In this section, I examine two contrasting formulations of citizen-state relations that are pertinent for my study. The first is a normative conception that is popular among international financial institutions that are attempting to reengineer and manage relations between citizens and “service providers”. As implied in the quote above, this reengineering is essentially intended to transform citizens into good, paying customers with the ability to demand their rights and “monitor and discipline” service providers (World Bank 2004). Policies for promoting competition, cost recovery, and privatization are thus thought to strengthen the accountability of the state vis-à-vis the citizen. In turn, the state (who may or may not be the service provider as the case may be) is expected to assume accountable, business-like characters and is held to certain performance standards.

By contrast, the second approach—one that I refer to as “actually existing citizenship”—challenges unified models of citizenship and identifies new and differentiated articulations of citizen-state relation in spaces undergoing political and economic transformation. Both

formulations go beyond traditional definitions of citizenship as membership to the nation state, since, as observed by Ong (2006), formal membership seldom guarantees political or civil rights. But, whereas neoliberal actors construe citizenship in apolitical and homogenizing ways—often normatively asserting that *good citizenship* underlies *good governance*—scholars like Ong (2006), Holston (2008), Appadurai (2002), and Chatterjee (2004) point to the fluid and contested nature of citizenship, and, in particular, to the constant aligning and realigning of various groups vis-à-vis the state.

In the first formulation, governments and international lenders like the World Bank strategically prescribe modalities of citizen-state relations based on institutionalized forms of “engagement”.. The World Bank’s report titled “Engaging with Citizens to Improve Services” (2007), building on a framework for service provision laid out in the “Making Services Work for the Poor” World Development Report (2004), embodies this shift by systematically examining three relationships: citizen ↔ service provider, citizen ↔ state, and state ↔ service provider. Through its three-actor framework, the report suggests how relations between citizens (both poor and non-poor) and the state (e.g. bureaucrats, elected representatives) and citizens and service providers (e.g. utility managers, frontline engineers) can be enhanced—and accountability demanded—through certain interventions involving “voice” and “client power” (World Bank 2004). Voice involves engagement with elected representatives and constitutes the “long” route of accountability (e.g. elections), whereas “client power” constitutes the “short” route of accountability and involves direct engagement with utilities through, for instance, logging grievances in a centralized database, choosing among a variety of competitive service providers, or paying user fees. Note that the “short” route is preferred since direct engagement with public utilities is found to be more effective than political negotiation or voice. The assumption is that engagement of this nature leads to more accountability and responsiveness from service deliverers. In the World Bank formulation, relationships are explicitly managed via certain interfaces and citizenship is imagined to be universal and constant across society. In other words, the underlying assumption is that all citizens have the ability to become, and be treated like, clients.

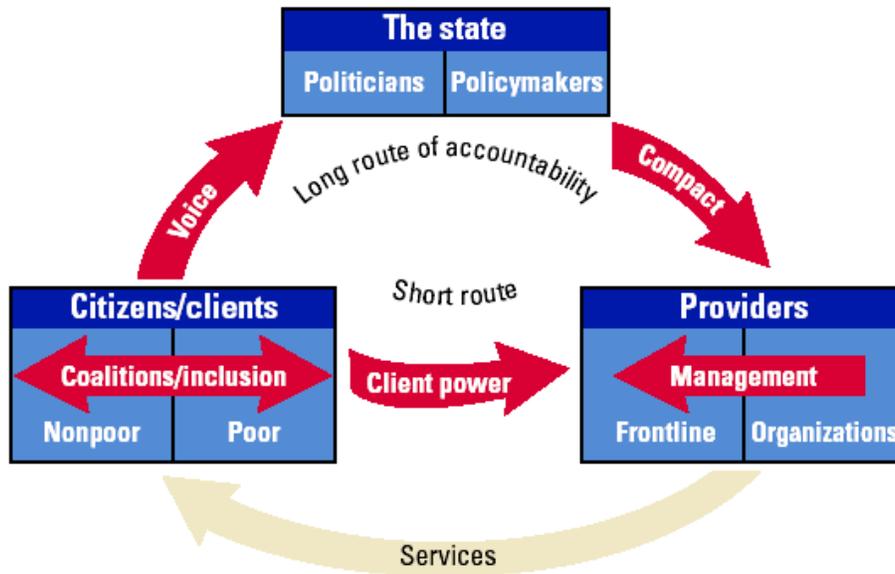


Figure 1. The World Development Report's Framework for Service Provision. World Bank (2004, 2007).

There are several problems with these ideas of accountability. First, as I will show below, “client power”—the ability to hold service providers accountable—does not automatically ensue from user fees or deregulation of markets, and it is certainly not guaranteed for the poor. Second, the poor often rely on elected councilors and other associational forms—political and non-political—to voice grievances and negotiate access to grievances. This may not always be possible in a situation of privatization or competitive markets for in service provision where elected representatives are no longer powerful to enable access for the poor.

In contrast to this static characterization of state-society dynamics, a second broad theoretical approach relevant for my research sees citizenship as emerging from sites of struggle and claim-making over resources. This approach is chiefly concerned with *differentiated* forms of citizenship arising from urban expansion into the periphery, struggles over land, the expansion of market rationalities, class struggles, and other historically situated phenomena. In India’s case, Partha Chatterjee (2004) points to differentiated citizen-state relations by recognizing the distinction between political and civil society. Chatterjee argues that the vast majority of Indians do not comprise civil society in that they do not make their claims on the terrain of established law, but rather through the game of strategic, and often paralegal, electoral politics. Along similar lines, Holston and Appadurai (1999) emphasize the difference between citizenship claims derived from formal constitutional rights, and those that are politically negotiated. Holston (2008) uses the term “insurgent citizenship” to describe how working class residents in peri-urban Sao Paulo mobilized new forms of substantive citizenship based on ideas of participation, self-help, and modern consumerism to counter existing inequalities. He finds, however, that these modes of citizenship claims co-exist with more violent forms of claim-making, and that these contradictions comprise the ineluctable reality of citizenship in a country with deep-rooted social inequities. Appadurai (2002) elaborates on the term “deep democracy” to describe mobilization efforts by slum communities in Mumbai to reconstitute citizenship through self-enumeration, housing exhibitions, and toilet festivals. Such seeming contradictions—that the poor may turn the very technologies and rationalities that are responsible for their own containment into the basis for citizenship-like claims—are key in my research.

To understand how these techniques of government and specific reform approaches played out in Bangalore, it is necessary to explore the context and historical precedents to reform, to which I turn next.

### **III. Context: Municipal Governance and Reforms in Karnataka**

A few key aspects of urban governance in Karnataka provide crucial backdrop for this study. The first is that the state has historically been welcoming of international loans because of its willingness to implement reforms, and the managerial culture that prevails at the top echelons of its parastatals, state departments, and financing intermediaries. There is a reciprocity (and recycling of jobs) that characterizes the relationship between the state’s senior bureaucrats, civil society elites, and international experts. This nexus creates what Mosse and Lewis (2005) call an “epistemic community” of knowledge and consensus building on good governance reforms. With impetus from the ADB in the mid-1990s, this community was responsible for the founding of the Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation (KUIDFC), a special purpose vehicle created to liaise between lenders (both multilateral and private) and municipalities. Staffed mainly by business and management school graduates, engineers, and other technocrats, KUIDFC hires project consultants, oversees projects, and negotiates loans.

Given this overarching institutional culture, it is not surprising that in the late 1990s, leaders from the corporate world decided to take the city’s state of affairs into their own hands. They banded

together to solve the city's dire infrastructure problems through a "public-private partnership" called the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF). During their five-year tenure, the BATF succeeded in imprinting a corporate ethic of performance monitoring, the use of information technology, report cards, and participatory budgeting on Bangalore's governance agenda—measures favorably reviewed by international lenders who were funding infrastructure reform in the city (e.g. ADB 2006; e.g. USAID 2004). Several of the BATF's strategies live on in the Nirmala Nagara reform program, which I discuss below.

What is important to note, however, is that the BATF did not last long. Several undercurrents from below and above succeeded in unseating this partnership as discussed at length by Kamath (2006)—not the least of which was the election of a new pro-rural populist government. The partnership was widely criticized for being elitist in its conduct and failing to address some of the core concerns of the poor (Ghosh 2005; Kamath 2006; Nair 2005). The history of Karnataka politics therefore reveals that unstable coalition politics, Kannada nationalist movements from below, and antagonistic relationships between the elected and executive arms of government<sup>2</sup> have always made market-oriented and techno-managerial types of neoliberal rule tenuous and contentious. The lack of progress on urban decentralization—i.e. power has *not* been handed down to local government in the manner envisaged by the constitutional amendment for urban decentralization—exacerbates suspicions and power struggles between various arms of government.<sup>3</sup> Civil society is also fractured with pro-poor alliances refusing to associate with more established NGOs.

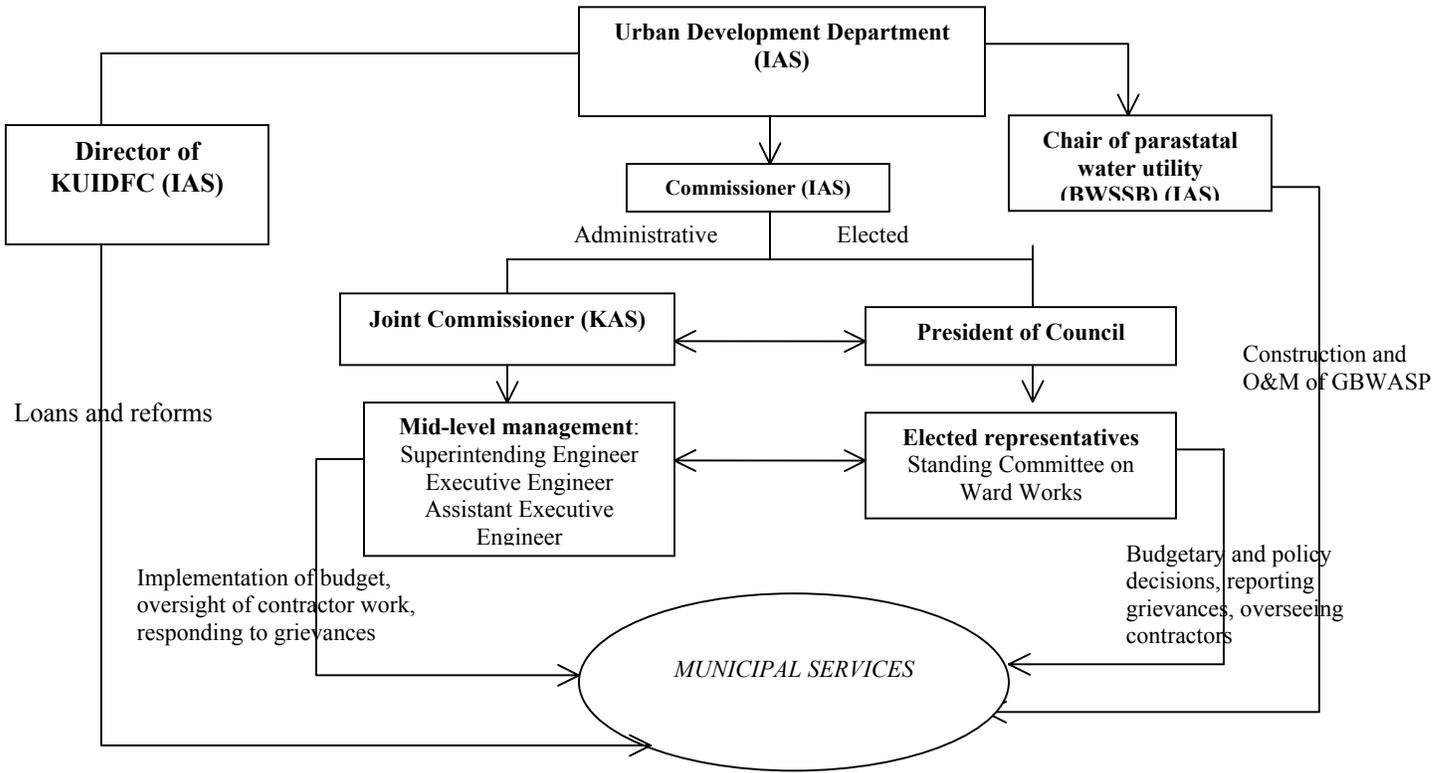
The creation of the Greater Bangalore City Corporation brought into sharp focus several of these contradictions and antagonisms. In early 2007, the Bruhath Bangalore Mahanagara Palike, or Greater Bangalore City Corporation was formed by merging the city with surrounding municipalities and villages. One of the stated rationales for doing this was to bring the infrastructure in the peri-urban areas up to par with Bangalore. The area of the city corporation grew threefold, from 225 sq. km to approximately 740 sq. km. Governance in Greater Bangalore is currently in a state of flux as local governments in the former municipalities and in the corporation attempt to harmonize their systems. The transition period is throwing up many questions as to how to coordinate the provision of core services, how to manage budgets, and how to ensure citizens in the mean time do not suffer from inertia on both sides.

In Bommanahalli, water supply is one among several serious municipal challenges. Local government has the responsibility of sinking borewells for public use and supplying tanker water to individual households. Wealthier households have their own supplementary borewells. Poorer households gain access to water through a mixture of public borewell water and private tankers that typically charge Rs 1-2/pot. However, frequently, tankers do not deliver water and electric pumps in borewells break down resulting in severe hardship for households, especially those without back-up options. While the local government has the responsibility of providing services and the elected representatives are directly accountable to citizens, it is the state-level and parastatal institutions that are responsible for implementing new investments and reform projects.

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<sup>2</sup> The executive and legislative arms of ULBs do not always see eye-to-eye; mutual mistrust and suspicion often underlie the attitudes of each side, and power struggles abound. It is common for members of the executive arm to accuse councilors of "vote bank" behavior and party politics, while, on the other side, elected representatives resent city managers for being incompetent, overly bureaucratic, and consolidating decision-making power.

<sup>3</sup> As per the 12<sup>th</sup> schedule of the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment, 18 new functions are devolved to urban local government, including urban planning, regulation of land use, roads, bridges, public health, and slum improvement.



**Figure 2:** Generic urban governance framework. IAS stands for Indian Administrative Service and KAS stands for Karnataka Administrative Service—both systems for training career bureaucrats.

## IV. Case Studies

### 1. *Nirmala Nagara Reforms*

In 2003, the Department of Municipal Administration (DMA) of the Government of Karnataka launched a statewide reform program covering 57 cities known as Nirmala Nagara Yojane (the “Clean City Program” in Kannada). The program is mostly financed by the state, with around \$2 million allocated from ADB’s second urban infrastructure loan to Karnataka.<sup>4</sup> Project documentation rationalizes the need for the program based on the backwardness and inefficiency of existing systems of municipal governance:

*Over one-third of Karnataka’s population lives in urban areas. Most of the urban population lives in Class-I cities (cities with more than one lakh population) and their numbers are expected to grow very fast. This rapid urbanisation is throwing up several challenges. Infrastructure is inadequate and often poorly maintained. Record keeping functions are poorly carried out and are a manual drudgery. Low resource mobilisation and inadequate managerial capacity results in absence of attitudes to usher in change. Without strong citizen participation, transparency suffers. In short, credibility levels are low. Nirmala Nagara programme launched by the Government of Karnataka aims to remedy the situation...*

The rationale maintains that records entered by hand and not computer are inefficient and a “drudgery”; that financial and managerial capacity is short; and that the lack of citizen participation is hindering transparent functioning. In brief, such rhetoric creates the need for a strong hand to step in and discipline dysfunctional governments through techno-managerial fixes.

The program involved a miscellaneous range of small-scale investments in infrastructure (public toilets, rainwater harvesting, solid waste management), but largely focused on reforms, such as double entry accounting, GIS-based property tax collection, municipal websites, and computerized public grievance redressal (PGR) which I chose to focus on. The DMA partnered with the E-Governments Foundation, a “public interest” organization founded by a California returned entrepreneur, to implement various software models that support what reform proponents like referring to as “process reengineering” of government (CMAK 2006) (see the description in **Figure 3** for evidence of this).

I focused on the PGR module because my primary interest is in citizen-state interactions and relations. I discovered through my fieldwork that *complaining* is one of the main ways urban citizens in India interact with authorities, although channels of complaints differ between the poor and middle class. *Payment* (of taxes, of user fees, etc) is the other primary mode of interaction. As Chatterjee (2004) notes, political society has historically engaged with their elected representatives over complaints related to civic amenities (particularly *bijli, sadak, pani* or electricity, roads, water), the public distribution system, and voter ID cards. He finds that the middle class on the other hand, after withdrawing from the public sphere during several decades of post-independence state intervention, is again engaging in public affairs through neighborhood groups such as Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). More recently, with growing awareness about consumer rights coupled with influences from the corporate sector, there has been a rise in complaint “hotlines” and websites for logging complaints directed at government agencies and

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<sup>4</sup> This is a little known fact. In my interviews at the ADB, I discovered that it is a little known fact even at the ADB. The state government requested the ADB to allocate loan finance from an unrelated loan to Nirmala Nagara but the ADB has no direct oversight over the reform implementation. Personal Communication with Saugata Dasgupta, ADB INRM, November 21, 2007.

utilities. Some NGOs such as Praja in Mumbai and Janaagraha in Bangalore have piloted their own versions of online complaint management systems that they claim as “one stop shops” for citizen needs.

The PGR module under Nirmala Nagara is the government’s initiative to put forth a computerized system for collecting and tracking grievances about services delivered by the local government, and to provide an “interface” between local government and citizens. In every town that PGR was implemented, that interface involved a “helpline” to collect and respond to complaints in a centralized manner staffed by a local NGO. When residents have a problem such as disruption in water supply or blocked underground drainage, they have four options for reporting this grievance: a) by personally visiting the Helpline desk set up by Nirmala Nagara b) by telephoning the Helpline, c) by submitting a letter to the Helpline desk, or by d) lodging a complaint through the city’s website. A snapshot of the website of the municipality which I studied, Bommanahalli, is provided in **Figure 3**. Note that even though the system is referred to as “computerized” grievance redressal, it is accessible to users through avenues other than the Internet. In fact, due to the low penetration rate of computers and the Internet in India, it is much more common for residents to file complaints in-person, by telephone, or in writing.

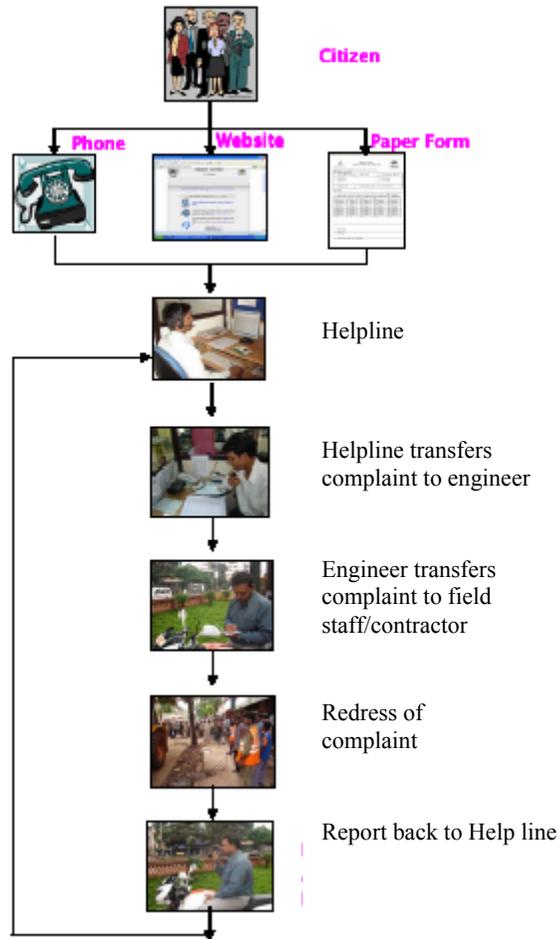


**Figure 3.** City of Bommanahalli website.

In theory, the Helpline is supposed to relay the grievance to frontline engineers who are then supposed to resolve the problem within a stipulated timeframe and report back to the Helpline about the status of the problem (see **Figure 4**). The system is thus *intended* to build accountability of the local government because it provides real-time information about the problems experienced at point-of-use and also sets a time limit within which grievances must be resolved. A glowing Government of Karnataka report evaluates the system as follows:

*The benefits of PGR system have been that it has introduced transparency and accountability of the Municipal Staffs. This is a most successful module of direct NGO participation, most efficient and cost effective. The system is not only useful to redress individual citizen’s complaints but also useful to understand what kind of problems occur at which parts of the city at what time of the year. Since much of this information is freely*

*available online, citizens and other city stakeholders can understand the city's problems and constructively participate in the governance of the city (GoK 2006).*



**Figure 4.** How the PGR is intended to work. Source: CMAK (2006)

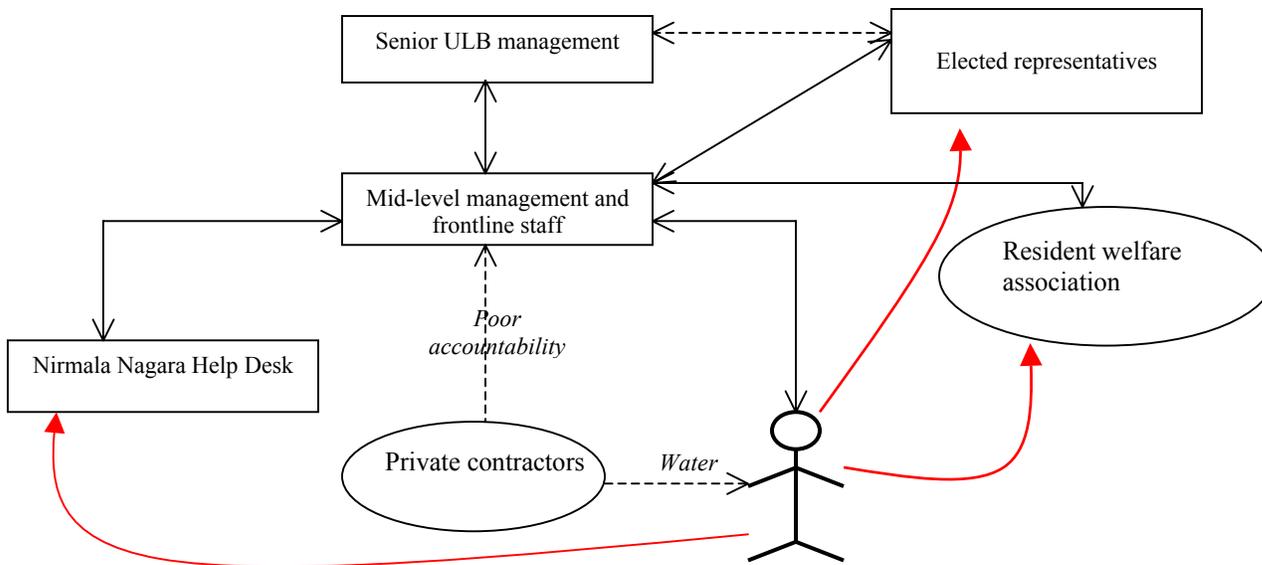
My analysis of the system in Bommanahalli, however, produced different findings: not only have accountability and transparency *not* been enhanced for reasons I will discuss below, but the PGR system raised unrealistic expectations about the capacity of local government, leading to more frustration among residents and heightened tensions between local government and citizens. Moreover, I found that the existence of the PGR system led to increased differentiation in the ways citizens interact with government over complaints, reinforcing Chatterjee's political/civil society divide.

Approximately 6,000 complaints were recorded by the system over a period of 1.5 years from 2005 to 2007.<sup>5</sup> Complaints related to water and sewerage problems comprised the majority (42% of all complaints received in the engineering and health sections), closely followed by streetlights (38%). Interviews with residents confirmed these findings in part—that, indeed, water supply and

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that in early 2007, the Internet version of the PGR was abandoned because Bommanahalli was no longer considered a separate municipality, but part of Bangalore. However, the phone and in-person complaint registration manually continued. In this sense, then, complaint registration was still institutionalized during the period of my research.

sanitation is one of the priority concerns for residents. However, the qualitative interviews and anecdotal evidence from the poor and lower class populations in Bommanahalli reveal that water and sanitation is *far more* a priority than this data reveals. This data must then be treated with caution in terms of whether it represents the actual distribution of complaints in the population. This is because the very poor often use more informal mechanisms to voice demands, such as through their ward councilor, by making group visits to the Assistant Executive Engineer or Commissioner's office, through a local civic welfare association, and through field engineers on their inspection visits. These informal reports do not usually get recorded in the PGR system. In a sample survey of phone interviews I conducted with citizens who had used the system, I found that over half of respondents were not satisfied with the local government's responsiveness. Several had filed complaints multiple times and were frustrated by the lack of response. Qualitative interviews also indicated a general dissatisfaction with services delivered and apathy towards local government. I argue that one of the key reasons that the PGR module did not work in the ways intended or claimed is the misguided assumption that citizen engagement alone will lead to greater accountability. The intervention chose to ignore certain relationships that are crucial for improved service delivery.

To understand the gap between the conception of this governmental technology and the reality of implementation, I mapped institutional relationships in Bommanahalli (**Figure 5**). In this diagram, the red arrows depict the routes that citizens use to file grievances, both formal and informal. The solid arrows show fairly strong relationships, while the dashed arrows show weak or absent relationships. The flow of information, delegation of responsibilities, and enforcement are fairly strong between senior and mid-level ULB management, the help desk, and resident welfare associations, all of whom have a relationship with the citizen.



**Figure 5.** Mapping accountability relationships in Bommanahalli

Where the primary weakness lies is in the relationships between private contractor and frontline engineers and thus between contractor and citizen. As one engineer in Bangalore put it:

*There is so much demand and so many problems. In the current system, there are several different private contractors. One contractor deals with the borewell pump maintenance,*

*one deals with opening and closing the valve. If the valve man is taking [extra] money from some houses to supply them more, we cannot do anything drastic. Our duty is to the public first. The people will suffer if we fire the valve man. The current situation is not good. We need an alternative but currently there is no alternative. The system of private contractors has been going on for many years. It was like this from the beginning (Executive Engineer, Bommanahalli, 2007).*

The fact that the city “has no other choice” but to recruit “fly-by-night” contractors and that the accountability of these contractors is very low are reasons widely cited to be the cause for continued poor service delivery, despite the institutionalization of a formal complaint mechanism. In fact, I found that it is the alternate channels of interaction with public officials, such as when engineers make spot inspection visits to wards, or when a group of women stormed the office of the Assistant Executive Engineer (AEE), that work is attended to. On one occasion when I was interviewing the AEE, I witnessed 20 or more angry and distressed residents (mostly from lower and lower-middle class backgrounds, mostly women) storm his office. They were from one low-lying ward in Bommanahalli that often gets flooded after a bad downpour. In this ward, several borewells sunk by the local government have gone dry, and for several others, the electric motor is worn so badly that the pump no longer draws water. The women complained to the engineer about the flooding in their homes and about the fact that they had no drinking water (*kudiyokke niiru*) for days. Tankers that usually supplement drinking water supply had not delivered as per their contractual agreements. In front of the mob, the AEE picked up his cell phone and dialed the contractor in charge of borewell maintenance. A few minutes later, he hung up in frustration telling me that the contractor was “absconding, as usual!” What the AEE meant is that the contractor had failed to honor his responsibilities of regular maintenance check-ups and that, to avoid admonishment by the local government, he was refusing to answer calls. He then turned to the women, assuaged them, accepted their written complaint and laid it on top of a pile of complaints that had already come in that day. I spoke informally to the women and discovered that some number of them usually came to the municipal office at least once a week. Several felt that it was better to speak directly with an official—even if it meant being more confrontational—than speaking with helpdesk personnel. When the women finally left his room, the AEE told me that he received at least 20 such group-initiated complaints a day—which amounts to about 400 complaints a month. None of these complaints got lodged in the complaint database so carefully designed under Nirmala Nagara.

There are a few key findings that can be drawn from this case. The first is that there are multiple channels through which complaints are voiced. More often than not, informal channels are more reliable than formal ones like the PGR (thus disputing the World Bank’s claim that the “long” route of accountability is less desirable than the “short” one). People that are hardest hit by infrastructure deficiencies and that need urgent redress of their problems find it more effective to complain in groups to someone whom they feel is directly responsible. Many poor households use their elected councilors as channels through which to make their complaints heard in instances where elected representatives are recognized for their efficacy. Several lower middle class and middle class households have joined forces with the Democratic Youth Federation of India, a cadre-based organization of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), who, in Bommanahalli have formed a civic welfare organization to channel citizen complaints to authorities and stage protests when necessary. The PGR system simply did not take account of or record these alternative channels.

Second, even in instances where complaints were channeled through the helpdesk, the fundamental problem of contractor accountability still was not being addressed. As shown in the map of institutional relationships, the most crucial connection for citizens is the last link with the

contracted technicians (e.g. the “valve man”, the “borewell maintenance man”, etc), who have weak institutional relationships with their local government supervisors. Without this relationship, no amount of technologies to ease the complaint process will deliver better services. Such nuanced analysis is fundamentally missing from claims by international agencies and domestic reform proponents for increasing accountability through the “short” route.

Third, upon examining the complaints that came in through the PGR database, I found several complaints about the lack of borewell and tanker water. Several had paid connections charges for the Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project, but were not being given any information about the delays, timeline for completion, etc. The complaints reflect that the residents are not aware of the jurisdictional boundaries between the local government and the utility, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), who is in charge of implementing the new Cauvery water project. For instance, two complaints that were in the PGR database were as follows:

*“For the past 2 years, we are drinking borewell water which is found to be very hard water. When will we get Cauvery water connection? (April 4, 2007, Resident from Ward 12)”*

*Though pipelines has been laid earlier [for Cauvery water], drinking water is not coming yet. Please look into this (March 24, 2007, Resident from Ward 24).*

These complaints are directed at local government, but the local government actually has its hands tied when it comes to “Cauvery water” (i.e. the GBWASP) because it is not the implementing agency for the project as mentioned earlier. In fact, intergovernmental tension between bureaucrats and technocrats working for the parastatal utility, BWSSB, and administrators in the local government is apparent because of the lack of information flow about the project from one agency to the other. The efficacy of the PGR system as an interface between government and citizens over crucial issues (e.g. how their money has been spent in a new project and when the water will flow in the pipes) is thus thwarted because of fundamental gap in accountability relationships. I discuss these problems further in the next case.

## **2. The Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project**

My second case study is the Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project (GBWASP), a mega-project framed within the larger imagination of global cities and urban modernization in India. In this case, I discuss the effects of the project’s primary mode of financing: capital contributions from “beneficiaries” that intend to transform them into “stakeholders.” The up-front fee structure embedded in this 24x7 piped water project significantly alters historic trends of state-supported household water supply from groundwater sources in Bangalore’s peripheral localities. I argue that the strategy of making citizens pay for a service that has historically been regarded as a nearly free public service has led to differentiated forms of interaction with and stances vis-à-vis the state, ranging from resistance and protest to endorsement and alliance. I show, however, that citizens who have paid their share of the project’s budget through connection charges are still very far from being “stakeholders” in the project. This is because the project’s conception and rhetoric is fundamentally at odds with the messy and politicized reality of water provision in Bangalore, where real estate and other powerful interests are so inextricably tied to water allocation, and accountability of parastatal institutions still remains fundamentally low.

The project aims to expand piped water connections from the Cauvery River (already the primary source of water for the core urban areas, but not for most peripheral areas) to 1.2 million people living on the periphery of the city. The original date for water delivery (2006) was pushed back to

2012 primarily because: a) there were unforeseen delays in the laying of the pipelines due to multiple miscalculations that did not match the rapid growth of the periphery and b) water once allocated to the periphery was re-allocated to certain core areas with higher land values and high-end apartment complexes and technology parks, thus greatly frustrating people who have already paid for water.

A flurry of international attention is behind GBWASP: USAID worked out the details of the pooled financing model (*i.e.* financing from across public and private sources and geographical areas), the World Bank conducted a demand and willingness to pay assessment and provided a loan for the sanitation component, and the International Finance Corporation served as “transaction advisor” for private sector participation. In addition to this, a number of consultants and credit rating agencies are involved. Although implementation and ownership of the project lies with the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), debt repayment must be borne by Bruhath Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), the Greater Bangalore City Corporation.

The project’s stated rationale in the World Bank’s demand assessment study is as follows:

*Earlier studies have highlighted that the quality of water supply services in most of the urban areas of Karnataka state are very poor with unsatisfactory and discontinuous supply being the routine rather than the exception...The poor service quality is due to a number of inter-related factors including a lack of accountability, user charges falling short of operational costs, consumer perception that water is a free good, chronic lack of sector investment, complicated system of subsidies, lack of a regulatory framework, etc....The conversion to a continuous and pressurized supply of water is essential if cities are to realize their full economic potential and raise their quality of life for all their citizens to an acceptable level (World Bank 2005: 1).*

As in the Nirmala Nagara case, the problem of water supply is described in such a way as to make market-oriented reforms involving specific governmental calculations and instruments (in this case, pricing) a logical *necessity*. And, as in the previous case, the citizen (or the user/consumer in this case) emerges as the obvious starting point for reforms.

Similar to the case of public grievance redressal, the purpose of managing the interface between citizen and service provider is to develop a responsible, compliant citizenry and an accountable, disciplined local government. Two quotes from the minutes of the steering committee meeting (comprising senior bureaucrats, municipal council presidents, and utility representatives) on GBWASP reveal this intention:

*The Committee was informed that it was necessary to monitor the reform process of the ULBs in order to **ensure discipline** and improvement in their financial status so that the liabilities incurred in the project [GBWASP] were serviced effectively (GoK 2003).*

*[The Committee] felt that the BCC should also be collected on a time bound basis to ensure smooth implementation of the project, and for this purpose it was necessary to fix a cut off date beyond which a penalty would have to be levied in order to **enforce compliance** (ibid).*

As Mosse and Lewis (2005) find, the language of discipline is intrinsic to new global regimes of good governance. However, this discipline does not flow strictly from international financial institutions to borrower governments, nor from states to citizens in any sort of teleological one-way relationship. Rather, it is *within* communities of aid workers (bureaucrats, consultants, etc)

that “technologies of monitoring and surveillance...are negotiated (2005: 17).” My research takes this analysis a step further by showing that supra levels of government (e.g. KUIDFC, the Urban Development Department) also employ technologies of rule to discipline subordinate levels of government (e.g. local government or elected council in Bommanahalli), but also end up incapacitating them to make decisions on their own or to respond to citizen questions and grievances. This process is antithetical to the ideas of urban decentralization so highly upheld by reform proponents, in which powers and responsibilities are supposed to be devolved to local government. In this sense, then, and as others before me have argued, GBWASP is a project that throws up many contradictions in governance, especially in that it “centralizes decision-making and control, but decentralizes debt burdens (CASUMM 2006: 2).”

The project is financed from a range of sources: municipal bonds, state government grants, international and market-financed loans, and, as stated above, beneficiary capital contributions which account for approximately 30% of the total budget<sup>6</sup>. The connection fee structure underwent three revisions due to counseling by World Bank experts (World Bank 2005) and criticisms by pro-poor alliances (Personal Interview 2007) (see **Table 1** below).

**Table 1. Connection charges under GBWASP**

	CHARGES PER PROPERTY SIZE (Rs)			
	600 ft <sup>2</sup>	600-1200 ft <sup>2</sup>	1200-2400 ft <sup>2</sup>	>2400 ft <sup>2</sup>
Residential	2,500 (now waived)	5000	10,000	15,000
Commercial	5,000	10,000	20,000	Rs 8/ ft <sup>2</sup>
Penalty per month starting March 31, 2005.	50 (now waived)	100	200	300

Source: (GoK 2005)

Based on an analysis of over 400 receipts for payment for GBWASP and secondary data collection from the local municipal office and the consultants in charge of implementing this project, I arrived at the following: Several citizens across 33 wards in Bommanahalli have paid for water thus surpassing the overall target for collection. But some wards (19, 23, and 2 newly added wards) have paid far in excess of others, and these will not be the first wards to get water because of: a) engineering and hydrological constraints and b) water originally promised was reallocated as mentioned above. In the opening of this paper, I quoted a senior official who claims that beneficiary contributions are intended to “make citizens—or beneficiaries—also stakeholders in this project, so that ultimately, they could also be brought in in matters of administration of service.” But the fact is that the political question of *who* gets water *when* trumps any intention to build stakeholderhood in the project via the World Bank’s “short route” of beneficiary fee calculations. In other words, putting policies in place for what could be termed “client power” has, in this case, not helped citizens in making BWSSB, or this project, more accountable.

Second, through interviews with residents and elected representatives, I wanted to uncover how citizens perceived the project, the state, and their obligations to bear part of the financial burden

<sup>6</sup> During the early phase of the project, Janaagraha was brought in as an NGO partner to implement its Participatory Local Capital Area Expenditure (PLACE) model. At the time (2005), Janaagraha was responsible for making sure project targets were reached by doing outreach, awareness raising and campaigning in neighborhoods. However, soon after the inception of PLACE, Janaagraha pulled out on grounds of it not being pro-poor enough. Other activists and the KUIDFC say that Janaagraha came up against too much resistance from grassroots organizations.

(twice in fact—not only in terms of the BCC but also the loan that they will have to pay back through taxes). I found that middle class residents living in “layouts” (plotted developments) on the periphery have different notions of responsibility towards the state and responsibility towards being good citizens. Some of these residents, through self-help resident welfare associations, have raised funds for ward works and have usually been rewarded by local government and utilities with specific infrastructure requests (roads, street lighting, etc). RWAs and the local government thus seem to share a mutually beneficial relationship in Bommanahalli. Consider the two quotes below:

*Our association tried to convince people to pay the BCC. We told them about the penalty. This is our street, our drainage, our water. Shouldn't we at least be willing to give money for that?” –RWA, Mico Layout*

*We told citizens about GBWASP. Whoever can pay should pay, otherwise the project won't start. But now if the water doesn't come in December, we will be blamed. We can't take responsibility for the government's delay!” –RWA, JP Nagar*

Contrary to the assertion of *not* wanting to take responsibility for government's delay, the fact is that many residents *are* looking to their RWAs for answers about the project. These middle class organizations hence take on a custodial role on behalf of the state of ensuring neighborhood welfare and project implementation. In some sense, they are acting as the reform proponents would have wanted—as responsible, disciplined citizens who feel a sense of ownership over their infrastructure.

The poor and lower middleclass, on the other hand, who have always been suspicious of new charges slapped on them by the government, have demonstrated the most resistance to paying penalties that were designed to discipline them. Ironically, this resistance has been articulated by invoking liberal, consumer rights-type of arguments. The quotes below are from one resident and an ex-councilor who is respected for his work for the poor:

*We will pay only when they give connections. Why should we pay when there is no water? – Resident, Ward 10*

*Already more than 50% have paid. But why, without giving water, they are collecting fine? Every month there is a penalty. This is foolishness. It's okay: supply the water, then only put a penalty. Many poor have not paid. Imagine what their penalty is?!” –Ex-Councilor, Ward 10.*

The notion of not paying until the water actually flows through the pipes, or at the very least, until a physical connection is given, actually redirects the citizen-as-consumer strategy back at the state and at neoliberal actors.

Finally, I found that even though the connection fee for poor households (living on under 600 sq ft) of property has been waived, several in that category have paid hefty fees and fines (averaging Rs 1,400). This suggests that the pro-poor policy has not been implemented and is still only on paper. In addition to this, no slum households have signed up for the project yet. Bommanahalli has five slums with an average population of 500 households each. In these areas, there is an acute need for drinking water. GBWASP, once conceived of as an investment for the peri-urban poor, has in reality not served this population yet.

## V. Conclusion

Bangalore will add several millions to its population—particularly to its peripheral areas—over the next decade. Its participation in the global economy is creating an unprecedented demand for connectivity and premium living and work spaces. Communities of experts have identified large-scale investments in infrastructure and disciplinary reforms to bring Bangalore on par with other global cities. At the core, these strategies aim to change the relationship between governed subjects and the governing through logics of the market and technological interfaces in order to achieve desirable benchmarks of “good” governance. Institutionalized citizen engagement through computerized grievance redressal and beneficiary capital contributions—argued to increase public accountability—is the primary mode that reform proponents attempt to reconfigure the relationship with the state.

Across the two cases studied, the paper finds that accountability seldom arises from citizen engagement at such superficial levels. This is because key institutional relationships in the functioning of local government (contractor  $\leftrightarrow$  local government in the case of Nirmala Nagara and parastatal utility  $\leftrightarrow$  local government in the case of GBWASP) are not altered through techno-managerial reforms. The attempt to overlay depoliticized reform strategies on what, in reality, is a highly politically negotiated process (i.e. the delivery of water and sanitation) results in a different and heightened set of tensions between citizens and the state. Informal modes of interaction with the state—as through groups visits to the AEE’s office—are found to be more effective than formal routes, challenging the World Bank’s “framework” for service provision. The political question of *who* gets water *when* trumps any intention to build stakeholdership in the project through rational beneficiary fee calculations. Moreover, technologies of rule find appeal among certain constituents like resident welfare associations whose invention and reinvention are premised on self-regulation and discipline. Conversely, as in the case of GBWASP, some poor and their representatives use the language of consumer rights to resist conforming to the very technologies that are used to control them. Thus, this research finds that reforms reproduce varied subjectivities of urban citizenship and modalities of engaging with the state that continue to be divided along class and income lines.

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