



Bhagidari

The Delhi Experiment in Governance

Bhagidari: The Delhi Experiment in Governance

'Bhagidari' is the process of introducing participatory governance – a basic tenet of democracy. The logos '*Bhagidari: citizen government partnership*' and '*My Delhi: I care*' are ubiquitous in government functions and events. The intensity with which Bhagidari is being projected to the citizens of Delhi has generated immense curiosity about it. What is Bhagidari? Why is there a need for such partnership and how is it different from other initiatives? Has it delivered the promises made to citizens? An attempt has been made to answer some of these questions in this chapter. At the same time, the implementation aspects of Bhagidari have been explained along with suggestions for reform.

Evolution of Bhagidari

Government-citizen partnership has a long history. Endeavours have varied from community development projects in the fifties to the Panchayati Raj movement in the sixties and finally the 73rd and 74th amendments to bring democracy and good governance to the grassroot level. The Congress Government initiated the concept of '*Bhagidari: Citizen-government partnership*' in January 2000. The main objective has been to devise institutional forms of citizen-government partnerships and increase the efficacy of existing representational forms of participation. Slowly but surely, Bhagidari is evolving as a mechanism of an active, effective and target-oriented citizen-government partnership.

Bhagidari literally means “collaborative partnership.” It envisages collaboration between citizens and the city administration for improvement of civic services and facilitates citywide changes. It aims to utilise processes and principles of multi-stakeholder (citizen groups, NGOs, the government...) collaboration, and apply the method of Large Group Interactive Events to increase people's participation and “joint ownership” by citizens and the government.

Bhagidari received a mixed response. The main challenge lay in managing changes in government policy, necessitated by the fact that

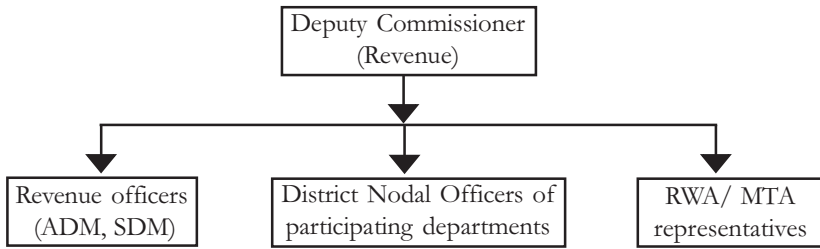
they were framed when there was no awareness of ground realities. There was need for a model that would ensure a collaborative process between government officials and citizens. To evolve such a mechanism for putting the concept of Bhagidari into practice, wide consultations were initiated with various citizens' groups - the Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), Market and Traders Associations (MTAs), Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Delhi Development Authority, New Delhi Municipal Council, Delhi Vidyut Board, Delhi Jal Board, Delhi Police and the Department of Environment and Forest, as well as many NGOs. Now practically all departments of Delhi Government have become participating units in the Bhagidari programme.

The concept of Bhagidari is distinct from traditional models of local self-governance. Unlike earlier times, when people expected that the government should solve all their problems, Bhagidari was launched as a movement from total dependence on government officials to sharing the role of governance. It aims at understanding constraints, appreciating the other's side strengths of various parties involved and then arriving at a consensus, which can be implemented. Thus the focus shifted from passing on the responsibility to sharing the responsibilities. The RWAs and MTAs have now become an integral part of programme implementation.

Decentralisation of Bhagidari

Initially, the Bhagidari cell at the Chief Minister's office conducted interactions with citizens' groups and supervised resource mobilisation. This arrangement continued for more than a year. Although the programme was a success, it was evident that changes were required for better participation. To ensure a spatial spread, the programme was decentralised at the revenue district level with the Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) as the district coordinator. The decentralisation helped in involving more than 1,500 citizens' groups in the programme.

The existing monitoring mechanism at the district level is described in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Monitoring mechanism at District Level

Source: Government of NCT Delhi. Bhagidari Cell. Delhi Secretariat

Issues in Bhagidari

The Bhagidari initiative takes up everyday issues that impact the life of a citizen. These are amenable to simple solutions, ranging from small initiatives such as collective payment of water and electricity bills to rainwater-harvesting schemes, which call for technical expertise. For MTAs, the issues range from removal of slums/ JJ clusters, encroachments to sale of beverages, ice creams, mineral water bottles at market price on pavement stalls. In Bhagidari workshops, issues that are relevant for a community as a whole are discussed. Individual issues are taken for discussion only at the District Commissioner meeting, with RWAs and nodal officers of various participating agencies. The major functions that various departments of the Delhi Government have to perform as a part of Bhagidari are as follows:

- **Delhi Jal Board (DJB)**

The RWAs are made aware of water saving/ conservation, payment and collection of water bills, distribution of water through tankers, repair and maintenance of pipelines, water harvesting and internal colony sewage system, desilting of sewers, and to ensure awareness that water from handpumps should not be used for drinking purposes.

- **Power**

The power issues that are being handled now in conjunction with private distribution companies are common meter reading and billing collection/ delivery problems, handling load shedding/ breakdown, maintenance of street lighting, RWA coordination in

"meter name change" and "load enhancement", conservation of energy and maintenance of data on power supply/ breakdown/ restoration by the RWAs. The basic constituents and issues are similar to those that were carried out earlier, but some of them are now taken care by Discoms (power distribution companies) themselves. However, participation and partnership has not been efficient in improving power supply, as was evident from the recent power price hike episode. The concept of Bhagidari encouraged the participation of people and helped in mobilising them, resulting in massive protests against paying the hiked price.

- **Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)**

The major function involved collaboration with RWAs for house tax collection, maintenance of community parks, management of community hall, sanitation services, imposition of fine on littering, desilting of drains, removal of stray and dead animals from the colony, and maintenance of roads and back lanes on a regular basis.

- **Sanitation**

The Department has to ensure solutions with regard to community bins, role of RWAs in internal colony sewage system, supervision of sanitary staff by RWAs, door-to-door collection of waste/ garbage, and generation of public awareness on sanitation.

- **Department of Environment and Forests**

Significant functions of the Department involve plantation and maintenance of saplings, greening of the colony and discouraging use of plastic bags.

- **Delhi Police**

Delhi Police is responsible for crime prevention through involvement of RWAs, neighbourhood watch scheme, verification of antecedents of domestic help, prevention of encroachments, regulation of traffic through colonies, and prevention of illegal sale of liquor.

- **Delhi Development Authority (DDA)**

DDA is responsible for seeking solutions to prevent encroachment, maintenance of community parks, maintenance of common areas, and parking inside the colony.

The issues mentioned below are exclusively for the Market Trade Associations (MTAs).

▪ **Weights and Measures**

The Department ensures accuracy and efficiency of weights and measurements used for commercial purposes, indigenous and imported packaged commodities, sale of beverages, ice-creams and mineral water at MRP (maximum retail price), registration of packers and importers, as well as inspections and challans.

▪ **Sales Tax**

Sales Tax Department is supposed to strengthen communication channels for disseminating sales tax information, better communication channels for reviewing feedback on sales tax from dealers, joint detection of bogus and unregistered dealers, interface between sales tax field officers and grievance handling.

▪ **Industries Department**

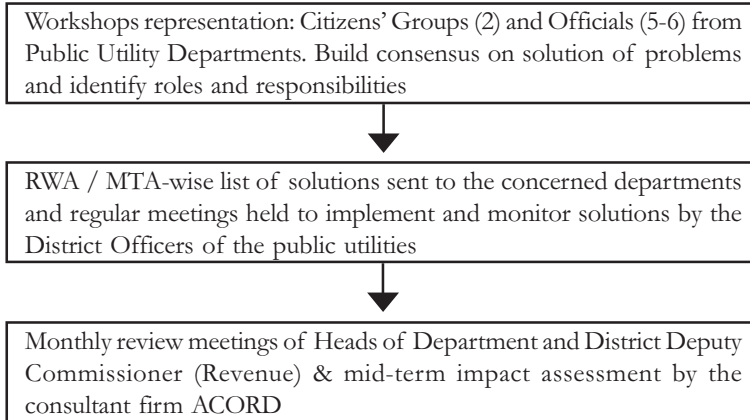
The Department is responsible for handing over estate/maintenance services to MCD in a time-bound manner, uninterrupted power supply, metering, billing and changes in rules/regulations, adequate and potable water supply. Some of the other functions involve provision of streetlights in the industrial estates, removal of slums/ JJ clusters, encroachments on approach roads and pavements, rainwater harvesting, MCD factory licence inspection methods and procedures, fire station research and development centre, toolroom and industrial waste/ solid waste disposal.

**Implementation Mechanism (Monitoring,
Funding and Evaluation)**

The whole Bhagidari scheme involves discussions of problems, arriving at consensus solutions, implementation of the discussed solutions and then monitoring the implemented ideas. In consultation with the Asian Centre for Organisation Research and Development, (ACORD), the “Large Group Interactive Events” (LGIE) was devised as an appropriate model to train citizens' groups and government officials (of all levels) to sit together, discuss their viewpoints on common problems and build up consensus for solutions and their

implementation. It also facilitated district-level Bhagidari workshops of two-and-a-half days, which were henceforth organised by Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) of respective districts in consultation with the Bhagidari Cell and the General Administration Department. The model envisages processes as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Process of Bhagidari Model



Funding of Bhagidari scheme

Initially, institutional support was given by creating the ‘Bhagidari Cell’ in the Chief Minister’s office by designating the General Administration Department as the nodal department to provide financial and administrative support. The Cell has been coordinating the activities covered under Bhagidari as well as in conducting workshops. Since 2003-04 the budget for conducting workshops has been around Rs 10 lac per district. It was proposed that each district would hold at least two workshops in a financial year so that around 20 workshops could be organised with citizens’ groups.

In addition, a provision of Rs 40 lac has been kept for paying the fee of consultants engaged for conducting workshops. There are certain schemes operated by departments like Environment & Forests, Urban Development, in which grants-in-aid are given to NGOs for carrying out specific projects. Projects that are already under the existing schemes of the departments can be executed by the RWAs based on qualifying criteria laid down by the government. For those projects not covered under the schemes, the Deputy Commissioner’s Office grants funds under the ‘special financial assistance’ head created in all the nine offices in Delhi.

The approved outlay for the Tenth Five Year Plan is Rs 825 lac and Rs 16 lac was spent in the Ninth Five Year Plan.¹ In 2002-03, only Rs 87 lac was spent out of an annual approved outlay of Rs 165 lac.² The approved outlay for 2004-05 is Rs 160 lac.

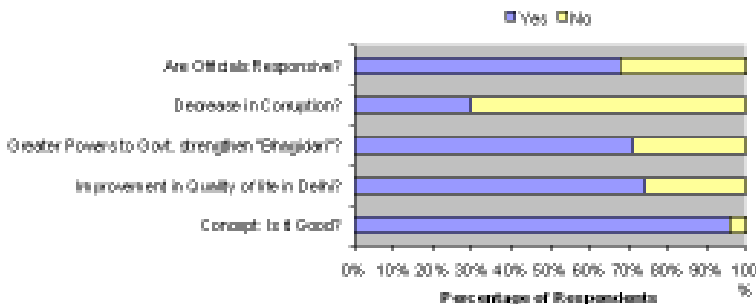
Activities Undertaken by the Bhagidari Fund

The Bhagidari fund is used for disseminating news about the progress of various schemes undertaken under the Bhagidari initiative. It is done through printing newsletters both by the Delhi Government and the citizens' groups. The Government prints its newsletter through the Directorate of Information and Publicity, with an annual budgetary provision of Rs 10 lac being kept for it. Some Bhagidars also bring have been out their news letters and leaflets. With a view to provide impetus to the good work done by government agencies and RWAs/ MTAs, award schemes have been initiated for the best maintained market area and RWAs. The total cash award component in this scheme is Rs 5 lac.

Impact of Bhagidari

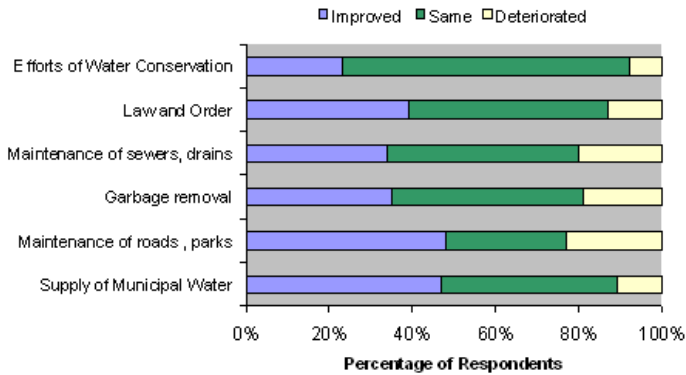
A survey was conducted at the end of Phase III by the journal Civil Society through TNS Mode in October 2003 covering 132 RWAs across Delhi, representing localities with different levels of civic infrastructure/ services, and varied social and political concerns. The significant responses reveal positive impact on some counts and failure on others.

Figure 3: Civil Society-TNS Mode Survey (October 2003)



Source: Government of NCT Delhi. 2004. Bhagidari: The Citizen Government Partnership, Working Report on Phase III. Department of Administrative Reforms

Figure 4: Perception of RWAs on Public Service Delivery under Bhagidari



Source: Government of NCT Delhi. 2004. *Bhagidari: The Citizen Government Partnership, Working Report on Phase III. Department of Administrative Reforms*

The survey also brought out interesting comparisons and differences between North, South, East, West and Central Delhi, with regard to impact of Bhagidari. Water supply, for example, is perceived by RWAs to have improved in 2003 in North, West, and Central Delhi. DJB does not score well on this count in South and East Delhi. With regard to garbage removal, North and East Delhi RWAs are less satisfied than other areas. Roads and parks were reportedly better maintained in East and North Delhi with scores of 62% and 50% respectively, against the citywide average of 48%. On drains and sewers, only 21% in the South and 19% in the East reported that maintenance had improved, compared to the citywide average of 34%. Averaging all the six items, the "quality of life" index has improved the most in Central Delhi and least in East Delhi. This indicates the consequence of not including squatter settlements and the urban poor (mostly in East Delhi) in the Bhagidari initiatives.

Bhagidari faced various challenges during initial years of its implementation. First, bringing together a large number of citizen groups and government officials on a common platform was difficult. Bhagidari faced strong resistance from field-level government officers, who were not willing to step out of their bureaucratic shell and embrace the direct interaction with citizens' groups. They felt it was erosion of their authority and in many instances it also stemmed from corruption at the field-level.

Critique of Bhagidari³

One will wonder that why something as simple as Bhagidari can draw criticism from people. Nevertheless following are some of the grounds on which Bhagidari is criticised.

- **A Way to Hide Government Inefficiency**

The common perception by critics of Bhagidari is that it is a mere prop used by Delhi's Chief Minister Sheila Dixit to cover every aspect of what the administration handles very poorly, namely sanitation, power and water supply and law and order. It is also believed that Bhagidari empowers the RWAs with the illusion of taking matters into their own hands, while inefficient government employees lie back, earn pay for working even less than usual, and corner the glory.

- **No Constitutional Basis**

According to Gita Dewan, an architect living in Vasant Kunj, the Bhagidari scheme has given unlimited powers to the RWAs, who are using it to cater to their illegal activities. She gave the example of Vasant Kunj, where 35 borewells have been dug in the name of Bhagidari. She added that the whole Bhagidari scheme has no constitutional basis. How can a government so vehemently push the case of Bhagidari when it has no constitutional basis?

- **Political Tool**

Bhagidari has given a political platform to all those who aspire to join full-time politics sooner or later. The phenomenal rise in the number of RWAs validates this fact. Every colony now has two-three RWAs and they jostle among themselves for power. Bhagidari has become a freewheeling mechanism for elevating chosen Bhagidars above the law for illegal Bhagidari benefits like unplanned hospitals or banned boring.

- **Lack of Awareness**

Awareness of the concept of Bhagidari is conspicuous by its absence in many locales. While the concept is working in some places, its impact has not been stable or symmetrical.

- **Coverage only to Planned and Developed Areas**

Till now, citizens' groups' interactions have been limited to

registered associations, which are mainly prominent in planned and developed areas. The impact of Bhagidari is not visible in slum clusters, resettlement colonies and unauthorised/ regularised areas. A lacklustre attempt has been made to reach out to rural areas.

Recommendations

▪ **Area-based approach**

The Bhagidari scheme only involves citizens who have formed an RWA/ MTA, but a large section of society does not have them. These are people living in JJ clusters, or hawkers and sellers on the footpath. They too need to be involved in Bhagidari, therefore an area-based approach is required encompassing all citizens living in a particular area. This can be done with the help of women's groups and non-governmental organisations.

▪ **Power to RWAs/ MTAs and Financial Assistance**

Most RWAs/ MTAs complain about lack of power to implement schemes. An RWA cannot punish someone who is throwing garbage on the road. Therefore, power should be given to RWAs/ MTAs to enforce ideas more practically. Many ideas discussed in workshops cannot be implemented due to lack of funds. The government should therefore ensure that financial constraints do not come in way of Bhagidari.

▪ **Involvement of Private Sector**

The concept of Bhagidari should be widened to bring about private sector collaboration in governance. Government can pull itself out from many areas and pass on the baton to the private sector that can do the same job more efficiently. Starting from garbage collection to opening schools, there are many sectors where the private sector is better placed to give results. It would be much better if government could tap the expertise of the private sector.

▪ **Participation of Junior and Middle Level Officials**

One of the chief reasons for the failure of Bhagidari in delivering on promises is the non-participation of junior and middle level officials. As they are the ones who ultimately have to do the job, it becomes very important that they are adequately informed about

the concept and working of Bhagidari. More accountability and better efficiency standards have to be ensured for the success of initiatives.

- **Internal Change Management**

Performance improvement in civic agencies and key departments (including Transcos and Discoms) can be done through internal change management.

- **Institutionalisation**

The intent should be to gradually work out changes in policies and legislation which would enable citizens' groups to statutorily interact with Government. There should be stress on scaling-up and further strengthening of 'institutionalisation' of partnerships with RWAs/MTAs and between RWA federations. One important area will be broader inclusiveness and participation of stakeholders who are not involved in the process. A kind of 'Delhi Bhagidari Committee' can be formalised through appropriate legislation, which will provide an institutional structure with broad-based representation focusing on citizen-government partnership.

– Prepared by Kaushal K. Vidyarthi

Notes

- ¹ Government of NCT Delhi. 2002. *Tenth Five Year Plan 2002-07 & Annual Plan 2002-03: Physical Targets/ Achievements*. Vol. 4. Department of Planning
- ² Government of NCT Delhi. 2003, 2004. *Annual Plan 2003-04, 2004- 2005: Scheme-Wise Plan Outlay*. Vol. 5. Department of Planning
- ³ Gaurav, K., M. Singhal. 2002. *Bhagidari: Good Intention, Bad Implementation*. New Delhi. Centre for Civil Society

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Bhagidari or jagirdari?

