

Social Coherence and Community Participation in Rurban Area

Introduction:

Community participation is key to SPMRM's mandate of creating rurban spaces with urban facilities, while preserving the rural soul. Including the views and opinions of community members and PRI representatives is crucial for understanding the needs of the community and the consequent amenities to be included in the cluster. Participatory planning provides the pathways by which a cluster can be developed and be grounded in the socio-economic needs of the community. Further, community participation facilitates greater ownership of the cluster and its amenities by the community members, given that they formed a key part of decision making and needs assessments. Community ownership is important for community-level maintenance of assets and amenities developed, thus contributing to the cluster's sustainability as well.

Background:

Community participation to ensure social coherence in planning is evident from the experience of Bhagtanpur - Abidpur Cluster in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. In this cluster, inter-village road connectivity was a significant barrier to safe mobility and access to public facilities. Here, the construction of rural roads was preceded by a detailed gap assessment which invoked community participation. The assessment was used to identify the challenges faced by under the current road system by the community in general, and specific groups in particular. By doing so, the rural road network that was designed was community driven, and able to cater to the specific socio-economic needs of the cluster.

Details of the Intervention:

Prior to planning the construction of the rural roads network in the cluster, a gap and needs analysis was undertaken to identify the extent of the problems in inter-village road connectivity. Community members were consulted on the problems faced by them due to the poor condition of the inter-village roads.

The gap and needs analysis revealed that the 'kutchha' roads would get ruined with every rainy season, and this negatively impacted the economic and business activities in the cluster. Community voices also lent support to the fact that specific vulnerable groups such as women and children faced barriers in accessing public services. For instance, the community revealed that pregnant women and children were not able to access the Anganwadi services easily due to connectivity challenges posed by 'kutchha' roads. Consultations with the community thus revealed the problem of road connectivity, the extent of it, the challenges faced by vulnerable groups and the need to act on it.

Impact:

The Rural Roads Department in Uttarakhand took up the construction of 'pucca' roads using interlocking tiles. This has provided an easier commute for the villagers and has benefited the community in the cluster. Given that community participation was actively sought in the planning phase, the rural road network developed is coherent with the requirements of the community. The road networks has improved access to public facilities for women and children. Pregnant women and children are now easily able to travel to the Anganwadi Centres. Students also find it

easier to travel to school. Further, better roads have improved the business and social environment in and around the cluster.

Source: Ministry of Rural Development. (2020). Success Stories – Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission. Government of India.