Evolution of Partnerships for Urban Poverty Alleviation

Devyani Mani, UNCRD

INTRODUCTION
Partnerships for urban poverty alleviation between nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and local government began emerging in the 1980s. The failure of public agencies to meet the needs of the poor, and the success of certain self-help projects resulted in NGOs being seen as alternatives to, or even substitutes for, the public agencies.1 Urban poverty alleviation programmes initiated by central governments and funded by bilateral and multilateral agencies during this period called for the participation of NGOs and CBOs. This occurred within the prevailing environment of structural adjustment and reforms towards free markets and a reduction in the role of the state to increase productivity and efficiency.2 This paper reviews the evolution of partnerships between government and civil society for urban poverty alleviation from the 1980s—the first section includes a literature review to identify key concerns and the framework of the study, while the second section reviews the experience of two “best practices” in the cities of Ahmedabad in India and Cebu in the Philippines.3

LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAMEWORK
In the 1980s, NGOs advocated for the poor and were increasingly contracted by bilateral and multilateral agencies and local governments to organize poor communities, deliver services, and provide access to microcredit. It was soon realized that while NGOs were more responsive to the poor, their efforts were not easily replicable or sustainable due to the inadequate technical capacity and rivalries. In practice, local and central governments continued to dominate the development of programmes and projects, while NGOs were recruited for specific project implementation tasks that the government could not undertake. Meanwhile, local governments were seen as unresponsive and inefficient in the 1980s. This was aggravated by their lack of autonomy and inadequate capacity to mobilize financial resources for development.4

The emphasis was therefore on transferring service delivery to NGOs and the private sector for wider access and greater efficiency. It was recommended that the role of local governments in service delivery change from that of a “provider” to a “facilitator”. In the early 1990s, there was renewed interest in the performance of local governments through decentralization and the approval of the Local Agenda 21 stipulating that local authorities undertake a consultative process with their populations to reach a consensus on sustainable service delivery and environmental protection. Local governments needed to readjust and build capacity for the new tasks of coordinating with NGOs and the private sector.5

By the end of the 1990s, although participation increased between local governments and civil society, it did not always result in “real political choice or greater inclusivity” of the poor in urban governance.6 Mitlin and Thompson question the extent to which people-centred development initiatives provide inputs into higher structures for planning and policymaking.7 The concerns today are the operational challenges facing NGOs, their ability to deal with the political processes of urban governance, accountability in local governments as well as NGOs, and the scaling up of projects into citywide programmes.8
Experience indicates that success is more likely when civil society complements rather than substitutes local government to ensure a greater role for the former in policy-making and improved coordination skills and accountability in the latter. With the proliferation of NGOs greater accountability is now demanded. Evaluations of NGO performance in poverty alleviation indicate that they are not as effective as they are assumed to be in reaching the poorest of the poor, providing cost-effective solutions, and ensuring sustainability.9

There is an emerging literature analysing partnerships between civil society and the government for urban poverty alleviation. Devas explores the relationships among the various actors in urban governance, their roles in poverty alleviation, and the patterns of decision making determined by the objectives and influence of each actor in a partnership for service delivery.10 The discussion deals primarily with improving service delivery while briefly addressing the manner in which political processes include the interests of the poor in policy-making. The Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment (LIFE) Programme that covers sixty cities in twelve countries identifies the constraints to implementing participatory local governance and incorporation of the poor into policy-making at the city levels as initiating dialogue among diverse groups with differing interests and dealing with the complex interaction of political, social, legal, and cultural variables.11 The LIFE Programme documents various stages in the participatory relationship as confrontation, compromise, cooperation, and alliance and identifies some factors critical to each stage.

Discussions on participatory urban governance in the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UN-Habitat) focus on practical aspects of service delivery rather than “...political conflicts, patronage, and the formation of community norms for resource distribution,” which receives some attention from academics and practitioners involved in participatory urban governance and alternative development.12

Three broad stages may be identified in the evolution of partnerships--initiation, consolidation, and complementarity. In the initiation stage, the various actors are brought together in partnerships to address a certain concern. They may be brought together because of factors such as prerequisites in external donor-funded projects, decentralization and governance reform initiated by central governments, or as a result of social networks. Once the partnerships are established, attempts at consolidation take place--that is, establishing working relationships, scaling-up of small projects into larger programmes, and introducing rules and regulations to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each partner as well as ensuring equitable distribution of benefits and risks. These benefits could be material benefits from a project as well as earning credit for the successful completion of a task.

Certain partners may be more vulnerable to financial and political risks within a partnership and if this is not addressed, the partnership can break down. When roles are not clearly defined and communication breaks down, the partnership may move away from consolidation and may have to be reinitiated. The third stage, complementarity, may be reached once projects have been successfully undertaken through partnerships and successful scaling up is underway. In a complementary partnership, each partner has the voice and negotiating capacity in the policy- and decision-making processes. Instead of complementarity, cooption may take place, when some partners are dominant and apply leverage to force their interests. Partnerships do not progress consequentially from the first stage to the next. Backwards and forwards movement between stages may be experienced. There can also be overlaps with some elements of each stage being demonstrated in a partnership.
Initiation Of Partnerships For Poverty Alleviation

In the early 1980s, the participation of NGOs and CBOs received an impetus with the move towards decentralization and “people-centered development” and the emergence of successful NGO initiatives in service delivery. It was felt that NGO participation would increase responsiveness of programmes and, in turn, their sustainability. Correspondingly, governments were asked to facilitate the activities of NGOs and CBOs through changes in regulatory structures and management style. The participatory model was also encouraged to overcome financial shortages for service delivery and was sometimes criticized as “…little more than a cost cutting strategy aimed at placing greater responsibilities onto local communities while reducing external support”.

Consolidation Of Partnerships

Partnerships between governmental and nongovernmental agencies to address urban poverty are constrained by: (a) the coordination of several government agencies active in various sectors of development with overlaps and conflicts in jurisdictions and tasks; and (b) the integration of the interests and efforts of NGOs with different philosophies and varying levels of professionalism and dedication to the poor to have an impact beyond individual projects. Creating reciprocities where one agency undertakes tasks for which the other does not have the capacity has often resulted in partnerships that are more effective--for example, where NGOs undertake community organization of the poor in a situation where the local government has no prior experience in this task.

Consolidation is challenged by differences in working styles, flows of information between agencies, and transparency in dealings. Long bureaucratic procedures in government frustrate NGOs used to greater flexibility, while the lack of measures for accountability in NGOs constrain the functioning of the government agency involved in the partnership. Poor coordination among various agencies is often the result of inadequate information flows resulting in delays and flawed decision making. Conflict occurs where there is limited or no transparency in the tasks undertaken and the decisions made by each partner.

Changes are required in the working styles of different types of agencies to work with each other and in the mindset of the target groups of the programmes, from beneficiaries receiving handouts to participants with specific roles and responsibilities. Capacity has to be built in all the agencies to enable them to undertake their new roles and an institutional environment has to be created to support the roles of each agency such that the benefits are maximized and distributed evenly and the risks are minimized and distributed equitably.

The strengths of NGOs lie in their ability to reach the poor and organize them to participate in development activities, their low operation costs, their capacity for innovation and ability to adapt to changing situations, and their strong negotiation skills. Therefore, several bilateral and multilateral agencies initiated development programmes with NGOs as the principal implementers. While NGOs were successful in undertaking individual projects, their activities were too small to be scaled upon a citywide or regionwide basis. As their role had been primarily that of advocacy and small-scale service delivery, many NGOs lacked the capacity to undertake a greater number and wider variety of tasks related to programme strategies for poverty alleviation.

Similarly, CBOs lack technical and organizational skills, financial resources, and the productive capacity even though they were engaged in self-help activities. There are often inadequate frameworks to address the wide variety of initiatives of CBOs and large
transaction costs are borne by all the partners in adjusting to a partnership in explaining concepts and negotiations. There is a need to identify the benefits, costs, and risks for the various partners to improve the management process. At the same time, where several local governments have conceded some of their tasks to NGOs and CBOs, they lack the capacity to undertake their “facilitating” role, which requires skills in assigning tasks, negotiation, and conflict management.  

Following the Local Agenda 21 in 1992, several countries have developed a regulatory framework to include NGOs and CBOs in the tasks of urban governance including service delivery. NGOs and CBOs however remain more active in service delivery than in planning and policy-making at the city level. The UNCHS (Habitat) and the Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements (CITYNET) have prepared a source book on participatory approaches for local government officials that focuses on shelter and human settlement improvement. Methodologies for community participation such as Community Action Planning (CAP) in Sri Lanka have been found effective but continue to be project and sector-specific.

Other problems to be overcome are those of credibility and accountability. In many developing countries, local governments have to bear the burden of low credibility due to long-term poor performance and endemic corruption. NGOs have often substituted government in providing services to traditionally deprived areas that are neglected by government. Some poor communities receive services when local politicians address their needs, but usually their needs are addressed only during election periods to garner their votes. Meanwhile, only NGOs with a proven record of accomplishment in urban poverty alleviation are considered credible by government and donor agencies. Instances of opportunistic NGOs siphoning off development funds do occur. This lack of credibility delays consolidation of partnerships between civil society and government.

Increased professionalism in governments and NGOs through capacity building improves efficiency, which, in turn, heightens credibility. The successful implementation of projects has a strong demonstration effect in improving credibility. Credibility is closely associated with accountability to the beneficiaries, that is, “downward” accountability. Measures for accountability tend to focus on “upward” accountability to the higher levels of government and to funding agencies. Downward accountability is ideally assured by political representation in the local government and the electoral process.

NGOs have contributed to increasing government accountability to the beneficiaries, but often have few measures for their own accountability to the funding agencies or to the communities they work with. It has been found that NGOs target select beneficiaries among the poor and do not necessarily address the needs of the poorest of the poor. For NGOs working closely with government and dependent on government finance, cooptation is a threat that compromises their accountability to the community. Community participation in the CBOs can weaken over time due to frustration when their needs are not addressed or due to complacency when their immediate needs have been met. The extent to which the poor have advantage in the political process by being organized influences accountability.

**Achieving Complementarity**

Complementarity is defined as “…the interrelationship or the completion or perfection brought about by the interrelationship of one or more units supplementing, being dependent upon, or standing in polar opposition to another unit or other units.” In the context of
partnerships for urban poverty alleviation, complementarity implies that each partner has a voice and control over its contribution to, and the benefits gained from, the partnership with sufficient negotiating capacity and participation in decision-making. This would entail that roles are clearly defined and the partnership is not subject to manipulation or tokenism.¹⁹

Stereotyping of government and NGO roles, for example, seeing government as inefficient and corrupt and NGOs as innovative and effective does not yield results. Tendler finds:²⁰

Evidence from a substantial body of case studies also raises questions about the assumed mirror image of advantages and disadvantages of government and NGOs....Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, these findings add up to a significant body of evidence against the argument that NGOs have a particular purchase on flexible and client-centric behavior, or that NGOs have desirable traits that are the mirror images of the undesirable traits of government. If there are any patterns to be found in this evidence, they run across the public-private divide rather than along it.

Success in citywide programmes has been achieved where government and NGOs have gone beyond their traditional roles to strike complementarities. There are instances of governments being innovative and responsive to the needs of the consumers and of NGOs participating in local politics. Sanyal has argued that for NGOs to be more effective in bringing the disadvantaged groups into the mainstream, they have to consider: (a) establishing relationships with political parties and participating in the electoral process and policy-making; and (b) generating resources through profit-making activities to reduce dependence on external aid and increase sustainability.²¹

Observers of changes in the NGO role over the last decade have warned against the increased professionalism of NGOs in the attempt to attract external funding as a step away from advocacy. Cooption by governments where NGOs are dependent on government funding has also compromised the NGOs adhering to an agenda for empowering the poor. To ensure a voice, a sufficient critical mass has to be built up by NGOs and CBOs to develop sufficient political advantage. This can be achieved when they have sufficient negotiating skills and can sustain community participation beyond specific issues. Otherwise, the partnership can degenerate into cooption or hostility. When community participation is linked with specific issues, for which decisions are made from outside, the organization cannot be sustained.²²

The Case Studies

Ahmedabad in India and Cebu City in the Philippines are selected as case studies being forerunners in forging partnerships that have increased access to services, including land and housing; created employment opportunities; and incorporated the poor into the mainstream. The nature of partnerships between government and civil society differs in the two cities as a result of differing regimes, social systems, and economic conditions. The study is based on a review of the literature on the two cities and structured conversations with select local government officials, and representatives from select NGOs, CBOs, and the academe in the two cities during 1999 and 2000.

Ahmedabad, India

Ahmedabad, located in the western state of Gujarat is the seventh largest metropolis in India. The city is emerging as a financial centre with a diversified economy including engineering
and chemical industries and a rapidly expanding service sector. The Ahmedabad Urban Agglomeration (AUA) covers an area of 310 km² and a population estimated at 4.67 million in 2001. A recent survey found that 42 per cent of the population lives in slums, of which 1.2 million people or 300,000 households live in marginal areas. There are a total of 2,412 slum pockets in Ahmedabad of which 83 per cent are on private land, 10 per cent are on Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) land, and 7 per cent are on state government land. A large proportion of the inhabitants have been resident in the slums for one or two generations. The slums are concentrated in the eastern and southern parts of the city near the textile mills and industrial establishments.23

The percentage of households in the lowest-income group (earning below Rs 25,000 per annum) declined from 35 percent in 1985 to 11 percent in 1995. This change took place in spite of the sharp decline in the city’s principal textile industry that had a severe impact on the city’s resources and levels of services but resulted in an expansion of the informal sector (IS) that is estimated to employ about 60 per cent of the city’s work force. In the last decade, there have been improvements in health services with the implementation of the Urban Basic Services Programme (UBSP) and other poverty alleviation programmes. However, unsanitary conditions and disease continue to prevail due to inadequate water supply and sanitation services. The constraints in providing these services have been low land tenure security, lack of space, inadequate financial resources, and the location of slums and squatter settlements in low-lying areas and on marginal land (such as in abandoned quarries, on riverbeds, and riverbanks) that are difficult and expensive to service with piped networks.24

Partnerships between the NGOs, CBOs, and local government were initiated in the early 1980s during the World Bank-funded Slum Upgradation Programme (SUP) and other centrally-initiated programmes for the poor such as Urban Community Development (UCD), Environmental Improvement for Urban Slums (EIUS), and Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY). To implement these programmes, technical cells have been created in AMC at the zonal level along with an autonomous consultancy organization at the city level. In the early 1980s, the NGOs were predominantly involved in advocacy and provision of basic services such as health and education for the poor. The efforts were small scale and a number of NGOs were involved in the several slums in the city. The NGOs were of different sizes, with varying ideologies and sources of funding.

The poor developed patron-client relationships with politicians who wooed them during election time and neglected them thereafter. As the inhabitants of a slum area are not homogeneous but are composed of a variety of people of different castes and religions, the patrons of each subcommunity would be different. Politicians would favour their electorate with common caste and kinship ties resulting in wide variations in service levels even within a slum. These conditions resulted in frequent confrontations between NGOs, who were also concerned with social reform, and the local government. Demonstrations would be organized by the NGOs at the city hall and strategic locations in the city to demand services for the poor.

However, following the initiation of the partnerships between the NGOs and the administrative wing of AMC for the municipal jurisdiction, the two types of agencies began adjusting to each other’s working styles. The SUP initiated in 1984 was undertaken citywide and covered the slums in existence before 1975. While this programme had limited success, the foundation was laid for partnerships between civil society and AMC through the creation of CBOs and the exposure of NGOs and AMC to each other’s working styles.
In 1988, an NGO called VIKAS, one of the principal agencies responsible for the SUP, launched the LINK programme to establish working relationships between the principal stakeholders in urban poverty alleviation such as CBOs, NGOs, local government, academe, private sector organizations, and other concerned individuals. LINK undertook activities in three phases over a decade to create an inventory of CBOs, organize participatory research and training workshops for the urban poor, document activities in the workshops, share findings of workshops with urban poor communities, and generate a dialogue among the stakeholders. These efforts have strengthened the capacity of the CBOs and created the foundation for effective partnerships for urban poverty alleviation. The limited success of the programmes launched in the 1980s was the result of inefficiency in AMC, the scattered efforts of the different NGOs who found it difficult to collaborate given their differences in ideology and approaches to poverty alleviation programmes, and the perception of the poor as beneficiaries rather than as participants in the urban poverty alleviation programmes.

The decline in the city’s economy was a major constraint in alleviating poverty. In the period from 1976 to 1986, the number of textile mills in Ahmedabad declined from eighty-five to fifty-eight, and by 1994, there were only twenty-three textile mills still operating. Nearly 50,000 workers were laid off and sank back into poverty. Industries related to the textile industry also declined leading to further retrenchment of workers and a large increase in the number of the city’s poor. The economic decline resulted in a corresponding decline in AMC’s income, making it difficult to even maintain existing services. This period saw a marked increase in political and economic corruption and organized crime related to business activity, land deals, and building construction. Civil unrest was common at this time leading to communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in 1985, 1986, 1990, and 1992-93 that affected the poor most seriously. There was a sharp decline in the city’s rich legacy of social capital with a loss of trust among heterogeneous communities and consequent demographic movements within the city leading to the formation of ghettos where communities sought security in homogeneity of religion and caste.

From 1994 onwards, new AMC management overhauled the working of the organization. Injecting professionals into the work force changed AMC’s staffing pattern and efficiency. The result was that within two years, the government achieved a high level of credibility that attracted investments and partnerships from the private sector and NGOs in urban development. The change took place in the larger context of the introduction of economic reforms at the national level in 1992, heralding a move to a market economy. In recent years, industrial houses have renewed their interest in the quality of the urban environment out of “enlightened self-interest,” that is, with the intention of improving the city to attract greater investment and enhance local economic development (LED). Recent initiatives for slum upgradation in Ahmedabad see the poor not as beneficiaries but as “clients” for infrastructure and housing projects. The approach to development projects is now “business-like” and the poor mobilize considerable resources towards their own development. This approach ensures that there is reduced condescension towards the poor, whose self-sufficiency has increased and who are being empowered and offered a life of dignity.

The case of the Slum Networking Programme (SNP) or Ahmedabad Parivartan is discussed to illustrate the consolidation of partnerships between the local government, NGOs, CBOs, private sector, and multilateral agencies. Local government serves as a coordinator of the partners with one of the larger NGOs and through a special cell established for the tasks. Ahmedabad Parivartan is the scaling-up of a successful pilot project. The partners are the
local government, a selection of NGOs for the different tasks of community organization, housing, and provision of microcredit, and the CBOs in the slums. The pilot project was conceived with four main partners: the slum community, a private agency -- the Arvind Mills, AMC, and an NGO. The Arvind Mills was responsible for executing the project through a trust called Strategic Help Alliance for Relief of Distressed Areas (SHARDA) while AMC performed the role of the facilitator. The NGO was responsible for community development that included setting up neighbourhood groups, women’s groups, and youth groups, while mobilizing community savings and developing links with the financial sector for access to loans for small businesses, and health and education services.

Community leaders were identified and motivated to involve the community in all stages of planning and implementing the project as partners. The community contributed one-third of the costs of implementing the slum upgradation while AMC and the Arvind Mills each provided a third of the costs. Two-thirds of the community was able to raise the finances on their own and the remaining one-third was provided with access to microcredit. The project was successfully completed in one year without any cost overruns and to the satisfaction of the residents. The success factors were the granting of temporary land tenure (ten years) by AMC, the high credibility of the partners, the access to microcredit, and the active participation of the community in the process.\(^3\)

However, the private company opted out of the partnership at the end of this programme due to differences with AMC in the working styles and decision-making structures. The lack of a clear delineation of roles of each agency, sufficient transparency, and conflict management mechanisms constrained the relationship between AMC and the private company. Moreover, technical personnel of AMC responsible for the project felt “sidelined and ignored”.\(^3\) This project has been scaled up to a citywide project to include eighty-five slum clusters. Select NGOs continue to support the programme and additional support has been obtained from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme — South Asia Region (WSP-SA). AMC is confident of undertaking this programme in spite of the fact that several NGOs have not committed themselves to the partnership due to their conflicting approaches to slum upgrading. The challenges are to adjust the working style of AMC to incorporate more NGO participation and a clearer definition of roles and responsibilities. While AMC now has the credibility, it has yet to develop capacity to adjust to a facilitating role. As the communities are contributing to the cost of the project, their interest is sustained at a high level.

In Ahmedabad, the delineation of roles and responsibilities has yet to be clarified. However, the government, NGOs, and the private sector have shown a high level of innovation in addressing the problems of the urban poor in the city and have transcended their traditional roles to create partnerships, which are still being consolidated. While community participation is high in urban slum upgradation projects, the community structures need to be enhanced further for the setting up of ward-level communities for effective community participation in planning and policymaking at the city level. Community participation needs to be enhanced beyond improvements in the physical environment and needs to be extended for continuation of social reform to address the concerns of exploitation of the weakest and the most vulnerable groups. Co-optation of NGOs is not yet a major issue, as only a few NGOs have established effective partnerships with AMC. AMC, in turn, needs to develop its capacity to be a facilitator of other agencies and to incorporate participatory planning to develop more pro-poor policies. The strength of the partnerships in Ahmedabad is in the reduction in dependence on external finance, which gives greater flexibility to the partners.
Three recent disasters: a flood in July 2000, the devastating earthquake of January 2001, and the communal riots of 2002, have kept public attention sharply focused on the need for transparency and accountability in the local government agencies as well as control of the corruption endemic in the city’s construction activity. Action being taken in the form of litigation against local government agencies and private builders has made apparent the conflicts between the various groups in the city with some calling for accountability, transparency, efficiency, and professionalism in the local government agencies and private sector; some being apprehensive of political and economic vengeance of powerful and corrupt entities; some being suspicious about collaborating with disparate class groups; some lacking trust in the leadership; and others disillusioned with the corruption and the impotence of the legal practice. In the last two decades, the breakdown of the city’s social capital is reflected in the resolution of issues through conflict rather than consensus building and the pursuit of private interests regardless of the implications on the public good or compliance with laws. In the present, while rebuilding the city economically after the disasters, it is also essential to focus on building social capital and creating sustainable sociopolitical structures through increasing complementarities between the government, NGOs, private sector, and local communities.

Cebu City

Cebu City, on the island of Cebu, is the capital of Cebu Province as well as of the Central Visayas region. The city has a highly diversified economy, which includes small- and medium-sized industries, an export-processing zone, and a well-developed tourism sector. Metro Cebu, covering an area of 330 km², registered a population of 1.44 million in 1995 within which Cebu City had 662,299 inhabitants. The proportion of the urban poor in the city’s population varies between the City Commission for the Urban Poor (CCUP) estimate of 42 per cent and the National Statistics Office (NSO) estimate of 60 per cent. A survey in 1995 identified 561 slums housing 61,940 families, of which 75 per cent were on private land, 10 per cent were on public land, 1 per cent was on central government land, and 14 per cent were on provincial government land. A large number of the inhabitants continue to be migrants attracted to the city because of its rapid economic growth. The slums are spread throughout the entire city.

In Cebu, there was an initial reduction in poverty during the period of high economic growth between 1988 and 1991 but this trend was reversed following the financial crisis of 1997, when the proportion of population with the lowest income increased from 35.8 per cent (in 1988) to 39.3 per cent in 1997. In fact, the income distribution between the low-income and high-income groups has become further skewed with a sharp increase in the share of the population earning more than P 100,000 per year. Most of the poor are employed in the IS. There have been significant improvements in service delivery during the last decade in health, education, housing, and specific services for women and children. Strategies for the poor focus on provision of basic social services, particularly those of health and education. There are also concerted efforts to provide land tenure security and access to credit for the purchase of land by the poor.

In the 1980s, during the Marcos dictatorship, some church-related organizations became politically active and began to undertake policy advocacy along with their roles in charitable activities for the poor. The role of civil society in urban governance received a major impetus when the people’s movement, the EDSA Revolution, successfully overthrew the Marcos regime in 1986. The 1986 Constitution made it mandatory that “…the state shall encourage
nongovernmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation.” Since then, there has been an explosion of NGOs and people’s organizations (POs) that are involved in a wide range of development issues including urban poverty alleviation.

After the overthrow of the Marcos regime, the political environment encouraged “people power” and the participation of NGOs and CBOs in governance. Politicians who were not sympathetic to the people power movement of that time had limited chances of survival. To make the most of the political environment in Cebu, some NGOs involved in advocacy for the poor decided that this was an opportune time to integrate their concerns into the mainstream. The urban poor constituted nearly two-thirds of the city’s population and, if well organized, could influence the city’s politics, and endorse candidates who would commit themselves to helping the poor when elected. Getting involved in the city’s elections was not an easy decision, as NGOs are inherently apolitical. To underscore the NGO commitment to the poor and their distance from the established political culture, a seven-point agenda was drawn up to express the People’s Program of Governance for Cebu City as well as to ensure that NGOs would not get coopted by the city government and politicized with their involvement in the elections. To make certain that this agenda was understood and respected, the urban poor organized popular rallies and invited the electoral candidates to attend them and explicitly express their support for the urban poor agenda.

Among the candidates, Tomas Osmeña participated in these rallies and decided to address the concerns of the urban poor if elected to office. Osmeña was elected as mayor and created the Cebu City Commission for the Urban Poor (CCUP), an office within the Cebu City Government that would exclusively address the needs of the urban poor in keeping with Clause 2 of the seven-point agenda to which he had committed himself to garner the support of the poor. Through the CCUP, a direct link was established between the local government and the urban poor in policy formulation and programme implementation. This organization was created with the help and management of NGO personnel. To ascertain that cooption would not occur, the NGO staff accepted a salary of P 1 per year only to enable her to sign the payroll of her staff. The CCUP later expanded into the Division for the Welfare of the Urban Poor (DWUP) which forms one of the major sections of the city government. The first programme to be launched with the partnership between government, NGOs, and POs was the UBSP, which is the mainstay of the city’s poverty alleviation strategies.

Partnership between local government, POs, and NGOs was established through major changes in the attitudes, structures, policies, and functioning style of the local government. The NGOs in Cebu were very effective in advocacy and in organizing the urban poor communities by virtue of their credibility and organizational capability. The city government benefited from these attributes of the NGOs by being open and willing to share power. In Cebu, meetings between the coordinating groups and an open-door policy increased the transparency of the programmes and the participation and responsiveness of government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector. The transformation from an “…agency-based, sectoral, vertically administered approach to a city-based, multi-agency, multi-sectoral approach” has taken place. NGO collaboration with the city government began with the activities of the UBSP in the City Health Department. The UBSP includes service delivery, community empowerment, and capacity-building. The UBSP has had a major impact on the urban poor, especially in the fields of health, housing, and livelihood and skills training.

Attitudinal changes have emerged at all levels. The networking has given both GOs and NGOs a chance to overcome mutual prejudices since communication has become more open
and direct. Funds were routed through the NGOs rather than through the mayor. Through the formation of a coalition of NGOs, the Kaabag sa Sugbu, a powerful lobby, whose voice cannot be ignored by the government, has been formed to draw attention to concerns related to women’s issues, drug abuse, socialized housing, environmental concerns, and sustainable watershed management. NGO activities also receive media attention leading to high levels of awareness among the city’s residents and among the urban poor.

The partnerships have resulted in changes in the working styles of both types of organizations and a shift from confrontation to collaboration on key issues for the urban poor. The Local Government Code of 1991 encourages GO-NGO-PO collaboration for better urban management. The initiatives to assist the urban poor have been institutionalized with the passage of several ordinances for the Republic Act of 1979. These ensure that there are no demolitions, evictions are monitored, and on-site improvements or relocations are provided for the urban poor communities. Constraints being faced are related to legal land tenure in some of the urban poor settlements and the lack of adequate technical skills in the NGOs as they have shifted from advocacy and community organization to providing professional services to the urban poor communities.

The local government has realized that participation of the beneficiaries in intervention programmes leads to their successful implementation. Recognizing its limited resources, the local government has used the NGOs as a cost-effective means of social service delivery. While local government provides the logistics, the technical support, and the necessary policy legislation, the NGOs manage the projects and deliver social services to the target. In the process, the NGOs have acquired a working knowledge of the government. Moreover, an important impact is the increased awareness among the beneficiaries themselves with their improved understanding of laws and regulations enabling them to form community organizations to demand their rights from local governments.

In Cebu, roles of the government and civil society are still conventional and so are the sources of project finance. Therefore, even though effective partnerships have been developed for project implementation, consultation on key issues concerning the poor, and development of appropriate regulatory frameworks, the dependence for finance constrains further development of the partnership to achieve complementarity. Cooptation of NGOs working closely with the government takes place due to the NGO dependence on external finance. Networks of NGOs have been established and a code of ethics has been developed but implementation has to be pragmatic and follow the political realities of resource allocation. The participation of civil society in the political process has given the partnership additional strength and allowed NGOs and CBOs to bargain for the urban poor. While the city development committee (CDC) has been instituted for joint decision making and planning for the city, it is not working in practice.

In Cebu, weakening of community organization is observed which is occurring for two reasons: the community is disappointed when it does not receive expected improvements or the community becomes complacent after it receives land and services. This is because community organization has been tied to specific issues rather than sustained for the long-term development of the community. Also, the community does not raise its own finance for environmental upgradation, which would increase its interest in sustaining the organization.
CONCLUSIONS

Some key elements in building partnerships between civil society and local governments for urban poverty alleviation are:

- Advocacy by NGOs for the poor;
- Consultation with the community and mobilization for participation in political process;
- Dialogue among diverse groups;
- NGO networks and creation of common agenda;
- Changes in working styles in government and NGOs;
- Frameworks for joint policymaking and planning;
- Innovation in generating resources in local governments and NGOs; and
- Innovation in traditional roles of local government and NGOs

The comparison of the two cities provides rich lessons for understanding the evolution of partnerships for urban poverty alleviation through stages of initiation, consolidation, and complementarity. In Ahmedabad and Cebu City, poverty levels are influenced by the patterns of local economic growth as well as delivery of services to the poor through collaboration between poor communities, NGOs, and the local government. In Ahmedabad, poverty alleviation strategies have focused on provision of basic services as well as creation of employment opportunities, whereas, in Cebu, the focus has been more on the provision of basic services, land, and housing.

At the initiation stage, leadership and openness of different kinds of agencies are important; during consolidation delineation of roles and responsibilities, credibility, accountability, and transparency are important. Changes in traditional patron-client relationships can be achieved partly through innovations in finance generation. Formation of networks and participation in the political processes is important to integrate the urban poor into the mainstream. Complementarity is being achieved in Ahmedabad because of innovation in roles of government and NGOs, and in local resource generation. In Cebu City, the move towards complementarity is the result of regulatory frameworks and participation of the poor in the political process. Capacity building is essential for improving negotiating skills between agencies and increasing professionalism.

Initiating partnerships between NGOs and government agencies was not easy in either city given that their relationship was adversarial with NGOs drawing attention to shortcomings in government performance and advocating for the poor who were neglected by the system. NGOs perceived government agencies as inefficient, elitist, and corrupt while government agencies perceived NGOs as upstarts in development. In Ahmedabad, the partnerships were initiated because of fiscal and environmental crises and the launching of programmes with external funding that demanded NGO and CBO participation. In Cebu City, the partnerships are an outcome of political upheaval and the need to integrate people power in governance. Commitment to an agenda in Cebu ensured that the political process was manipulated to the benefit of the poor.

In Ahmedabad, consolidation could be achieved only with an increase in credibility of the local government through professionalization, transparency, and a decrease in corruption. Further, programmes are being successfully implemented due to the integration of service delivery with income generation and access to microcredit. Innovation in raising finances locally has also contributed to sustained community participation and reduction in dependence on external sources. However, the local government has yet to adapt to being a
facilitator through improved coordination and negotiation skills and increased transparency in decision making.

In Cebu City, consolidation is being achieved through the establishment of effective institutional structures and adjustments of NGOs and government to each other’s working styles. Programmes are constrained by the lack of income-generating activities, local resource generation, and provision of credit facilities. The partnerships in Ahmedabad are moving towards complementarity by innovation in roles of government and NGOs and in local finance generation. The NGOs have yet to form effective networks to create a lobby as in Cebu. In Cebu, complementarity is increasing because of the regulatory frameworks and the formation of NGO networks. However, the lack of innovation in raising local finances keeps civil society dependent on finances from external sources and therefore gives them less freedom.

NOTES

2 United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (Habitat) and Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements (CITYNET), Partnership for Local Action (Bangkok, 1997).
3 This study was undertaken as part of a United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) project on Human Security and Urban Environmental Management during 2000-2001.
7 Diana Mitlin and John Thompson, “Participatory Approaches in Urban Areas: Strengthening Civil Society or Reinforcing Status Quo?” Environment and Urbanization 7 (April 1995):231-50.
10 Devas, “Who Runs Cities?”
16 UN-Habitat and CITYNET, *Partnership for Local Action*.
17 Abhijit Datta, “Institutional Aspects of Urban Governance” in Om Prakash Mathur, ed., *India: The Challenge of Urban Governance* (New Delhi: National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, 1999). Datta distinguishes between “upward” and “local” accountability, where the former is accountability to higher levels of government and funding agencies and the latter or “downward” accountability is accountability to the programme/project beneficiaries or in the case of the local government, accountability to the residents in their jurisdiction.
30 Dutta, “Partnerships in Urban Development.”
32 Spodek, “Crisis and Response.”