

# Get organized — self-help and partnership in urban Pakistan

by Jude Tavanyar

**'It's up to the government' is not a phrase you'll hear on the lips of OPP and ASB NGO workers in Karachi and Faisalabad. Dynamic, motivated, and politically astute, their self-help water and sanitation programmes are improving dramatically slum children's chances of survival.**

SINCE 1993, WATERAID has been involved in supporting water and sanitation schemes in Pakistan. In the past four years, the organization's funding strategy has developed from a single grant of £7000 to CDP-Pak, a local NGO developing rural sanitation in North-West Province, to a programme valued at £60 000 per annum, exclusively committed to financing urban projects. This shift in emphasis has come about chiefly through support of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP), in the *katchi abadis* of Orangi, Karachi.

Founded some 17 years ago, OPP believes that local people should pay for and supervise their own services, and that the government's role is to provide what smaller organizations cannot — the larger infrastructure of mains water pipelines, trunk sewers, and treatment plant with which local systems can link up. The OPP model works by getting people to organize themselves into small groups or 'lane committees', providing technical advice and training to communities willing to pay for, and supervise, the construction of their own lane sewers, and also making loans available for the moulds needed to cast concrete manhole chambers.

The approach has proved highly cost-effective: by simplifying design criteria and eliminating expensive contractors, OPP has reduced the cost of laying sewers to around one sixth of typical government expenditure. Furthermore, the programme has now developed its own momentum — the knowledge and expertise of the Orangi settlers has enabled many communities to construct their own sewers, and the sanitation programme is now backed up by other projects in health education, a credit scheme for small businesses, and building-materials improvement.

WaterAid funds the staff and training costs so that OPP can provide technical skills — such as sewer sizing and construction — to five other NGOs in cities throughout Pakistan, as well as skills in undertaking the mobilization

and organization of local communities necessary to get new projects underway. Under this arrangement, the NGOs themselves are responsible (with guidance from OPP) for activating local interest in water and sanitation schemes, providing technical and managerial advice, and (where necessary), negotiating with local water authorities

of the success of this approach can be seen in infant mortality rates, which have fallen from 128 in 1985 to 37 in 1995. As a result, the government/community relationship has been transformed and the state is investing in trunks to build on the people's achievements.

In part, the project's achievements can be attributed to the sheer range of its experience — over 15 years of motivating and empowering local communities in Karachi to act for themselves in providing safe water and sewage systems rather than continuing to wait for the government to do so on their behalf.

In this, it shares an advantage with the Anjuman-e-Samaji Behbood



*Nazir Ahmad Wattoo and a shopkeeper discuss laying the community waterpipe.*

for connection rights to mainstream sewers.

While the OPP continues to offer an impressive demonstration of just how much poor urban communities can contribute to the development of large-scale, more complex, water and sanitation projects, there still are only one or two successful small-scale replications outside Karachi.

In Orangi, communities of 87 512 houses in 7256 lanes have built their own underground sewerage system and latrines. They have invested Rs73 million (around £1 million). OPP's investment, around 6 per cent of the total, has been invested in research, extension, capital costs for tools and shuttering, and administration. A strong indicator

(ASB), an NGO which has achieved notable success in applying OPP's approach in Faisalabad, Punjab, under the careful guidance and direction of Nazir Ahmad Wattoo. Wattoo, (pictured above), whose experience in community activism began over 30 years ago, has more recently encompassed the launch of a programme in 1995, with the help of WaterAid, which will eventually bring piped water and hygienic sanitation to over 2500 homes in six urban communities. Since then, the ASB has organized the construction of over 1600 feet of mains water pipeline, with subsidiary lines connecting local lanes between houses, as well as the first safe sewerage and drainage system to be established in the region.

WaterAid/Caroline Penn

As in the Orangi settlement, the problems facing people in the Faisalabad area were severe — before the ASB programme was launched, 50 per cent of illnesses in the area were attributable to contaminated water, and 95 per cent of the area served by the organization had damaged or blocked open drains, with constant seepage from the main sewage lines.

Wattoo is clear that, if local communities had not acted, with the help of ASB, the problems of contaminated water and open drains would still exist.

'In one of our colonies we decided to go ahead and dig trenches for our own waterline which would connect us to the main water-pipe. We had asked the Water Board to provide us with piped water, but they refused. In 1995, we decided to take the matter into our own hands, so at nine o'clock on a cold

the training he and six other activists received from OPP in the preparation of plans and estimates, supervising workers and, perhaps most importantly, mobilizing their community.

But, it is also likely that the planning and research which preceded the launch of ASB's programme were significant in making sure that the understanding and commitment of local communities would be achieved. In general, ASB has been careful to win the trust of those who might initially consider sanitation and water provision to be the duty of the government. It has set up a sanitation committee of respected residents to gain credibility for the project to ensure a broad representation of views. Local activists go from house to house promoting the idea of community action, gradually building up interest and support. It may also be significant that, to some extent at least, the ASB has been preaching to the converted: the concept of 'self-help' in some areas of Faisalabad is not entirely new, as local communities had already organized their own open drainage systems before ASB's sanitation programme.

### Ties that bind

ASB owes its success to date as much to what it has avoided as to what it has achieved. There are four other NGOs working to develop the OPP model — the Organization for Participatory Development (OPD) in Gujranwala, the Okara Development Project (ODP) in Okara, Community Development Concern (CDC) in Sialkot, and Boo Ali Sina (BAS) in Muzzaffargarh. Despite some important and worthwhile developments, for all but BAS, work has been delayed or disrupted by difficulties ranging from lack of team organization, and

inadequate financial management, to poor communication with OPP and WaterAid.

The single most significant factor to block development of the OPP approach by other NGOs has less to do with internal disorganization or individual bodies, than to the funding criteria applied by donors backing the OPP's work. Attempts to work with larger donors have often been characterized by the donors insisting on changes to the organization's principles, in favour of moving away from programmes which start with communities

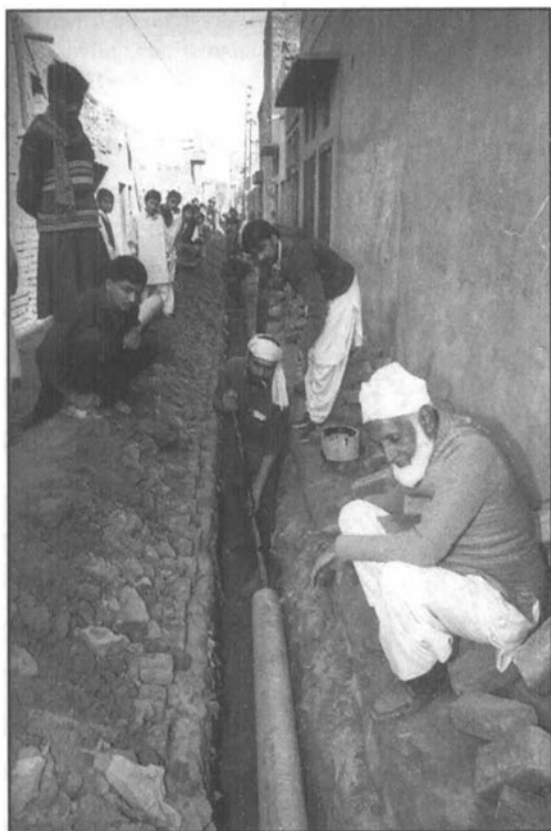
organizing themselves and then challenging government to do its part towards those which centre on government trying to get communities to participate in its projects. This shift in emphasis assumes that government is interested and willing to take such a proactive role; however, the experience of OPP and other NGOs is that there is often little momentum at government level to do this successfully. And even if they show interest, local government bodies are likely to have extremely limited experience in dealing with community groups, and no legislative framework for doing so, which results in further inactivity and delays.

Short-term approaches by funders have also made it extremely difficult for OPP to support small community-based organizations during the formative stages of their work. As the OPP approach expects local people to group together and raise all capital funding for construction costs, projects take longer to set up than those based on subsidies, so any interruption to funding during the initial stages of development can lead to delays and disruption while new donors are sought. In recognition of this, WaterAid, in providing funding for OPP to work with other NGOs over a period of three to five years, aims to introduce a period of stability before work programmes are reviewed and are, where successful, promoted to larger, longer-term funding bodies.

### Looking out

What lessons can be learned from this which might shape funders' future approaches to urban NGOs interested in 'self-help' approaches to safe water and sanitation? In the past, WaterAid has selected NGOs as partners on the basis of their history of organization and professionalism, and was less specific about whether they were able to take the model outside the immediate boundaries of their environment. A key message to emerge from working with the Orangi Project is that NGO partners in urban programmes need to be dynamic, motivated, and politically astute — they will, for example, have to know how to build successful and supportive relationships and networks with other relevant bodies, in and outside government. Although there is a tradition of local organization and a fairly large NGO sector in Pakistan, many have limited experience in 'dealing outwards' in this way.

At the same time, successful partner NGOs are likely to have deep roots and a good track record in the communities they serve, in order to have the trust and commitment required from local people



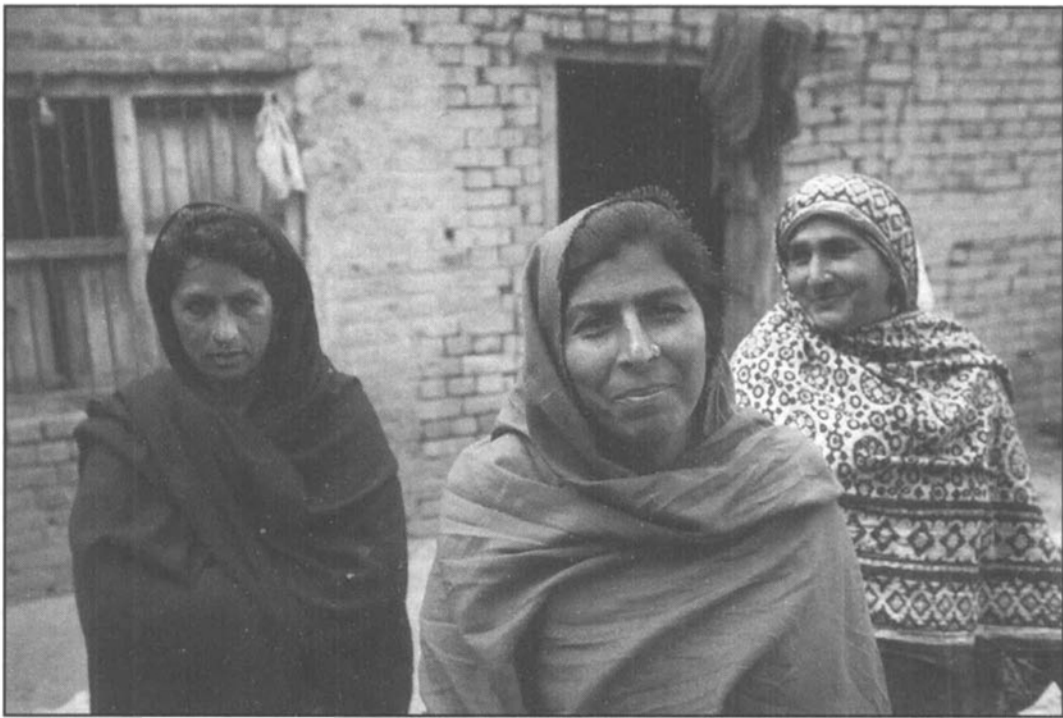
Faisalabad: Haji Mohammed Yussif, water committee president, oversees the laying of new pipes.

night in November we started digging, and by five o'clock the next morning we were 110ft away from the main waterline. After a long legal struggle, we received permission from the Water Board to connect the line and, by 17 January 1996, we had purchased the pipes and arranged the labour.'

### Local democracy

Like the OPP, ASB has now extended its services to include a health education programme, and a credit system owned and managed by local people. Wattoo attributes its obvious success to

WaterAid/Caroline Penn



WaterAid/Caroline Penn

*Emtiaz Maulladin, Allama Shah Mohammed and Irshad Abdul Azak, community campaigners in Faisalabad.*

who will need to take on the risk of paying for services from their own pockets, and making the time and effort to organize themselves into groups to sustain and manage these. Gaining this trust and commitment may severely test the motivational skills of many NGOs, particularly where the attitude that 'it's up to the government to make the first move' continues to predominate.

That said, there is clearly enormous potential for supporting the development of OPP's work as a model of partnership between NGOs, communities and governments. It could also be

argued that the self-help philosophy of OPP might usefully be extended beyond *katchi abadis* to a broader range of urban developments, so that the government can focus limited resources on providing mainstream water and sewage lines on a much larger scale. At ASB, Nazir Ahmad Wattoo sees the benefits of 'community empowerment' as going well beyond accessing available resources:

'Since we have been working this way with WaterAid and OPP, I can see big changes in the community. This is not the way of the government, which

breeds dependence. This is about independence. People help themselves. This is the way of success. People are always enthusiastic once they accept the idea of self-help. At first, motivation meetings start in the morning but often now they are still going until late at night!'

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*continued from page 21 (Bolnick et al)*

Few municipal or state authorities have sought to work with this kind of initiative. While many have sought to address urban poverty, they have mostly drawn on professionally designed solutions, and few have looked at what the community has already invested, and sought to enhance and extend them.

In South Africa, they generally feel that the provision of infrastructure is so high-tech, that only professional engineers and contractors can do it. In Manila, the Government prefers to evict low-income communities rather than consider how they might be better provided for within the city. In Karachi, the municipal authorities do little. Initiatives supported by the Sindh *Katchi Abadi* Authority have been dependent on the current Director. When he left the post between 1992 and 1993, this investment dried up. In Kanana, the community is now fighting the state authorities to prevent its housing subsidies being used to duplicate the work it has *already* undertaken in planning and developing the settlement and gathering information about local residents.

These examples demonstrate what can be seen in thousands of settlements throughout

Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The amount that low-income communities waste in having to purchase water from private vendors (or bribe public-sector providers) has now been recognized. What also needs to be recognized is how local residents have invested to bring down these costs.

These short stories do not touch on the struggles and difficulties that have had to be overcome. Some residents are suspicious of these initiatives, and others seek to exploit them. Many have little money and have to make difficult choices about the contribution that they can afford; there are few opportunities for credit to enable them to expand their investment options. A further problem is that a lack of technical skills may mean that attempts to improve water and sanitation fail. We are not arguing that the residents of low-income neighbourhoods can solve all their problems alone. Professional skills have had an important contribution to make in the later development of these settlements and others like them. Government money is needed to ensure that all citizens live in safe and healthy neighbourhoods. The critical importance of the local authority in providing core services, functioning water pipes and drainage systems must be

recognized. But, too often, the importance of independent community initiatives is ignored and unappreciated.

Development agencies and governments need to look much more carefully at how they can work with initiatives such as these. Too many projects start from the basis of what government programmes and development agencies will do for a settlement, and they do not recognize what the settlement has done, and can do, for itself. The result is high-cost projects which do not address local priorities, and investments that are neither maintained by the local residents, nor by the project implementors.

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