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Planning a ‘slum free’ Trivandrum: Housing upgrade and the rescaling of urban governance in India

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journals.sagepub.com/home/epc**Glyn Williams** 

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Abstract

This paper examines how India’s national urban development agenda is reshaping relationships between national, State and city-level governments. Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, the flagship programme that heralded a new era of urban investment in India, contained a range of key governance aspirations: linking the analysis of urban poverty to city-level planning, developing holistic housing solutions for the urban poor, and above all empowering Urban Local Bodies to re-balance relationships between State and city-level governments in favour of the latter. Here, we trace Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission’s implementation in Kerala’s capital city, Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram), where the city’s decentralised urban governance structure and use of ‘pro-poor’ institutions to implement housing upgrade programmes could have made it an exemplar of success. In practice, Trivandrum’s ‘city visioning’ exercises and the housing projects it has undertaken have fallen short of Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission’s lofty goals. The contradictions between empowering cities and retaining centralised control embedded within this national programme, and the unintended city-level consequences of striving for Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission funding success, have reshaped urban governance in ways not envisaged within policy. As a result, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission has been important in rescaling governance relationships through three interlinked dynamics of problem framing, technologies of governance and the scalar strategy of driving reform ‘from above’ that together have ensured the national state’s continued influence over the practices of urban governance in India.

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Keywords

Urban governance, state rescaling, slum development, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, Kerala, India

Introduction: Urban ‘reform’ and the rescaling of governance practices

To improve urban infrastructure and provide urban services for the poor, we need urgently urban governance reform. ... Cities... have not been able to look inward and build on their inherent capacities, both financial and technical, and instead are still being seen in many States as ‘wards’ of State governments. This should and this must change.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s speech at the launch of JNNURM 03/12/2005

(Source: Sivaramakrishnan, 2011a: Annexure III)

From the turn of the Millennium in India, increased national attention on urban development has coalesced into a consistent and clearly articulated agenda to turn cities into engines of economic growth and to reduce urban poverty. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), this agenda’s flagship programme during Manmohan Singh’s United Progressive Alliance governments (2004–2015), was backed by INR 500 Bn (US\$75 Bn) of central government funding (Kundu, 2014), a level of investment unprecedented in India’s urban history. This paper focuses on JNNURM’s evolving aspirations for poverty-alleviation, examining its effects on slum improvement in Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram), the capital of the south Indian State of Kerala.¹ Much of the existing literature on JNNURM outlines its inception and development (Sivaramakrishnan, 2011a, 2011b), or reviews its progress and impact at the aggregate scale (Mehta and Mehta, 2010; Patel, 2013; Vidyarthi et al., 2013). Here, we instead use grounded insights into JNNURM’s operation to understand how it is reshaping governance practices. As Manmohan Singh’s speech clearly indicated, the Mission went beyond delivering improvements to city infrastructure or urban services for the poor, and explicitly aimed to reform and empower urban governments. This paper’s central question is therefore how are national projects of urban reform reshaping relationships between national, State and city-level governments. Accordingly, our starting point is the growing literature on state rescaling within contemporary India.

Since the 1990s, centralised management of India’s economy has loosened under market liberalisation, but instead of the formal decentralisation to local rural and municipal government envisaged within revisions to its Constitution, India has witnessed the growing power of its subnational States (Kennedy, 2017). States have had greater scope to promote and regulate economic growth, often competing with each other through industrial subsidies, and the development of land (Sud, 2017) and infrastructure (see also Jenkins, 1999, 2014). This process has been indirect and somewhat haphazard, and as Shaktin and Vidyarthi (2013) note, it has also had dramatic city-level consequences, including the transformation of the real estate market (Searle, 2013) and the establishment of elite policy networks (Sami, 2013; Vidyarthi, 2013; Weinstein, 2014a). As liberalisation has unfolded, opportunities for real estate development have expanded massively, alongside linked pressures from local middle class and elite groups to ‘modernise’ their cities

(Weinstein et al., 2013). These newly empowered actors have aimed to curtail the influence of the poor within urban politics and ‘realize a vision of an economically competitive city’ (Shaktin and Vidyarthi, 2013: 24, see also Chatterjee, 2004).

JNNURM has played complex and contradictory roles within these changes, and by exploring these we contribute to the literature on state rescaling. Existing research has particularly concentrated on how States and city-level elite networks have sought new spatial strategies to capture private investment opportunities (Kennedy, 2014), a focus on the ‘supply side’ that complements studies of the post-Fordist transition in Western economies (Brenner, 2009). But India’s ‘social policies are also undergoing scalar transformations’ (Kennedy, 2017: 7), making work on the changing geographies of welfare equally important (Landy, 2017; Vijayabaskar, 2017). Vijayabaskar neatly summarises the central problem of ‘demand side’ rescaling for State governments – ‘there is tension between attracting capital through incentives like tax concessions and cheap land and providing welfare to the electorate as a route to sustaining political power’ (2017: 44) – and outlines Tamil Nadu’s proactive but territorially exclusive welfare regime as a response to this. Looking at JNNURM potentially extends this work by reminding us of the ongoing potency of ‘All India’ programmes for welfare and governance reform,² and in particular highlights three further tensions they set in train by reasserting this national scale of intervention. First, this standardises the policy problem to be solved (in our case, making India’s cities ‘slum free’), meaning that the local prevalence, form or causes of these problems may differ greatly from those imagined in New Delhi. Second, whilst programme implementation is usually devolved to State and/or local government, finances and rules for this are set nationally, resulting in struggles over technologies of governance (in our case, the seemingly mundane practices of plan-making and project approval). Third, and more particular to our case, JNNURM self-consciously sought to redress India’s lack of ‘meaningful rescaling in favour of local governments’ (Kennedy, 2017: 10), through a scalar strategy: enforcing from above an ordered decentralisation to enhance cities’ governance capacities (Shaktin and Vidyarthi, 2013). The literature has not addressed the scalar contradictions all three unleashed, but these are of potential significance for studies of governance reform far beyond the urban Indian context.

This paper provides a context-rich analysis of JNNURM’s reforms, exploring the roles of sub-national constellations of institutions and actors in shaping policy outcomes. Empirically, it focuses on Trivandrum for two reasons. First, much recent critical governance scholarship on urban India has centred on its ‘metros’, particularly Delhi (Datta, 2012; Dupont, 2011) and Mumbai (Kennedy and Zerah, 2008; Weinstein, 2014a, 2014b), but also Bengaluru, Chennai, and Kolkata (Arabindoo, 2011; Ellis, 2012; Harriss, 2010; Roy, 2004; Sami, 2014): Trivandrum, at around 950,000 population, provides a useful counterpoint to this ‘megacity’ dominance. Second, it is a city with the potential to realise JNNURM’s promise of empowered, inclusive government: Kerala has been a pioneer of democratic decentralisation (Heller et al., 2007), and Trivandrum has been controlled by leftist parties since the Millennium.

The paper opens by examining the governance practices that JNNURM sought to instil: democratic decentralisation, holistic city-level planning, and devising effective housing solutions for the urban poor. These practices are intertwined with forms of control – funding conditionality and centralised project scrutiny – through which central government disciplines cities towards these objectives. It then examines how Trivandrum reworked this ‘reform’ agenda as it drew down central government funding for housing upgrade. The focus here is on the planning processes that these programmes aimed to instigate, and the design and selection of the housing projects they brought to Trivandrum. What emerges

is a City Corporation strategically engaging with national policy in search of financial support and reputational gain, but which becomes reshaped through this interaction in unanticipated ways.

We draw upon a variety of data sources to investigate this interplay of national policy and city-level response. We began with extended qualitative research (2013–2017) within a settlement undergoing JNNURM in-situ upgrade where intensive community-based oral history work and interviews with those directing the programme's implementation provided a rich understanding of a slum community's history and how upgrade was experienced 'from below' (Devika, 2016; Williams et al., 2015). Looking 'upwards and outwards' from this particular community, we investigated JNNURM's national handbooks and guidance notes, and Trivandrum's responses to these: its City Development Plan (CDP) (TMC, 2006a), Slum Free City Plan of Action (SFCPoA) (DMG Consulting, 2014), and the Detailed Project Reports through which it sought funding for particular low-income housing developments. To understand JNNURM's role in effecting governance change at a city level, in 2016–2017, we interviewed experienced practitioners across differing layers of the state. These included former mayors and high-level administrators, those inside and beyond Trivandrum Corporation responsible for day-to-day implementation of slum improvement projects, and those people shaping and experiencing its housing projects at the community level.

Reshaping governance for a 'slum free' India

India's urban policy has sought to eliminate slum conditions in parallel with reforming urban governance, restructuring city finances and promoting rapid economic growth. Key moments in its development included the 2005 launch of JNNURM itself, the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy (MHUPA, 2007), and the expanded JNNURM-II (2011–2015) which called for 'slum free cities'.³ This agenda responded to a consistent diagnosis by academics, consultants and policy makers of underlying structural constraints on India's urban development potential: chronic under-investment in infrastructure, urban poverty, the under-supply of legally developable land, and the need for empowered municipal governments (McKinsey, 2010; Nandi and Gamkhar, 2013; Planning Commission, 2008, 2013).

Criticisms that this agenda contained neoliberal elements (Banerjee-Guha, 2009; Kundu, 2014; Mahadevia, 2011; Mehta and Mehta, 2010) are borne out by scrutiny of national JNNURM documents. These encouraged cities to improve their 'bankability' to enable services provision through public-private partnerships,⁴ and to free up property markets to promote the influx of private capital. Reducing stamp duty and the repeal of Urban Land Ceiling and Rent Control Acts were thus key 'reforms' required under JNNURM, although these long-standing Acts were originally introduced to curb land speculation and keep rental property affordable for the urban poor. Cities were also pushed to levy user charges for the operation and management of urban services, turn property tax into the 'major source of revenue for Urban Local Bodies' (MHUPA, 2009: 16), and cross-subsidise low income housing from private development projects. The implicit aim was that Urban Local Bodies would promote and effectively manage a local property boom, redirecting some of its benefits in favour of the urban poor.

Other more progressive elements accompanied this view of state-managed trickle-down. There was a strong push towards decentralisation: in accordance with India's 74th Constitutional Amendment, States were required to empower Urban Local Bodies as institutions of self-governance⁵ with responsibility for city planning, and cities were required

to institutionalise public participation at a grassroots level. The commitment to reducing urban poverty was enshrined by committing 35% of the total JNNURM budget to Basic Services for the Urban Poor (BSUP)⁶: BSUP in turn defined slum upgrade holistically, as seven core entitlements of ‘security of tenure, affordable housing, water, sanitation, health, education and social security’ (MHUPA, 2009). Although BSUP did not directly fund social services itself, its projects were required to show convergence with other service providers (MHUPA, 2009; see also Chatterjee, 2013). The 2011 expansion of JNNURM attempted to ‘lock in’ pro-poor elements to BSUP’s successor programme, the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY).⁷ Cities therefore had to ring-fence at least 25% of their own budgets to address urban poverty; reserve a minimum proportion of housing within private developments for low income groups; provide lease rights for long-term slum dwellers; and develop municipal capacity for urban poverty alleviation and slum development.

Debate over whether these were effective policy responses to either urban poverty or housing affordability in India continues (see Bhan et al., 2014 for a clear review), but here we focus instead on JNNURM’s required governance practices, and the changing relationships between city, State and national government they aimed to produce. The first was enacting a prescribed list of urban governance reforms, within which the establishment of empowered City-level governments was central. Eligibility for inclusion within the JNNURM was conditional on city and State governments signing a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding, committing them to a timetable for reform implementation (Sivaramakrishnan, 2011a, 2011b). The second was the production of a City Development Plan (CDP), a vision document based on broad stakeholder participation, and integrating both poverty-alleviation and economic investment. This commitment to ‘joined up’ city-level thinking was strengthened further and given an explicit poverty focus under JNNURM-II, where cities needed to develop a Slum Free City Plan of Action (SFCPoA) that rehabilitated existing slums and traced preventative action to tackle constraints on housing access for the urban poor. These plans required a ‘whole slum’ perspective throughout, considering livelihoods, social services and community assets in addition to delivering affordable housing. Engaging scheme beneficiaries was deemed essential within this: RAY expected their participation throughout the planning and delivery of housing projects, and that this would be institutionalised through setting up representative bodies for slum dwellers (MHUPA, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, see also Williams et al., 2017). Finally, eligibility to access JNNURM’s considerable resources was conditional on co-funding from State and City governments⁸: housing projects also included a beneficiary contribution that was presented as giving slum dwellers a direct stake in their own re-housing.

Taken together, these ‘reformed’ practices suggested that city governments should embody certain ideals of statecraft. First, they should be legally and financially empowered as autonomous spheres of governance. Second, they should use this autonomy to govern strategically, with city visioning exercises making them entrepreneurial agents that promoted rapid economic growth and coordinated responses to poverty. Finally, within the latter, they should understand the causes of slum housing, and devise effective (and participatory) solutions to this.

This vision of empowered municipal government clearly advocated a rescaling of governance in which States relinquished control over their erstwhile ‘wards’, but it also set in motion wider changes in relationships between cities, States and National government. As Sivaramakrishnan (2011a) notes, the central government funding available through JNNURM was an incentive for States and cities to embrace this vision. At the same, however, for JNNURM projects required cities and States to comply with an ‘invasive’ array of

toolkits, planning documents and approval processes (Gopakumar, 2015) designed and monitored by New Delhi, thereby potentially undermining the city-level autonomy that was central to the Mission's stated purpose. In our conclusions, we return to these tensions between the explicit aims and embedded practices of JNNURM, and their broader implications for state rescaling. First, however, we look at their city-level effects within Trivandrum. How did the State and City governments shape the 'institutional architecture' through which housing programmes were delivered, and with what effects? Did the CDP and SFCPoA produce 'city visions' that changed existing planning exercises, or the place of poverty alleviation within them? Finally, how did JNNURM's requirements to deliver a breadth of 'core entitlements' (BSUP), or contribute to 'whole slum' development (RAY), influence the selection and design of slum redevelopment projects?

Implementing JNNURM in Trivandrum

Urban governance reform

The governance reform and housing delivery agendas underlying BSUP and RAY seemed likely to find a receptive audience in Trivandrum. Kerala has a long history of independent action on urban poverty, with schemes from the 1970s onwards providing housing for the urban poor over and above national government support.⁹ It had also wholeheartedly embraced decentralisation in the 1990s beginning with the People's Planning Campaign (Thomas Isaac and Franke, 2000; Thomas Isaac and Heller, 2003). As a consequence, the core JNNURM condition of implementing devolved urban government had already been met, as Trivandrum Corporation had control over a range of functions matching India's 74th Constitutional Amendment. The Corporation has a Mayor-in-Council system, with directly elected councillors representing each of its 100 Wards and participating in standing committees that oversee key policy areas (such as finance, development, health and education). The day-to-day management of many services, such as schools and primary healthcare, has been devolved to the Corporation, and elements of participatory democracy have been institutionalised: an annual round of public meetings discuss developmental priorities,¹⁰ and these feed into annual city expenditure plans and five-yearly review of these priorities (George, 2006; Government of Kerala, 2002; Plummer and Cleene, 1999). In addition, from 1998, the State's Poverty Eradication Mission, Kudumbashree, had been given responsibility to undertake a range of national urban poverty alleviation measures within Kerala's cities.¹¹ Kudumbashree has gained international recognition for its women-based participatory approach (Williams et al., 2011), and potentially brought further support to inclusive urban governance through its extensive experience of community mobilisation and gender empowerment.

Trivandrum therefore had some contextual advantages for delivering a pro-poor housing agenda, and the Government of Kerala moved quickly to capitalise on these through two high-level actions: making Kudumbashree the State's nodal agency for BSUP schemes, and establishing a system of accrediting trusted NGOs to undertake construction within them. Both were significant attempts to shape Kerala's implementation of JNNURM housing programmes, setting the 'institutional architecture' through which they were delivered, and using this to effect wider governance change. The first was a decision initially resisted by the State Kudumbashree Mission itself on the grounds that they did not have expertise in running large-scale construction projects. The Mission's CEO also anticipated the political complexity of the role, and that Kudumbashree would not be undertaking it from

a position of institutional strength.¹² Nevertheless, the Government of Kerala insisted on the change:

I personally feel Kudumbashree was not happy with the decision at the beginning, but it was carried and pushed through... Kudumbashree's skill is not in construction but we said 'No, poverty is more important than the construction part'.

(Former Secretary to Govt. of Kerala's Local Self Government Department, 16 January 16)

As this was a new area of work for Kudumbashree, seconded staff with relevant expertise (in town planning, engineering, GIS and community mobilisation) were brought to form a 'BSUP Cell' within the Mission's State office: an equivalent Cell, physically located within Trivandrum Corporation's offices, became the focal point for its JNNURM slum and housing activities.

The system of accredited NGOs was established because of the complexity of these construction projects. Kudumbashree had had prior success in managing self-build housing schemes, particularly when working with rural councils and smaller municipalities (Former Kudumbashree CEO, 17 January 16), but the larger 'whole slum' intervention projects envisaged within BSUP required professional building firms. By limiting these to accredited NGOs, Government of Kerala was directly challenging contractor-based corruption:

We knew that construction is an area which even a good local government gets pulled away into either inefficiency or corruption because the contractor comes in... So we wanted to give a chance to clean local governments, so that their officials don't drag them to some kind of a link with the contractor. So ... we came out with the concept of accredited NGOs.

(Former Secretary to Govt. of Kerala's Local Self Government Department, 16 January 16)

An environmentally sensitive architectural NGO was accredited first, followed by a limited number of other organisations. The former Secretary noted that the rigour of the vetting process had kept this list free from subsequent party-political interference.

These decisions fixed the local institutional structure for implementing the BSUP, and later RAY. Accreditation of contractors allowed trusted NGOs to shape innovative housing projects: at the same time, this challenged what several respondents described as entrenched corruption in large-scale public works centring around Trivandrum Corporation's engineering division. These projects were intended to provide a model of clean, participatory delivery that would kick-start public demand for this to become 'mainstreamed' in city practice.¹³ Similarly, Kudumbashree's selection as the state-level nodal agency for BSUP and RAY built on its previous involvement in other poverty alleviation programmes, but required its existing competence to be complemented by bought-in experts. Significantly for our focus on rescaling, the State Government drove these tactical choices for 'pro-poor' housing delivery: we return the dynamics set in train by these choices below, but look first at Trivandrum's engagement with the strategic planning envisaged under JNNURM.

A pro-poor city vision? Planning within BSUP and RAY

Like all municipal governments participating in JNNURM, Trivandrum was required to develop a CDP outlining its overall 'city vision' (Trivandrum Municipal Corporation,

2006a, 2006b). This document's opening chapters provided an internally coherent picture of Trivandrum using its existing strengths (healthcare, tourism, higher education, and an IT park) to focus development on high-tech industry and high-end services, ideas which were largely culled from an earlier planning exercise.¹⁴ Its closing chapters outlined the city's pathway to full compliance with the governance conditionalities of JNNURM, highlighting that many mandatory reforms had already been undertaken, and providing a robust statement of Trivandrum's overall fiscal health. Much like the World Bank's intentions for City Development Strategies of the time, this CDP therefore portrayed a city that is 'liveable, competitive, well-governed, and bankable' (see Robinson, 2006: 128). In between these elements, plans for JNNURM investment were listed: these, and the bulk of the INR 74.2Bn (US\$1.1Bn) requested from Central Government, focused on projects under JNNURM's core Urban Infrastructure and Governance fund. A single, separate chapter provided analysis of urban poverty and staked Trivandrum's claim for INR 5.77 Bn (US\$89 million) of BSUP funding.¹⁵

The BSUP chapter justified this figure through quick sketches of four case-study city slums, and the houses and supporting social infrastructure needed for their upgrade. From this, standardised estimates were used to calculate the investment required to rehabilitate *all* slum housing in the city. Both the budget figure itself and the identified target of delivering 6662 formalised housing units were therefore deceptively precise quantifications of housing need and cost that hid far messier local considerations over defining and recording 'slums'. First, these estimates were based on relatively large, contiguous areas of informal and under-serviced housing. These are rare within the city, but seem to have been deliberately chosen to fit a national idea of what a 'slum project' should look like. Second, BSUP massively expanded the city's recognised number of slums: a 1995 Department of Town and Country Planning survey had identified only 37 slums in Trivandrum, but the CDP recorded 355 'slum clusters'. Many of these were smaller pockets of low-quality housing interspersed with areas of formal, serviced housing, a pattern far more typical of Trivandrum as a whole. Ward Councillors had been important in this change:

Actually, that was a wrong approach, because it was within a timeframe that the City Development Plan had to be made, because they had to access funds from the JNNURM. . . We asked the councillors to identify the slums, the elected members to identify the slums, and give us a list and they were not prepared to delete anything from that.

(Former Chief Town Planner, Government of Kerala, 19 January 2016)

Ward Councillors clearly had strong incentives to ensure that their areas would potentially benefit from BSUP, and aided by a loose official definition of 'notifiable slums',¹⁶ the city's 'slum clusters' expanded accordingly.

Knowledge of slum settlements was therefore sketchy in the CDP, but central to the SFPCoA that triggered follow-on funding under the RAY. Strategies for preventing future slum formation were required in the SFPCoA, and Trivandrum's plan briefly discussed deploying RAY funding to create state-owned social-rented housing. This was, however, primarily a data-driven document as National RAY guidelines demanded a comprehensive slum survey mapping all city slums within a Geographical Information System. They also classified slums more precisely, based on eleven qualitative criteria that covered aspects of poverty, building quality and service access, all linked to settlement clusters of a minimum size and density. This in turn prompted extensive city-wide surveys and data-collection, coordinated by the Kudumbashree Mission, and drawing on the (voluntary) labour of its

women's neighbourhood groups. This exercise roughly halved the number of recognised slum clusters in Trivandrum to 180, and although seemingly objective, it was a highly contentious act of classification, in which officials struggled to make national definitions meet local housing conditions and political realities:

But the fact is that those habitations needed it [RAY housing support], I mean they were poor! ... It's just that they didn't have the characteristics then, so we would bend backwards to give an impression that these were. ... You didn't have the density of populations. You didn't have any clear contours, but you still ... called them 'colonies' and you know, you drew maps clustering these places, and there was a bit of gerrymandering happened there that you couldn't do anything about.

(Former Kudumbashree CEO, 16 January 16)

RAY guidelines required an evaluation of each slum's demographic, physical and environmental vulnerability, linked to a resulting prescription for intervention (upgrade, in-situ rebuild, or relocation). This ranking exercise dominated Trivandrum's SFCPoA as a whole, largely displacing deeper considered analysis of housing need and policy.

It is important to ask what form of planning these documents contained. The CDP was essentially an updated amalgamation of previous investment plans completed as part of the People's Planning Campaign in the late 1990s and for Asian Development Bank-sponsored infrastructural investment, with the additional BSUP chapter estimating slum upgrade costs based around housing projects already under active consideration by the city. Respondents recognised that this fell short of national expectations, but the need to produce this quickly and the presence of these earlier city-level plans meant that the construction of a document with the financial and technical detail requested by New Delhi was prioritised over a comprehensive visioning process.¹⁷ The more detailed national specification of the SFCPoA made this a much more demanding document to produce. The City's RAY Project Cell met its huge data collection requirements by mass engagement of Kudumbashree's neighbourhood groups, and handed over report writing to a consultancy firm.

Respondents were clear that the CDP and SFCPoA were entirely separate from the production of a City Masterplan by Kerala's Department of Town and Country Planning, which establishes legal land use and development within the city. At best, BSUP/RAY produced projects that would be *compliant* with this Masterplan, but did not reshape statutory planning documents in any way. Both were also commissioned in parallel to the established annual developmental planning processes of Kerala's decentralised local government, which link Ward-level meetings through to a city-wide spending plan. This lack of coordination was noted within a Central Government review of the CDP (ASCI, 2006): Trivandrum Corporation's response noted that Ward Sabhas (public open meetings) had been used to consult on CDP content (TMC, 2006b), but this was a far cry from public participation driving a planning process.

As such, neither document contributed to the development of Kerala's urban policy, nor could they claim to represent stakeholders within Trivandrum. Emerging local urban challenges, such as the 'hidden' poor housing conditions of Trivandrum's growing number of long-distance migrant labourers, were also ignored in both.¹⁸ Even within the narrower remit of a project-focused planning exercise, however, both were somewhat devoid of spatial imagination. The CDP did not explain how leading sections of the high-tech economy and JNNURM-led infrastructural investments would intersect spatially, and had triggered nothing equivalent to the linking of economic, social and spatial planning present within South

Africa's Integrated Development Planning process (Harrison et al., 2008). The SFCPoA committed a parallel error: it pin-pointed slum clusters for a city-wide database, but ignored other relevant aspects of the city's geography, such as areas of service shortfall, the everyday geographies of slum-dwellers' livelihoods, or the distribution of government-owned land available for redevelopment. RAY sought 'self-financing' slum redevelopment, whereby the private sector rehoused slum dwellers in return for commercial redevelopment of slum sites, supported by relaxation of planning controls. Regardless of this model's desirability, the SFCPoA did not provide a guide to where it could progress in practice. It remained a geo-referenced slum census, labelling housing clusters as needing government intervention, but detaching them from the rest of the life of the city.

What both documents undoubtedly *did* achieve was to meet central government conditions for subsequent funding. The CDP lacked an account of how its planned investments were integrated, but it did establish the City as competent and deserving of JNNURM funding: by placing the case for slum rehabilitation within this context, it paved the way for specific BSUP housing projects. Similarly, by deploying the resources of the city (and the labour of Kudumbashree neighbourhood groups) to good effect, the SFCPoA would undoubtedly have been used to justify a further series of central government-supported upgrade projects had the incoming national Bharatiya Janata Party government not suspended RAY in 2015. The risks of this 'programme focused planning' were that the considerable costs of producing these documents were lost once national policy moved on. RAY's withdrawal meant that there was no funding to implement the SFCPoA's ideas around state-owned rental housing stock (RAY Project Cell Member, 06 June 16). More broadly, the SFCPoA itself never received final approval from Delhi, and remained a draft document not in the public domain: as such, it was unable to stimulate a wider policy debate that outlived the particular programme it served. If there was a legacy here, it was in the City's capacity to produce future plans that responded to national programmes. Respondents noted that the experience of completing the SFCPoA, as well as elements of the document itself, would ease the production of a 'Housing for All Plan of Action', the planning document required to trigger central government support under the successor programme to RAY, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

From plans to projects: Tackling Trivandrum's 'slum problem'?

Finally, we examine Trivandrum's response to JNNURM's holistic aspirations of building sustainable communities, rather than merely rehousing slum dwellers. As noted earlier, the Government of Kerala had hand-picked NGOs to lead this activity, in part because a key NGO in this field had delivered 140 flats in a project in one of central Trivandrum's largest, and most notorious, slums. Although this had ultimately suffered from severe problems of housing allocation¹⁹, it provided a model of good urban design with innovative elements – integrating good-quality housing with community infrastructure such as workspaces for micro-enterprises, study spaces, and *anganavaadis* (mother/child health centres) – that were replicated within subsequent BSUP projects (Figure 1). A concerted push from the Mayor, the NGO and the Kudumbashree CEO was needed to convince India's Ministry of Urban Housing and Poverty Alleviation to approve these 'extra' design elements, but Trivandrum ultimately won national awards for these projects (Former Mayor 'A': 20 January 16 and 06 June 16) and this experience may even have encouraged the Ministry's emphasis on community infrastructure in later iterations of BSUP and RAY.²⁰

The combination of Kudumbashree and a committed NGO again came to the fore in responding to RAY's demands for greater community involvement in project design



Figure 1. BSUP housing, Trivandrum, with mother/child health centre in foreground.
Credit: Glyn Williams.

(MHUPA, 2013c). The city moved quickly to select a fishing settlement on the outskirts of Trivandrum as a potential site for in-situ redevelopment, and the RAY Project Cell rapidly engaged its community in what was presented as a reflective and innovative process. Respondents repeatedly mentioned a drawing competition organised through Kudumbashree in which children imagined their ideal house: this had been important in winning another national award, this time for beneficiary consultation.²¹ Trivandrum's speed in responding to these increased expectations of community-led design meant that this became one of only six RAY pilot projects across the whole of India to be approved for implementation before the incoming BJP government suspended the scheme in 2015.

An optimistic reading would therefore see Trivandrum as engaging with, or perhaps even helping to drive, the evolution of national housing project design under JNNURM towards a 'whole slum' approach with ever-greater community participation, and its capacity to do so emerging from sound, State-level decisions about Kudumbashree's role and NGO accreditation. However, two other elements complicate this narrative somewhat. The first is the

mismatch between the central Ministry's requirements for project approval, and the possibility of genuine community-led design. Schemes had to be moved from proposals through to Detailed Project Reports for submission to New Delhi under acute time pressure: a two-week turn-around for one BSUP project was cited (Joint Director of Accredited NGO, 15 January 16) and that for the RAY pilot project was completed in two months, a time-frame that worked against the participatory aspirations of all involved. Central government's project review was described as being extremely taxing, with a panel of high-level bureaucrats cross-examining plans. All respondents stressed that the City needed to present a detailed defence of the projects, with commitment and coordination from all actors involved. Whilst one ex-Mayor described herself as 'studying for two days solid' (interview, 20 January 16) to understand the RAY guidelines and hand-picking engineers for the RAY cell to aid this process, it was not the intensity of this scrutiny, but its potential irrelevance that was a concern for others:

It was not the total project, but ultimately the [building] design that they were interested in. That was what they were talking about and we would just have to sit and get our engineers to work and re-work the designs until they were satisfied.

(Former Kudumbashree CEO: 17 January 16)

This review focused attention on a 'product' – 30 m² one-bedroomed flats, compliant with national financial and technical norms – rather than imaginative projects or modes of delivery.

The second is the mismatch alluded to earlier between Trivandrum's geography of informal housing, and national policies that were increasingly funnelling resources into 'whole slum' projects. This was clearly forcing the city's hand when selecting housing projects: rather than prioritisation on the basis of housing need, as envisaged within BSUP guidelines, this was based around sites where government land was available for large-scale redevelopment. Such sites were so limited that there wasn't even scope for competition between Ward Councillors wishing to have projects located in their own constituencies:

We have land in some areas only. Land purchasing is not easy – the price is very high in our city. Central government will never spend a single paisa for purchasing land, so no problem. If they [Ward Councillors] are arguing [about project location], I will ask them, 'Do you have land?' Government or the Corporation's own land must be used.

(Former Mayor 'B': 19 January 2016)²²

Behind these award-winning flat-based projects, Trivandrum was far more quietly using JNNURM resources to meet its particular housing needs. As Table 1 shows, completed *individual* housing units (where beneficiaries were given subsidies to purchase land and organise construction themselves) far outstripped the volume of flats produced. The complications of flat-based projects, which in many cases directly resulted from the rushed process of drawing up Detailed Project Reports, led to delays in project implementation, which in turn created significant budget over-runs. The least dramatic of these was a three-fold cost increase for the 'greenfield' project illustrated in Figure 1: flats in some in-situ redevelopment sites rose to 700% of the original proposed cost, an overspend Trivandrum Corporation met from its own budget.²³ The city's willingness to do so might therefore be seen as a reputational investment – to show itself as capable and deserving of Central

Table 1. BSUP housing delivery, Trivandrum.

	Individual self-built units	Project-built units (flats)
Sanctioned	10,891	1,621
Commenced	8,941	881
Completed	7,884	651
Withdrawn	0	358

Source: BSUP Internal Report (accessed 31 January 17).

BSUP: Basic Services for the Urban Poor.

Government support – even though their physical impact on city-wide housing need was limited.

Delivering housing, changing governance?

Trivandrum's slum improvement through JNNURM therefore presents a mixed record. A specialist BSUP/RAY cell provided a clear focus on project delivery, but meant that the housing programmes had little wider 'traction' on city governance. Far from improving the city's analysis of urban poverty, the need to present projects as compliant with JNNURM norms produced changing and competing definitions of slums. Neither of the city-level plans required by JNNURM had any significant interaction – in terms of inputs or outputs – with established processes of statutory land use planning or the annual 'development planning' round. Finally, although show-case flat projects won national awards, the dominance of individual houses within the total number of dwellings completed showed that JNNURM's aspiration to encourage participatory design of effective community-scale housing solutions remained elusive, not least because of the strictures of its own funding regime. That JNNURM had not provided the space for a basically well-run city with a modest housing need to become 'slum free' is, perhaps, unsurprising. Where Trivandrum's experience is perhaps more revealing is in the detailed insights it provides into this paper's central question of how are national projects of urban reform reshaping relationships between national, State and city-level governments. Here, the tensions and contradictions inherent within JNNURM policy set in train three inter-related dynamics of state rescaling based in turn around problem framing, technologies of governance, and the scalar strategy of driving reform 'from above'.

The first dynamic is that of the national-scale framing of a policy problem, whereby JNNURM established prescriptive planning exercises, and delimited appropriate solutions to the challenge of making cities 'slum free'. The CDP and SFCPoA required cities to present inevitably partial views of their current conditions and future development. These reflected back to central government the things it wanted to see, namely housing problems translated in to fundable projects, while squeezing out the space to represent local specificity and complexity. The increasingly detailed national guidelines for these exercises appealed to a bureaucratic 'will to know', perhaps resting on an assumption that if cities could be convinced to map the urban poor and their conditions more thoroughly, then housing problems would be rationally addressed. In practice, the SFCPoA became a straight-jacketed process of data collection: Trivandrum could meet its demands by listing out its slums and ranking their 'vulnerability', but this ultimately yielded little in the way of improved understanding. These planning exercises also had limited city-level institutional traction, even though they had revealed important local policy problems for our interview respondents. They had mapped the distribution of 'slum' housing across the city, raised

awareness of the extent of urban poverty, and highlighted the vague and fluid official definitions underpinning both. Furthermore, they had pointed to city-specific issues (such as long-distance migrant labourers' poor housing conditions) and started some internal debate on appropriate local solutions, such as using RAY funds to produce City-owned social-rented housing. However, this nascent debate was largely absent from the plan documents themselves, and was overtaken as national policy moved on: as our fieldwork progressed, wider discussions on urban development within the city were increasingly dominated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Smart City' programme.

These scalar effects of problem framing were not only present within broader city-visioning documents, but also shaped the form and selection of individual housing projects. National ambitions of finding 'whole slum' solutions incorporating housing, social infrastructure and beneficiary participation grew from BSUP to RAY: as these were embedded within New Delhi's increasingly exacting criteria, the scope for local flexibility diminished. For Trivandrum's RAY pilot project, these criteria were so demanding that no alternatives to the city-edge fishing community were seriously considered. This foreclosed any party-political competition over which Wards should benefit from such a sizable investment, showing the power of this national-level problem framing to dictate terms to a well-established and relatively autonomous city government.

The second dynamic was that of technologies of governance, and their impact on governance capacity at a city scale. As we have shown, effective engagement with JNNURM's goals was a significant challenge that prompted a coordinated State and City-level response. This drew on Kerala's existing institutional strengths, including trusted NGOs and oversight from Kudumbashree's conscientious CEO, backed by the skills of specialists brought in to the city's BSUP/RAY Cell. Together, this produced a tight-knit team, but as one of the RAY Cell members reflected: 'one of the objectives was to empower the Urban Local Bodies, but it never happened. . . instead of empowering them, Kudumbashree was leading the project' (Focus Group Discussion, 16 January 16). The dedicated BSUP/RAY cell fulfilled the immediate goal of gaining repeated funding of projects, but despite their aspirations were unable to effect wider change in the everyday operation of other parts of the City government. Trivandrum's JNNURM plans were legally and institutionally disconnected from existing city-level developmental or statutory planning processes: the need to produce them, however, absorbed much of the team's capacity. Alongside this deflection of resources for meaningful strategic planning, Trivandrum's governance capacity was being reshaped by the far more mundane practices through which central government programmes are 'seen' and managed: technical sanction, funding clearance, and evaluation based around physical progress of works and expenditure incurred. These practices are so deep-seated and unchanging that they were rarely questioned by any of the protagonists, but their cumulative effects were to close down the space for innovation and local autonomy within project delivery.

The final, and underlying, dynamic at play here was that of national government's scalar strategy, which attempted to drive through broader governance reform 'from above' using the incentive of project-specific funding. Here, Trivandrum's success in being attuned to national policy was having the unintentional effect of driving accountability 'upwards' to new Delhi, through the energy it spent on demonstrating reform and project compliance, rather than 'downwards' to city residents. There was a double irony here. First, as central housing subsidies were reduced, and flat-based projects ran into costly delays, Trivandrum was committing ever more of its own resources to capture a diminishing national funding stream. Second, as central policy underwent repeated change, the real chances of a coherent and consistent city-level plan for slum improvement receded. Respondents were acutely

aware of how hard it was to make Trivandrum fit to shifting national targets: for many of them, the JNNURM experience had highlighted Kerala's need for its own urban policy, but none felt that this significant absence at the State-level would be filled soon.

This is an important reminder that we should expect that the geographies of state rescaling within post-liberalisation India to be complex and plural. Even within processes of 'demand side' rescaling, we should not necessarily expect that India's States are the primary players in resolving the tensions Vijayabaskar (2017) identified between attracting capital investment, and building political legitimacy through welfare provision. JNNURM attempted to reform city-level governments and enable them to chart their own strategic paths towards urban development, promoting economic growth whilst addressing urban poverty. The contradictions inherent within this self-conscious project of rescaling have, instead, ensured that any such empowerment was highly curtailed and that the national state continues to play a key role in shaping the practices of urban governance.

These three dynamics of state rescaling in turn raise wider challenges for both academics and policy makers aiming to take up Shaktin and Vidyarthi's call to engage with the complexities of urban governance change in contexts such as post-liberalisation India. For academics, the challenge is that this engagement requires research that is itself multi-scalar in its reach. Some recent studies (including contributors to Shaktin and Vidyarthi's collection itself) have addressed urban governance from the perspective of the 'movers and shakers', the powerful elites at national and State/city level able to shape policy or developmental visions. Understanding these people and their agendas provides an important counter-weight to qualitative work on urban poverty that has often privileged the polar opposite approach, namely looking through the eyes of grassroots participants at policy outcomes. However, we would argue for research questions and methodologies that deliberately cross scales, following processes and documents from national policy guidance through to specific project delivery. In our case, this has helped us move beyond policy evaluation, the focus of much JNNURM research thus far, to understand Trivandrum's scope for strategic action in response to national policy, and the limitations to this. More broadly, this re-emphasises the tensions between different scales of the state in contexts across the global South where 'rescaling processes... appear to be more strongly shaped by state strategies as opposed to market forces' (Kennedy, 2017: 20). Here, we have presented problem framing, technologies of governance and scalar strategies as three inter-related dynamics of rescaling that may help scholars to unpack and understand these tensions elsewhere.

For policy makers, however, any such understanding is primarily of value insofar as it suggests ways in which the goals of autonomous, empowered city government Manmohan Singh articulated at JNNURM's launch might be realised in practice. Although we can offer no roadmap for change here, we can offer both hope and caution. Hope is to be found in Trivandrum's willingness to engage with these goals, where it was clear that local policy makers saw JNNURM as an opportunity to further Kerala's own reform trajectory. These aspirations could have been more fully realised had JNNURM promoted more meaningful dialogue with New Delhi on building cross-scalar pathways and alliances towards empowered urban governance, rather than simply requiring cities to react to a centralised agenda. Our caution is therefore directed at those shaping national urban policy, and would follow directly from Kennedy's observation that 'rescaling is not a zero-sum game' (2017: 13). Ever-more prescriptive guidelines reinforced by funding conditionality may appear to be the strongest weapons in the policy armoury, but reaching instinctively for these inevitably recentralises power, even when it is done in the name of devolution. Furthermore, any such

unintended acts of ‘rescaling upwards’ carry the additional risk of weakening governance capacity at *all* levels of the state.

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Notes

1. Throughout this paper, we use ‘State’ to refer to India’s provincial administrative units, such as Kerala, and ‘state’ without a capital letter to refer to institutions of government more generally. We generally refer to India’s cities by their revised official names (Mumbai, etc.), but retain ‘Trivandrum’ as it remains in common local use.
2. Ever since Indira Gandhi campaigned to ‘Remove Poverty’ (*Garibi Hatao*) in the 1970s, the unveiling of new welfare programmes has been an important tool for *national* governments to build electoral support (see Corbridge et al., 2004: Chapter 2 and Appendix 1).
3. In the run-up to the 12th Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 2013) there was a major review of the JNNURM as a whole, with JNNURM-II gaining increased funding and being expanded from the initial 65 ‘mission cities’ to the whole of India.
4. As the 2009 version of the BSUP guidelines state: “The main thrust of the revised strategy of urban renewal is to ensure improvement in urban governance so that Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and para-statal agencies become financially sound with enhanced credit rating and ability to access market capital for undertaking new programmes and expansion of services. In this improved environment, public-private participation modules for provisioning of various services would also become feasible” (MHUPA, 2009: 5).
5. This Constitutional Amendment made Urban Local Bodies a third tier of government under National and State (provincial) levels: passed in 1992, it required ratification and follow-up legislation by State Governments which had, in many cases, failed to complete this before JNNURM’s launch.
6. The remaining 65% went to JNNURM’s other ‘sub-mission’, Urban Infrastructure and Governance, implemented by the Ministry for Urban Development.
7. ‘Rajiv [Gandhi] Housing Plan’: naming the programme after a Congress Prime Minister perhaps contributed to its speedy replacement when Narendra Modi’s BJP came to power in 2015.
8. Percentage contributions from State and City governments were precisely stipulated, with larger cities making a greater contribution to costs: under JNNURM-II the level of central funding was reduced across the board.

9. Kerala's '100,000 houses programme' of the 1970s linked land redistribution to house-building for marginalised groups, producing many 'two cent colonies', named after the 1/50th acre plots beneficiaries received: State-specific subsidies for land purchase and housing construction for the urban poor continued from this period.
10. In Kerala, these meetings ('Ward Sabhas') are conducted at a neighbourhood scale – roughly equivalent to the area of a single polling booth.
11. These included two earlier pro-poor housing programmes, the National Slum Development Programme (NSDP) and Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana (VAMBAY), and an urban livelihoods programme, the Swarana Jayanthi Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY).
12. JNNURM coincided with a contested internal reform of Kudumbashree women's groups in the city, and through its previous work, the Mission was more closely aligned with rural/District administration than the city's powerful Mayoral structure (Former Kudumbashree CEO, 17 January 16).
13. In practice, Kerala faced difficulties engaging good quality contractors for the even larger-scale projects undertaken under the Urban Infrastructure and Governance elements of JNNURM: attempts to get an agency accredited for road construction, for example, were unsuccessful (Former Secretary LSGD, 16 January 16).
14. Immediately prior to JNNURM's launch, Trivandrum had been one of five cities in Kerala seeking Asian Development Bank funding for infrastructure development, and the CDP drew heavily on ideas from this (Govt. of Kerala, 2005).
15. At 7.8% of Trivandrum's planned JNNURM budget, BSUP projects were dwarfed by those proposed for transport (51.1%), sewerage (14.6%) and water (14.1%). There was, however, a significant *overspend* on BSUP projects, whereas Trivandrum struggled to implement fully these larger infrastructure projects (Former Secretary, Local Self Government Department, 16 January 16).
16. As noted by Kerala's former chief planning officer (interview, 19 January 16) the Kerala Slum Act (1980) is effectively defunct as it does not include clear enough rules to define slums.
17. "Yes, that we could easily get [the CDP] through because we had the People's Plan. It's not a rigorous city development plan, it is a very loose kind of socio economic plan. Because we had this plan and we have a reasonably capable Town and Country Planning Department, we could get it [completed] faster" (Former Secretary LSGI, 16 January 16).
18. These labourers often rented rooms in formal, serviced housing but in overcrowded conditions: respondents estimated that their numbers had grown rapidly over the last decade (Former Secretary LSGI, 16 January 16; Former Mayor, 19 January 16).
19. In a case reminiscent of housing project capture in South Africa (Miraftab, 2009), just before keys were to be handed over to the intended beneficiaries, the units were forcibly occupied by criminal groups, and distributed to their clients. This experience almost caused the NGO to disengage completely from urban housing programmes (Joint Director of Accredited NGO, 15 January 16).
20. "[Kudumbashree CEO] really convinced the [MHUPA] Secretary about the importance of these community facilities but later they included this very thing within RAY. Maybe these people are convinced and honest about this work and she convinced them and then only we got it passed" (Joint Director of Accredited NGO, 15 January 16).
21. Perhaps more substantively significant were public meetings which negotiated and redesigned the project's planned community facilities to provide storage space for fishermen's equipment, a community hall, and multiple safe usage of the site's limited open space.
22. Land scarcity not only suppressed local party-political competition over particular project sites, it also appears to have dissipated potential tensions between the Communist-led Trivandrum Corporation and Congress leadership of the State Assembly (2011–2016) over the RAY pilot project. Located in the Ward of a Congress councillor, the mutual advantage to the State and City of gaining this prestige national project seems to have ensured that there were no politically motivated delays to its selection.
23. All figures from BSUP Cell internal reports, discussed with a RAY project cell member (31 January 17). Trivandrum's willingness to ensure that cost over-runs did *not* lead to increased beneficiary contributions went beyond JNNURM expectations. It should be noted, however, that this did not protect residents from the high financial and personal costs of project delays.

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