

Community development approach to clean water supply in Rajkot

Providing access to services for inhabitants of developing cities is always going to be difficult, especially in a city like Rajkot which is one of the fastest developing cities in the world situated at the centre of the Saurashtra region in Gujarat, India, and has a population that has grown from just 36,000 at the end of the 19th century to more than one million in 2001. Like many urban areas Rajkot has experienced rapid economic and population growth with ever increasing demands on the municipal infrastructure.



▲ Rajkot is one of the fastest growing cities in the world and is experiencing challenges supplying services to its expanding population.

Provision of a clean, regular water supply was an issue that Rajkot decided was of paramount importance, not only for drinking, but also for cleaning and sanitation. Two wards in Rajkot were identified as being suitable for pilot water supply projects, and building on Leicester's expertise, it was decided to involve the community throughout the consultation and pilot stages – an approach rarely used in local service delivery in India

Leicester is the biggest city in the East Midlands region of the UK with a population of 280,000, including 30,000 people with family connections to Rajkot and Gujarat, and is experiencing a change in population that will make it the first city in Europe where no one ethnic group is in a majority. Leicester City Council has been at the forefront of development of community ownership and consultation in the UK and was recently designated one of 14 new demonstration areas on community assets being transferred to the community by the UK government. It has received Beacon Status – a recognition of expertise - for its approach to community cohesion and its plans for greater contact between communities to maximise crosscultural contact.



< Andy Keeling, Leicester's Corporate Director for Regeneration and Culture, Alpana Mitra (left), Deputy Commissioner Paresch P. Vyas (centre) and colleagues from Rajkot discuss departmental responsibility.

Solutions to the service delivery problems they faced

Involving the community Leicester welcomed the opportunity to work with colleagues in Rajkot to find local sustainable solutions to the problems and suggested a community development approach that would involve local people in service development and delivery. RMC wanted to explore private sector solutions to increase access to water, as shortages meant that water supplied by the municipality was available for just 20 minutes per day per household. During the project, construction of a cross-state water pipeline to Rajkot began which, although ensuring consistent regional supply, did not begin to address the issue of regularity and duration of supply to individual households.

Discussions between the two partner authorities highlighted the conflicting pressures between delivery and governance of resources including balancing the central requirements of the City of Rajkot with the particular needs of the specific local ward areas. A Good Practice Scheme project was set up in July 2004, with LCC drawing on its wide experience in service delivery, sustainable solutions and community engagement.

Consultation forums were established in the two pilot wards where citizens could openly discuss the problems and difficulties they faced regarding water supply, and what changes in service delivery would most

benefit their needs. By doing this, service providers gained a better idea of local needs, and were therefore better able to direct and implement services.

On the basis of these consultations, new water services were put into place in the two wards. A further consultation was then conducted to gauge the effect of these measures on the lives of the people living in the wards. This process ensured that once water services are in place they are meeting citizen's needs, and are having a positive effect on their quality of life, and overall poverty reduction measures.

More effective and sustainable services

The project brought about a fundamental change in the mindset of the local authority in India. Whereas it had started from the position that the private sector was the only source of effective development for providing local services, it came to recognise that, by involving the community, services can be better targeted, more effective, and sustainable.

According to a local NGO, Jatan Samarthan Kendra, in Rajkot this was the first time that services had been developed based on direct community consultation. There is now a strong feeling that this method of community consultation can be adapted and copied in other areas of service delivery across the region.

In Leicester, the benefits ranged from a greater

engagement with the local authority, with, for example, members in the community trust becoming elected local councillors, cross community engagement such as dissemination meetings, through to a greater understanding of its twin City of Rajkot.

Staff development

Staff development has been an important outcome for both partners. For colleagues from Rajkot coming to Leicester, it was important that they felt comfortable, safe, as well as being part of a successful and informative exchange. As the Commissioner said, it was important for her that a range of colleagues from Rajkot were exposed to different ways of working so that best practice could be considered for adaptation to meet local conditions.

For Leicester, it was a chance for officers to learn more about the historical connections of many people who live in the city, and to be challenged by debate and discussions from colleagues in the Commonwealth and thereby breakdown and reconsider previously held assumptions.

Clr. Ross Willmott, Leader of Leicester City Council, has underlined the importance of the CLGF Good Practice Scheme Project with Rajkot by calling for its dissemination to all relevant elected members and officers from across the local authority. This will help the council to maintain and develop the strong connections and understanding between Leicester and Rajkot.



Daxa Pancholi, Head of Crime & Community Safety and Mark Mizzen on a site visit with colleagues from Rajkot to a water plant.



New ways of working

During Leicester's first visit to Rajkot, cultural and operational differences became apparent. However during the project, a trust was built up that has been kept throughout the four year relationship. According to project manager Mark Mizzen, this trust is essential when discussing problems within both local authorities and is built on regular communications between those involved in the project.

It was recognised that no one local government service is run in isolation, and therefore the connections with related services, elected members both in ruling groups and in opposition, officers, users and the media were vital. Workshops were held on Leicester's approach to local authority provision, from which Rajkot was able to observe service provision and related issues in a relatively well-developed and resourced local government. For the Commissioner of Rajkot, it was important that officers from a cross-section of the Municipal Corporation were exposed to new ways of working. For Leicester it was important to ensure that local communities were engaged and would directly benefit from the project.

Both authorities sought links to national initiatives for greater impact. Leicester had links to national poverty reduction schemes where parts of the Abbey Ward area of the city had been identified as super-output areas through a range of indices of deprivation as part of

the planning and prioritisation of public services and regeneration programmes. In Rajkot, there were a number of initiatives already supported by the Government of India and the Municipal Corporation, one being the development of `social enterprise housing`. Colleagues from Rajkot visited Leicester to see their approach to community development by shadowing the work of the Social Economy Development Officer (SEDO). They were able to see a cross-section of service areas in the authority including support services, regeneration, and development and control. They were able to observe the SEDO's work with elected Members and local communities, including local communities and partners involved in public and private partnerships such as a local Member of Parliament, the sub-regional regeneration agency and independent support organisations involved with social economic development. These connections are anchored on Leicester City Council's commitment to social economic development, an area that is strongly supported by the UK Government.

During this time, the key officer from Rajkot was Mrs. Alpana Mitra, the technical assistant to the Municipal Commissioner. As well as advising the Commissioner she worked with the Deputy Commissioner for Planning and the City Engineer, who have vital roles in ensuring the infrastructure for services are in place to meet economic and social needs. To support the objective of promoting women in management, Leicester's Head of

Crime and Community Safety was retained in the project so that she could continue to provide her expertise with the RMC's technical assistant to the Commissioner. Progress was measured through observation, communication between the two local authorities, topics covered by workshops, engagement of officers, community groups and residents, including feedback from the independent NGO in Rajkot, questionnaires, reports, press coverage, political feedback against the Leicester's International Development Strategy and feedback from CLGF.

During the project there were significant changes in the administrations of both local authorities. In Rajkot three Municipal Commissioners were in place over the duration of the project. In Leicester, there were three different controlling administrations. However, the consistent engagement in the project of two experienced officers with the continuing commitment to the Good Practice Scheme agreement by the new administrations and Commissioners enabled a smooth transition in each case.



< Mitesh Joshi, Additional Assistant Engineer, with water testing equipment in Rajkot.

A model of service delivery

Though the RMC had not been popular with many people in the city prior to the project and, in the negotiating period for the GPS, there had been a particularly difficult period of criticism in the media on issues such as waste management, the attitude of the public was beginning to change after being involved in the service development and seeing the challenges and constraints as well as being able to shape the services as they want them.

Alpana Mitra confirmed that “since the CLGF project, officers from Rajkot local government have gone to the public to listen to their problems directly. This has made a difference and created a new impression in the minds of the people who used to think that the officers from the local government do not work. We were successful in convincing the people that some of their problems can be solved within the community itself. This has been assisted by a decentralisation of services during the project period, with an increase on civic facilities and easier access to local residents.”

There have also been wider impacts: during the project Rajkot was successful in receiving recognition under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), the first time that the Government of India

had embarked on such a large-scale intervention, where only a select few cities have benefited. This has brought in funds for the City and Regional State Government on the condition that the city brings in a percentage of funding from the private sector.

Rajkot has now developed the only profitable centralised solid waste management system in Asia, a model for other cities in India. To this end, the partnership work of Leicester, Rajkot with others such as Mumbai could become a Beacon for the Commonwealth.

Conclusion

The links between Leicester and Rajkot are now well established, and will continue to develop over time. Relationships between staff from each authority have opened channels through which an exchange of information, good practice and knowledge can flow both ways, improving the knowledge they have of each other’s working practices and circumstances, and enhancing their own ways of working.

The project is part of the UK Government Department for International Development (DFID)-funded Commonwealth Local Government Good Practice Scheme, which has been managed by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, over the past nine years. Local authorities have been working together on a range of practical activities aimed at improving the quality, and impact on people’s lives, of local government services in South Africa, India, Ghana and Jamaica.