THE CHALLENGE OF URBAN GROWTH
TO INDIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

P. R. Nayak

Since independence, the mode of life, problems, and aims of the Indian people have been undergoing radical changes. Of these, none probably is more important than the transition from a laissez-faire and largely agricultural economy to planned industrialization and accelerated urban growth. These two are in a sense symbolic of increasing national maturity. But much that is unpleasing is also happening.

At the best of times, our cities were a mixture of magnificence and squalor, of palaces and slums, of great opportunity and deep despondency. Recent urban growth, however, has created problems of an unprecedented character, and their impact has been felt most by the recent migrants, sucked from a poor but undefiled countryside into the crazy pattern of the cities. Housing is deplorably short. Slums spring up all around. Even clean areas become run-down through overcrowding. Water supply and drainage are inadequate. Other vital municipal services, such as education and medical relief, prove unequal to the demand and deteriorate in quality. Milk and vegetables become scarce and costly. Above all, the speed with which the urban areas grow, overflowing their boundaries and forming sprawling agglomerations of buildings and people, makes the tasks of city governments truly formidable.

We shall first examine the structure and resources of the governmental apparatus which has to undertake these tasks, and then move to a discussion of the way in which the challenge is being met.

The Structure and Resources of Local Government

Present Forms of Local Government

The main forms of local government in the urban areas are municipal committees and municipal corporations. Municipal committees, which have been established in all towns and in some cities, follow closely the English system of local government. All authority is vested in the elected council and its committees, though perhaps the president of the council has a role superior in character to that of his English counterpart. The permanent officials act as advisers in the making of policy and administrative decisions. They also execute such decisions, subject to the control and supervision of the elected body. All officers are appointed and removable by the council. Latterly, some changes have been taking place. The constitution of state-wide cadres of municipal executive officers has been adopted at some places to give the officials a greater measure of independence in presenting advice, exercising delegated powers, and executing policy decisions.

Municipal corporations have been set up in the larger cities, the earliest of them over seventy years ago. Their functions are generally wider and their powers of taxation larger than those of the municipal committees. They also enjoy a high degree of autonomy. A special feature of their organization is the separation of executive from deliberative or policy-making functions. The former are entrusted to a commissioner or chief executive officer, appointed by the state government for a term of years, and exercising powers or discharging functions prescribed under the municipal statute. The deliberative or policy-making wing of the corporation is the elected council; there are also a number of statutory committees composed of elected members with defined powers. The mayor, who is elected by the council, and the chairmen of committees regulate the conduct of meetings and generally act as the spokesmen of the respective bodies.

This system, it will be noticed, is very different from the English pattern of local government. It owes its origin to the ideas of Sir Pherozshah Mehta, who may be regarded as the father of the city government of Bombay. When a law was under consideration in the late 19th century for the municipal government of Bombay, he said:

The municipal council is not to administer and govern for which it is radically unfit, but has to fulfill its proper function to watch and control the executive Government, to throw the light of publicity on all its acts, to compel a full exposition and justification of all of them; and if the men who com-

pose the executive abuse their trust or fulfill it in a manner which conflicts with the deliberate sense of the people, to expel them from office.[1]

The vesting of executive authority in a municipal council, in his opinion,

would have been to substitute in the place of the responsible executive officer, a heterogeneous body of men equally powerful, men incapable and difficult of being controlled and with their responsibility so attenuated by division and sub-division, as to render them practically and really entirely irresponsible . . . It would be a retrogressive step, plunging the municipality into a gulf of mismanagement, insufficiency and jobbery such as the wildest rumours have not dreamed of . . . The only safe and efficient way of disposing of the executive authority is to vest it in a single responsible officer controlled by a representative assembly. Town councils with executive powers would only prove centres of inefficiency and jobbery." [2]

Despite a great deal of argument over the alleged unsuitability of such a statutory executive for the present democratization of institutions in the country, the system has been gaining increasing adherence; and more and more cities are being patterned at the local government level on the corporation form of administration. With the crystallization of political parties during recent years, the political cleavage that has become common in local governments threatens to make the administration of executive functions by a council degenerate into a "spoils system." A detached executive, capable of executing policies prescribed by the legislature and by the council without fear or favor, is considered to have great merit.

It must not be assumed that the executive can or does function in an irresponsible or unresponsive manner. He must operate within the framework of the policies laid down and the funds sanctioned by the council. Even in spheres which can be considered statutorily within his purview, it is not easy for the executive to ignore the wishes of the council. The council has the right to demand his removal by a majority of five eighths or two thirds of the members, and the appointing government is then bound to withdraw him. In these circumstances, and because of the good sense and restraint that have prevailed on both sides, cases of conflict have been rare.

Recent changes in local government structure—namely, the increasing resort to the corporation form of organization for the bigger cities, and the constitution of state cadres of municipal

---

[1] *The Bombay Municipal Reform Question, 1871.* [Pamphlet.]
[2] *Ibid.*

executive officers—indicate a policy shift of considerable importance. They appear to be dictated partly by the complexity of governing large cities. Urban administration has become today an extremely arduous task; and the part-time duty rendered by elected councilors is perhaps unequal to that task. A recent study by the *Economist,* of London, of the present situation in the U.K. has highlighted the weaknesses that are developing even in that cradle of local government. Government is, after all, a continual experiment in the art of promoting the well-being of the people. Good government, it has been said, is no substitute for self-government. But the latter, too, aims at the general weal, and our administrative forms must, in a changing situation, be adapted so as to promote these aims, rather than merely subserve purely theoretical concepts.

The argument over the right organization of local government in the larger cities is, in a sense, related to the stresses and strains generated by growing city populations. A heterogeneous, impressionable, and, at times, immature electorate has been called upon to exercise its franchise in a new-found atmosphere of considerable political activity, and in the cities the sheet anchor of traditionalism is often missing or weakened. In the result, political rather than civic considerations have dominated the arena of local government. Controversy over the organization of linguistic states and over Chinese aggression against India have, in Bombay and Delhi, created political tensions within the council and affected stability and smooth functioning. Different sections of the population with group or individual problems have appealed to party platforms, rather than to the good sense of the elected council. A tendency, therefore, to do and say things that are politically popular, rather than intrinsically good for the city, has emerged. It may affect slum clearance or the redevelopment of an area, for example, as either is likely to lead to the shifting and loss of valued voting strength. Tension and instability both contribute to create uncertainty of decision and to delay and aggravate problems that demand urgent attention.

Two or three other features which detract from sound local-government organization may be mentioned. Legislation for securing the long-term planning of city growth is halting and inadequate, where it exists. Moreover, the application of such existing laws has, in practice, been of negligible proportions. A paucity of qualified planning personnel has been one factor responsible for this; there have not been enough town planners to study the problems of even the principal cities. A second difficulty has been the financial stringency which renders any plans that may be drawn up ex-

tremely difficult of fulfillment. The plans themselves, when drawn up, are not based on properly conceived standards of need, and it is soon found that the gaps that are filled are overtaken by the developing urban situation in a short space of time. The necessity for well-conceived town-planning legislation of a uniform character has only lately been recognized; its enactment is still awaited in many parts of the country. Facilities for the training of town planners are slowly being developed, but until their value is fully understood, and their utilization rendered possible through compulsive legislation, not a great deal will be accomplished.

In both these fields, excellent work has lately been done in Delhi. Comprehensive legislation was enacted over two years ago covering the preparation of a master plan, the establishment of standards of services, and the preservation of the planning process as a continuing one. This has, however, highlighted another age-old problem in the cities, viz., the multiplicity of local government agencies. Improvement trusts operate over a common geographical area with municipal bodies; cantonment boards control small pockets under the occupation of the defense services; service agencies, such as gas or electricity utilities, transport undertakings, water and sewage boards, create a yet further confusing pattern; and the older and newer parts of some cities are governed by different municipalities. With the emergence of planning as a pronounced feature of city governments, a planning agency, working apart from the ordinary government of civic affairs, is a recent addition to the multiplicity of local government bodies. In Delhi, until about two years ago, there were eleven local bodies; three statutory boards controlling electricity, transport, and water supply and sewage disposal; and a Development Authority. After the formation of the Delhi Municipal Corporation, two years ago, there are still three local bodies and a Development Authority. Greater Bombay has now moved to a unified local government, but greater Calcutta still has a multiplicity of municipalities, an Improvement Trust, and separate public utility undertakings. Where the growth of cities makes artificial barriers of administrative control utterly unrealistic, the perpetuation of multiple agencies creates one more problem for the planner, the executor, and the administrator.

THE FINANCES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The remedying of urban problems has been rendered difficult by the pace of urbanization and the paucity of resources. Certain basic problems are common to all city governments today in the matter of their finances, namely (1) population growth, (2)

higher price levels and the consequent increase in the recurring cost of rendering municipal services, (3) the need for developmental plans for the augmentation of existing municipal utilities, and (4) a revenue base which does not correspond with factors causing rising expenditure.

The main source of municipal revenue is, of course, the taxes on property, including taxes for services such as water supply, drainage, and fire protection. An octroi or terminal tax on the entry of goods, taxes on vehicles and animals, a tax on professions, trades, and callings, revenues from markets and slaughterhouses, and licensing fees are other conventional sources. Latterly, taxes on theaters and advertisements have also been authorized. In one isolated instance (Delhi) a local government has been given the power to tax sales of immovable property and of electricity, though ordinarily these are sources of revenue exclusively reserved for the benefit of state governments. Table 1 gives an indication of the growth of revenues of certain cities:

TABLE 1

REVENUES OF FIVE LARGE CITIES, 1920–1959
(In millions of rupees)

City	1920–21	1925–26	1940–41	1955–56	1958–59
Greater Calcutta......	15.56	21.87	25.74	65.98 (1956–57)	...
Greater Bombay......	20.02	30.66	35.66	58.29	110.67[a]
Delhi...............	2.27	2.16	4.22	28.48	62.10[a]
Madras.............	5.24	6.06	8.34	29.38	32.86
Ahmedabad........	1.72	2.93	5.15	...	35.63 (1959–60)

[a] The figures for Bombay and Delhi for 1958–59 relate to greatly enlarged jurisdictions.

The increase has clearly not been commensurate with the growth of population and the increase in the cost of rendering service. Administrative and materials costs have gone up by three to four times between 1940–41 and the present day.

The situation may be looked at from another angle. Below are given figures, in rupees, of the incidence of taxation per head of population in three cities:

	Madras	Bombay	Calcutta
1918–19..............	5.02	15.71	10.15
1940–41..............	7.60	19.84	18.31
1947–48.............	10.94	26.15	11.46
1955–56.............	13.16	35.94	16.53

As new housing has not kept pace with the growth of population, and property values have been kept depressed through rent control and other measures, property taxes, which are the largest single source of revenue, have not yielded a corresponding increase in revenue. In the result, the gap between need and performance in the matter of services has become wider. A study of expenditure on certain items of civic services during a recent period is given in Table 2.

TABLE 2

EXPENDITURE FOR CERTAIN CIVIC SERVICES IN FIVE LARGE CITIES
(In millions of rupees)

Civic service	Madras		Bombay		Delhi		Poona		Bangalore	
	1952–1953	1956–1957	1950–1951	1955–1956	1948–1949	1956–1957	1951–1952	1956–1957	1956–1957	1958–1959
Public instruction..	3.44	4.56	7.80	9.97	1.54	4.60	1.5	2.01	0.19	0.50
Water supply and drainage........	3.44	5.25	...	...	1.65	3.95	0.75	1.10	1.32	3.22
Public works, roads, etc........	4.00	5.14	95.00	76.80	2.04	6.73	0.55	1.78	0.61	1.40
Medical relief and public health....	1.81	2.08	8.92	12.97	4.50	7.63	0.97	1.63	1.64	3.31

While an attempt is being made to increase services, this has been done, in the main, at some sacrifice of quality, as in the case of education or medical relief. The creation of new institutions does not, on the whole, show a corresponding rise. For example, a recent survey by the Reserve Bank of India on investment trends in local governments showed that between 1951–52 and 1956–57, borrowing for capital development in 54 local authorities amounted to only Rs. 380 millions, against their total income in 1956–57 of about Rs. 990 millions.

The necessity for increased financial assistance to local governments for their growing responsibilities has been emphasized by a number of committees and commissions. Little, however, has been done, and local governments are perhaps themselves partly responsible. Examples of underutilized local resources are not uncommon. Politically, a greater exploitation of available sources of income is considered to be a hazardous venture. But the failure to mobilize local resources on the scale needed and practicable itself hinders the accretion of fresh sources of income. Indeed, as has sometimes happened, it may encourage an encroachment on essentially local sources for state or national purposes. The maximum

exploitation of available sources of income is, therefore, a pre-requisite for the strengthening of local finances. The problem of mobilization involves a determination of the level of necessary taxation. This is, no doubt, a political decision, but it must proceed on the basis that the services rendered must be paid for, in one form or another. Though varying capacities may be recognized, the idea of something for nothing must be discounted. The humblest must make a contribution, however small.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

It has been said that success in local government depends on an enlightened and alert electorate, a conscientious body of councilors, an efficient municipal civil service, and adequate finance. To these, a fifth may be added: a program of action that is sufficiently far-seeing and dynamic. These requisites can be arranged somewhat differently under the heads of public participation, structure and organization, finances, and the ingredients of the physical program.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Some of the present weakness or ineffectiveness of local government results from the apathy of the ordinary citizen. As cities grow, people who by reason of their prominence in business or the professions might be expected to play an important role in civic affairs seem to drop out under the stress of political forces. Local government is then left mainly to political workers whose value and effectiveness in this field may not always be equal to the need. In that situation, the importance of alertness on the part of the common man becomes heightened. In fact, however, his apathy is noticeable at election time, when those who turn up to exercise their franchise rarely exceed 40 or 50 per cent of the electorate; it is evident, also, in the attitude towards Town Hall when things happen that are against good sense or public interest. Small pressure groups are able, through an agitational approach, to extort concessions that may actually be harmful to the community. There is a general attitude of helplessness or indifference to the defects and defaults in municipal government, save when they affect an individual personally. The electorate seems to have become a factor of diminishing importance in local government even in some Western countries, where it may be that a generally high level of local services leaves little scope or need for enlightened public participation or intervention; but where conditions are very different the reasons for apathy must be sought elsewhere. In India the heterogeneous character of the urban community seems partly re-

sponsible. Human relations in the cities are largely anonymous, superficial, and transitory. Here is the paradox of close physical contact and distant social relationship. In some measure, the handicapped city dweller has not perhaps himself perceived his disadvantage. His interest in the city has often been ephemeral. City dwelling is a temporary acquisitive phase. He has to concentrate on earning and laying aside as much as possible for the eventual and certain return to his real home. One need not also rule out the effect of the fatalistic outlook our philosophy of life has engendered: social and economic disadvantage is one's destined lot, and calm acquiescence is virtue.

This heterogeneity and this mental attitude have to be overcome if we want to create a keen and alert community that can both participate in local government affairs and apply correctives where necessary. The importance of social organization as a means to the integration of the people into an organized community needs no emphasis. As populations grow arithmetically, the need for a well-coördinated organization that weaves the individual into the group life increases in geometrical progression.

It is in this situation that a program of urban community development has lately been initiated in some Indian cities. The movement does not aim at urban development, which is a task for the local administration, but seeks to create an urban community on the basis of awareness and self-help. The object is not to take social service to the underprivileged, but to evoke in them a desire for and confidence in the success of self-reliance. It is both educational and organizational in character. It is educational in so far as the aim is to promote attitudes and habits that are conducive to social and economic improvement. It is organizational because it seeks to bring people together to pursue common objectives by requiring, where necessary, the reorientation of existing institutions and the creation of new ones to make self-help fully effective. The movement depends for its success on the emergence and training of local leaders, who may help to infuse into city administration a new influence that will be constructive, self-reliant, and attuned to the needs and feelings of the community.

A network of local organizations, neighborhood units, and citizens' forums must be complementary to an extended and improved program of public relations activity. The ordinary man knows too little about the work and the plans of his council. In the midst of a hard and drab existence there is little to arouse his enthusiasm. Public relations work should, therefore, impart information, bring color, present the good points of the city, explain current difficulties, and say what one may look forward to. An

exhibition of civic activities that was organized in Bombay four or five years ago was a tremendous success, having been witnessed by over a million people. One felt that the citizen was proud of what his city had done, looked forward to the promised future, and felt that Bombay was indeed *Urbs prima in India.*

The first battle of urbanization must thus be fought on the emotional and intellectual plane. The initial phase of the urban community-development project in Delhi has been encouraging, and there is reason to hope that the physical tasks of city improvement may, as a result, be rendered easier as time passes.

ADEQUACY OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

The present structure of local government has been discussed in an earlier section. We need a machinery that ensures democratic functioning and, at the same time, delivers the goods speedily and efficiently. The time factor is important. In the midst of much dissatisfaction at prevailing conditions, the time for action is fast running out in our cities. Our policies and administration forms must, therefore, be such as to catch up rapidly with the situation.

Several aspects of the subject of local government organization have been under study in many states since the country gained independence. In the main, however, thinking has been confined to the organization of deliberative and executive functions, and to the finances of local bodies. On the first point, it has been generally agreed that deliberative and executive functions should be separated and that a reasonable degree of independence should be given to the executive in day-to-day working. This view has been increasingly adopted in recent legislation governing the administration of the larger cities. There was, no doubt, a protest by mayors gathered in conference in 1958 against this trend as being undemocratic and bureaucratic-minded, but a meeting of Indian Local Self-Government ministers in October, 1959, reiterated the intrinsic soundness of the policy. Even as regards the smaller towns and cities, the progressive formation of state cadres of municipal executive officers is indicative of the same policy approach. One may, therefore, treat this subject as one of settled policy, at least for the time being, though controversy is unlikely to abate completely.

Our ideas are not as clear, however, on certain other aspects of good organization. There has latterly been a considerable degree of uncertainty and hesitancy over the functions of local government. In the context of national planning, conflicting and alternating trends of centralization or of excessive decentralization have been noticed in spheres such as education, public health, and medical relief. For a while, local responsibility tended to be diluted

by compartmentalized agencies or centralized control. The apparent conflict between central and state interests in developmental plans, on the one hand, and the needs of democratic decentralization, on the other, has not so far been rationally resolved. For example, there is considerable discussion today about the provision of public housing. Should this be the responsibility of local governments, or is there need for the creation of separate autonomous agencies, such as housing boards and development authorities? Where funds are provided by an outside agency, it may be natural to think in terms of increasing control over the local authority or the substitution of a separate agency.

A new element in this debate has been the proper organization of city planning. Some cities, Delhi notably, have preferred a separate planning agency, only tenuously connected with the local government authorities. How far an independent planning body can really be an effective instrument for serving the continuously changing needs of a city is arguable. The dynamism of planning and the effects of implementation (by local governments) of the several ingredients of a predetermined plan seem to point to the desirability of integrating the planning process with that of implementation. With the emphasis now being laid on long-term planning, this question is naturally evoking a great deal of discussion. The concept of a separate organization that will control local governments as regards either the desired ingredients of a plan or of its execution does not appear to be sound. Planning should spring from the people themselves. If the responsibility is placed on the local authority, it is probable that the plan that emerges will prove more acceptable and easier of implementation.

In these circumstances, an urgent reëxamination of the functions of local governments is necessary. Should they be comprehensive in character, or should we work more in the direction of independent, specialized agencies that will look after certain sectors of conventionally accepted civic activity? Can some of the advantages claimed for the latter arrangement be secured by making such specialized functions the concern of autonomous committees of the council itself? If local governments are to fulfill their proper role in the estimation of the people and, in turn, enthuse the community, the need today appears to be to amplify and enlarge their functions. Certain directive principles may have to be prescribed for development and service activity in the interests of broad national conformity, but the main task of framing policy and implementation is better left to the local authority itself.

A second, somewhat unexplored aspect of local government organization is the size of the elected body. The tendency in India

has been towards large councils. Bombay's corporation has 131 elected members. Delhi has 80 councilors elected by adult franchise and 6 aldermen indirectly elected. The law also provides for an enlargement of the council by 20 more directly elected councilors. These numbers may appear small in comparison with the hundreds that constitute city administrations in some of the Communist countries. But the method of policy formulation and administration there is very different. The council itself meets three or four times in a year and concerns itself with perhaps half a dozen issues of a major character, and day-to-day working is controlled by a small group of twenty or twenty-five elected from the larger council. A more suitable pattern for our way of work would be the one prevailing in the Western democracies. By those standards, our councils tend to be too large, and largeness has imposed certain handicaps in operation. A tendency towards greater fissiparousness, the accentuation of political or group activity, and greater difficulty in agreeing over policy or administration are often noticeable. Many thoughtful individuals have been advocating the constitution of numerically smaller councils. For example, in Bombay, for some time, the idea has been under consideration that the size of the elected council should be reduced to around seventy-five. A compromise between efficient organization, on the one hand, and opportunities on as wide a scale as possible for participation in governmental activity, on the other, has to be struck. Possibly the answer lies in a reasonably small council and a large number of ward or constituency committees that will help to promote and look after local needs better. The creation of such ward committees is envisaged in some recent legislation, for example that relating to the Delhi Municipal Corporation; but there has been a strange reluctance to create these bodies.

In this connection, it has been asked whether the right organization for Indian local government is not one based on the two-tier system that prevails in London. But already some dissatisfaction is being voiced at the disadvantages of that system. On any rational basis, it is difficult to see how development in the spheres of education or water supply or communications can work well if handled on narrow geographical lines. Indeed, some of the current problems in Indian cities have arisen from a multiplicity of local self-government agencies. The urban scene presents such profound disparities that a process of improving and equalizing conditions can be undertaken only by one agency that can redistribute resources according to need. In any case, the paucity of technical, professional, and administrative personnel makes this course inescapable at present.

A third aspect of the question concerns the manner in which municipal functions should be discharged. Should the power of decision remain substantially with the council as a whole, or should the committee system be resorted to in an increasing measure? It is true that certain spheres of civic activity, such as those in the nature of public utilities, are today being entrusted to more or less autonomous committees of the council. There appears, however, to be greater scope for functioning through the committee system. It would ensure quicker decision; the heat and controversy that generally attend public sittings of the council would be avoided; and calm and intelligent discussion would be facilitated. The council could then function as essentially a ratifying body and, besides, help to throw on general civic problems the glare of public debate.

The foregoing issues require careful study, and the same may be said for the performance of local governments in recent times and the fixation of broad priorities and programs for urban areas.

Finally, as regards organization, one may commend the recent example of Bombay in setting up a City Coördination Council. This was one of the recommendations of a Study Group on Greater Bombay, which observed that the lack of coördination among different public authorities concerned with city development was largely responsible for the prevailing unhappy state of affairs. These authorities own land, build houses, regulate trade and industry, and perform several functions that affect the life of the citizen. But because of their position, they are not easily amenable to control of a statutory character. The Coördination Council, which seeks to fill the gap in part, has representatives of the state government, the Bombay Municipal Corporation, the Port Trust, the railways, the Bombay Housing Board, and various control and state government departments. The fact that the council has the Chief Minister of Bombay at its head not only invests it with a special authority, but also holds promise of prompt and decisive action.

THE FINANCIAL PROBLEM

The great impediment to the speedy solution of urban problems has been, and continues to be, the acute financial stringency of local governments. The Taxation Enquiry Commission which made the most recent survey of this situation observed that "the total inadequacy of municipal finance for the work that remains to be undertaken in many cities and towns in respect of important items such as water supply, drainage and slum clearance has been brought

pointedly to our notice by many State Governments." [3] The Commission made various recommendations for the allocation of specified tax sources to local governments, for the sharing of certain taxes between local and state governments, and for a rational and definite basis of grants-in-aid. Many of these recommendations have remained on paper, for their implementation would have exposed state and central finances to weaknesses that might have proved detrimental to the Five Year Plans. As the Taxation Enquiry Commission itself said, "any proposal to augment local revenue by merely transferring a share of State taxes only accentuates the problem at the State level." [4]

The crux of the situation is that the financial requirements of local governments have not been taken into account in the formulation of the Five Year Plans to any significant extent. It was only during the Second Five Year Plan that some allocation of funds was made for programs of water supply and slum clearance. A part of the provision for water supply and the whole of that for slum clearance were to be made available to municipal governments. The funds allocated, however, were negligible and were essentially in the nature of token provisions. The financial needs of city governments for education, health and medical relief, communications, and housing were not considered. These needs will never be adequately provided for if local governments are left to make their own arrangements. There seems to be no escape from a total planning that takes the needs of urban areas also into account. It is futile to hope for rapid urban improvement unless resources of a commensurate order are found. Major local governments in the country were able to raise only Rs. 38 crores by way of borrowing in a recent six-year period. A very modest requirement of local governments today is probably Rs. 100 crores per year. A conference of city governments (Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, and Poona) held in 1954 estimated that the needs of these six cities only during the period of the Second Five Year Plan would be Rs. 125 crores. The Draft Master Plan for Delhi, over a five-year period, envisages a capital outlay of about Rs. 135 crores. The Master Plan for Bombay that was prepared twelve or thirteen years ago then estimated the developmental expenditure at Rs. 125 crores; at present prices, and in the light of new demands, this may be well over Rs. 200 crores now.

Local governments have not the strength to arrange for funds

---

[3] Ministry of Finance, Department of Economic Affairs, Government of India, *Report of the Taxation Enquiry Commission* (1955), I, 31.
[4] *Ibid.*

of this order on their own. The way out is by the inclusion of the developmental needs of cities within the framework of national five-year plans. It is not enough to cater to these needs in compartments, e.g., for housing or water supply or slum clearance, as has been the practice so far. These services cannot be provided in isolation. They must be integrated with the other essential needs of the community, such as schools, roads, hospitals and dispensaries, markets, and playing fields. Otherwise we shall find, as we do in Delhi, brand-new colonies without many of the essential ancillary services.

This is as far as external assistance goes for developmental purposes. A strengthening of revenue resources must go hand-in-hand with the provisions of larger capital services. The municipalization of public utilities, such as city passenger transport and electricity distribution, is being resorted to as one of the means of strengthening local finances, but the process has not gone far enough. Although administrative difficulties stand in the way in the case of the smaller towns and cities, means can be found whereby some monetary benefit may accrue to local governments from these operations of an essentially local character. Beyond this, however, there is the reluctance over the mobilization of resources that has been referred to earlier. Indeed, one sometimes notices alarming trends toward the sacrifice of current revenue resources. Thus, in Delhi during the last year or two, almost Rs. 10 lacs per annum of revenue has been foregone, though the general financial position is far from satisfactory. It cannot be truly said that the level of local government taxation has today even approached the optimum. Local government leaders frequently proclaim that the satiation point is yet a long way off, but they seem unable to resist pressures for sundry reliefs in existing taxes. It has been said that tax concessions and the reluctance to augment resources through further taxation are probably an outcome of the fact that city councils are still dominated by the middle classes. Their attitude is understandable, as the incidence of taxation falls substantially on that class. At the other end, a political section that professes to speak for the poorer classes strenuously urges their total incapacity to bear any taxation whatsoever. We see then a strange demand for free water supply, exemption from obligatory taxes, subsidized housing, and a variety of other monetary benefits. Amateurishness in local governments often tends to jeopardize their financial strength, as the needs of a developing economy are not adequately appreciated or understood. Here lies real danger. Some safeguards today exist, e.g., the power of state governments to enforce reasonable levels of local taxation; but, if we are likely to move

toward a real integration of local government finance with national plan needs, further measures for evoking a matching effort on the part of local governments are clearly necessary. The Taxation Enquiry Commission observed some years ago that a rational and enlarged system of grants-in-aid to local authorities should embody the principle that they exploit their own resources to the extent necessary or indicated from time to time.

THE INGREDIENTS OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM

Many of the present ills of urban areas have resulted from a neglect of the requirements of careful planning. The amelioration of these conditions can, therefore, be achieved only through planned development and redevelopment in a comprehensive manner. The planning process envisages the application of foresight, coördination, and adaptability to public and private improvements and developments. Each new activity is designed to yield its full contribution to the transformation of the community into an increasingly better one. This comprehensive city plan or master plan must be both practical and economically sound; and it must take note of the peculiar and varying conditions, problems, and requirements of each city. A common experience in this matter has, however, been that the process of plan preparation takes too long. Even for cities of modest size a period of two or three years is found necessary; Delhi will have taken five or six years. In cities growing explosively, the plan may, therefore, become outdated or impracticable of fulfillment even before the ink on it is dry. Clearly, the planning process must be quickened, even at some risk of arbitrariness or of a reduction in scope and degree of thoroughness. There have been instances in which town-planning schemes for small sectors of a city have taken more than five or six years to formulate. Much of the present legislation on the subject appears to be based on the needs of a vanished era and an outmoded approach to city growth. A law that obviates inordinate procedural delays is needed.

The most pressing needs to be served by city planning and development are housing and slum clearance. The great paucity of suitable housing in our cities and the rapid growth of slums have been referred to earlier. The slum problem is in reality an integral part of the larger issue of housing. Inadequacy of housing breeds slums, and slums are a blot on a city's housing facilities. The two must not, indeed cannot, be tackled in isolation. For a long time to come, therefore, a sound policy for all public housing should be that it must primarily help to speed the eradication of slums. Different housing authorities today operate without adequate mutual consultation and collaboration, and a good deal of new housing

does not subserve the needs of slum rehousing. The needs of new housing development call for the opening-up of large virgin areas. Coördination of public housebuilding activity will make such opening-up easier, as the pooling of sundry requirements will stretch available resources farther. Here, again, the development of areas must be done with an eye to the achievement of quick results and a careful husbanding of resources—for example, by bringing under use, to the maximum possible extent, vacant lands in already serviced areas. Considerations of economy must not lead to the result that the houses built and the development undertaken become the slums of the near future. Certain optimum housing and developmental standards must be set. Recent thinking would stipulate a two-room tenement, comprising two living rooms, a kitchen, and an independent bath and water closet. Notions about adequate housing standards and of environmental facilities change rapidly in a developing social and economic situation. It is better, therefore, to err on the side of some liberality. Paucity of resources no doubt imposes restraints; but these can take other forms than an undue depression of standards. For example, let our new houses be built to last for a modest duration instead of the sixty to eighty years that conventional forms of building predict. Building costs can also be lowered by modifying overrigid building regulations and by the mass production of components. The latter holds great promise, if we are really on the eve of a big housing program in our cities. The Study Group on Bombay estimates the housing needs of the city at 20,000 new units per year and considers that the target is realizable. In Delhi, too, we need a sustained program of constructing about 20,000 new houses every year by private and public agencies, calling for the development of about 1,500 acres of land per year. This development, in the main, can be undertaken only by public authority, preferably the local government which is the servicing agency. The needs of a long-term program of this nature demand a bold measure of large-scale acquisition of urban lands. In Delhi, therefore, proposals have been formulated for the acquisition of over 30,000 acres by government. As the principal land-owner, the government will be able, first, to ensure orderly development and, secondly, to control speculative and spiraling land prices, which have become a distressing feature of the urban economy. Where land is plentiful, as in Delhi, new housing will principally come in neighborhood units; but a densification of sparsely populated urban areas will also be necessary, and vertical development will become a more common feature.

While concentrating on new housing activity, we must not overlook the need for preserving and improving the older houses in our

cities. A serious attempt to arrest their further decay and disappearance is necessary. This is one aspect of a slum-prevention drive. It requires an urgent survey of all old buildings in our cities. This has lately been undertaken in Bombay. Many such buildings, though structurally sound enough to last for fifteen to twenty years, are deficient in certain important respects, such as size of rooms, light and venilation, sanitary facilities, and water supply. A scheme for securing alterations and improvements in such buildings so as to create desirable living conditions is fully worth while. The preparation of a housing code to regulate these improvements has been undertaken in Bombay. A scheme of subsidizing building-owners as an inducement for the execution of required alterations has also been adopted.

Our slums have to be dealt with through the dual approach of improvement and clearance. The former is, of course, only a short-term measure. It is, nevertheless, valuable, because clearance is a costly and certainly time-consuming process. Slum improvement aims to provide certain basic necessities, such as a piped water supply, adequate sanitary conveniences, conservancy and public health services, and electricity. In tackling the slum problem so far, much more has been done by way of improvement than by clearance. More than 300 slum properties in Delhi have been given basic amenities on these lines. New colonies with basic services laid so as to ensure a decent environment, but providing for the construction of small structures by the people themselves, have been developed. A project for similarly rehousing over 25,000 families in the capital who are now squatting indiscriminately in insanitary clusters of huts is under way.

These are, however, merely steppingstones to a regular program of slum clearance. Resources so far released specifically for clearance are meager, but it is believed that an integrated approach to urban housing will enlarge the success we can achieve in this direction. The prerequisite to any plan for slum clearance is a detailed physical and sociological study of depressed areas. As soon as possible, and even while a survey is in progress, active steps must be taken to educate the people so as to obtain their willing coöperation in any projected clearance scheme. We have not yet acquired sufficient experience of all the personal, social, and economic implications of a large-scale shifting of urban populations. Great care is, therefore, necessary in the preparation and execution of our first schemes, so that the movement as a whole does not get a psychological setback. The preferable course, therefore, is to take up small pilot projects in different types of slum areas. The redevelopment of clearance areas through private owners of land has not

proved fruitful, and the responsibility has had to be borne by public authorities.

After houses, our cities need most more drinking water, better drainage and sewerage facilities, and adequate schools, hospitals, dispensaries, and recreational facilities. Of these, the first two are especially urgent, if the needed housing program is to be rendered possible at all. Both involve very large capital outlays, and in some cases new sources of water supply appear problematical. The possibilities of small waterworks based on tube wells are being studied, especially for the townships or neighborhood units that are foreseen. Possibilities of reducing sewage-treatment cost through the use of lagoons are also under study; the Public Health Engineering Institute has been conducting experiments on their adoption for small communities in Indian conditions. In both cases, the objectives are quicker results and a reduction in development costs.

Reasonable standards for the provision of schools, hospitals, and dispensaries have been set under the Five Year Plans for the urban and rural areas. Some of the most striking of our achievements in recent years are to be found in these fields. Still, substantial gaps exist in regard to these and recreational facilities in the older, congested parts of our cities, where naturally the need is greatest. The quick development of new housing facilities alone can bring success nearer in these matters, for the rehousing of populations and the redevelopment of the older areas will release land for parks and open spaces and for schools and dispensaries. From all angles, therefore, a bold program of house construction holds the key to the urban situation.

CONCLUSIONS

The civic problems of our cities are undoubtedly complex and grave, but they are all essentially soluble. A planned approach and an appropriate machinery can resolve them. Even finance is not beyond the range of practical politics. The present time is a very opportune, indeed crucial, moment for crystallizing our attitude toward urban growth and concerting suitable measures for city improvement. With the Third Five Year Plan in the offing, we are on the eve of a large new program of industrialization. The objective of lessening the pressure on already strained urban areas must be promoted through a dispersal of industrial activity and an intensified program of rural civic development. In a sense, the challenge to urban growth must, in part, be met by a retreat from the urbanization process. Natural growth will, of course, always be there, and some accession of population is inevitable—but must we postulate the inexorable march of urbanization in the way we have seen it in

recent years? Must Bombay grow to be a city of 7.5 millions in ten years? Must Delhi's population rise from the present 2.5 millions to nearly 5.5 millions in two decades? One would like to answer these questions in the negative; if our policies and actions are wise and far-seeing, that answer might well turn out to be right. There are instances in Europe of the stabilization of city size and population, despite intensive industrialization. In a country of the size of India, with a tremendous hinterland full of possibilities, scope for the pursuit of a similar aim is truly great.

It is encouraging that good beginnings have been made on the new tasks of local government in Bombay and Delhi, to give two examples. The Bombay plan envisages, apart from the conventional programs of a local authority, the shifting of nonconformity industries, the establishment of numerous industrial estates and satellite townships, the relocation of government offices away from centers essentially suited for trade and commerce, the linking of the island with the mainland at new points through rail-*cum*-road bridges across creeks, and the reclamation of large areas of marshy land. The Study Group on Greater Bombay has expressed the definite view that if the tasks ahead can be tackled with determination, distinct improvements can be achieved within two years and that, within a further similar period, the problems of the city would have been set well on the way to a lasting solution. Bombay has always given a lead to the country in ideas and execution. The population is more civic-minded and alert; the leadership has been virile and clear-thinking. It is, therefore, reasonable to hope that a place endowed with natural beauty, with its hills and creeks and rivers, with a reasonable developed environment of man's own making, will be further embellished by a process of orderly redevelopment, by the eradication of slums and congestion, and by a release from city tensions.

Delhi also is chalking out an imaginative program of activity for the next two decades. One may not agree with all that Delhi's Master Plan foresees. There are those who dislike the planned growth of the city to a population of 5.5 millions by 1981. There is, however, great intrinsic merit and sociological justification for the proposed development and redevelopment of Greater Delhi on the basis of a rationalized distribution of population. There are large areas of urban Delhi today in which the density of population is as low as 5 to 10 per acre; in others, the figure goes up to over 1,000. The Draft Master Plan envisages a redistribution of population densities so as to create more acceptable living conditions all round. For example, the eventual population of the walled city that Shah Jehan built is to be reduced from nearly 1,000,000 to

380,000. New Delhi will increase from about 250,000 to 750,000. Shahdara, a suburb with a population of about 150,000 today, will be intensively developed into a complete new city of 700,000. The Draft Plan proposes far-reaching changes in the system of communications and sets optimum standards for ancillary civic services such as school buildings, playing fields, community centers, dispensaries, and markets. It has attempted a realistic assessment of developmental cost and of the resources that can and should be mobilized. The Delhi Master Plan is the first really comprehensive attempt to draw up a picture of long-term development. Its implementation is a great challenge both to the Government of India, which must bear the brunt of the financial burden, and to the Delhi Municipal Corporation, which is destined to be the principal agency for the execution of the Plan. The prospect would be exciting at any time, but it is infinitely more so to an infant corporation in whose hands much of the future happiness of the Delhi citizen reposes. Despite inevitable teething troubles, the work done in the last two years in overcoming psychological obstacles and in paving the way for long-term improvements encourages the firm belief that we can and will build a Delhi that is in all respects a worthy capital for a great and prosperous democracy.