

**Finding Effective, Contextual Solutions for Urban
Resilience: Piloting Proposed Decision Support
Framework (SECURE) with emphasis on GESI in the Indian
Context**

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Executive Summary

The report, Finding Effective, Contextual Solutions for Urban Resilience: Piloting the Proposed Decision Support Framework (SECURE) with an Emphasis on GESI in the Indian Context, explores the challenges of urban resilience in informal settlements of Ajmer, Rajasthan, focusing on Wards 2 and 48. The project, led by PRIA in collaboration with the International Institute for Environment & Development (IIED), examines issues related to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and the impacts of climate change through a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) lens.

Key Findings

The key findings highlight several challenges faced by informal settlements in Ajmer. WASH services are significantly deficient, with irregular water supply, poor sanitation infrastructure, and inadequate waste management systems. These shortcomings disproportionately affect women, who are primarily responsible for managing household water and sanitation. Despite their crucial roles, women's participation in governance and decision-making remains limited due to entrenched gender norms, as seen in Ward 48, where a female ward councillor's authority is undermined by patriarchal dynamics. Climate change further exacerbates these challenges, with erratic weather patterns worsening water scarcity and overwhelming the city's inadequate drainage systems, increasing the prevalence of waterborne diseases. Institutional barriers, such as jurisdictional conflicts between the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA), along with bureaucratic inefficiencies, delay WASH service delivery and leave residents vulnerable. Community-based organizations like Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Slum Improvement Committees (SICs) play a vital role in advocating for better WASH services, yet their impact is limited due to the lack of formal recognition and integration into local governance structures. NGOs like PRIA and CFAR have been instrumental in empowering marginalized communities and supporting their participation in local governance, but a lack of reliable data on vulnerabilities in informal settlements hinders effective planning and resilience-building efforts.

Process

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing participatory tools such as Transect Walks, Social Mapping, Venn Diagrams, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). These methods enabled a comprehensive power analysis, revealing complex dynamics between formal institutions, community organizations, and marginalized groups.

The SECURE framework guided the analysis, providing valuable insights into stakeholder relationships and resource distribution. However, the study also identified areas for improvement in the framework, particularly in its adaptability to local contexts and integration of informal practices crucial for resilience-building.

Recommendations include formalizing the role of community organizations in local governance structures, addressing jurisdictional conflicts between AMC and ADA, enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes, and improving data collection methodologies. These steps are essential for developing more inclusive, effective, and sustainable WASH interventions in Ajmer's informal settlements.

This executive summary encapsulates the critical insights gained from the study, highlighting both the challenges faced by marginalized communities in Ajmer and the potential pathways for enhancing urban resilience through improved WASH services and community empowerment.

Problem Statement and Intervention Rationale

Ajmer, a city with a rich historical legacy in Rajasthan, India, is currently facing profound challenges in urban resilience, especially within its informal settlements. As per the official records, Ajmer city has 67 slums which are mostly located within the city center. Some of the informal settlements are more than 30 years old. The slums in outer areas of Ajmer are formed by newly migrated settlers in the city. Out of these 43 are non-notified slum settlements and 2 resettled informal settlements in the city.

However, PRIA's survey in 2016-17 revealed that Ajmer city has more than 100 slums, most of which are located within the city centre and some of which are more than thirty years old. These areas, as defined by Rajasthan's State Slum Policy 2012, are densely populated and lack essential sanitation and drinking water facilities. A significant number of these settlements are situated on private or government land without proper tenure, making residents vulnerable to eviction and limiting their access to basic services. The population in these informal settlements largely consists of migrant workers from states such as Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, who are primarily employed as daily wage labourers. These communities face numerous challenges, including inadequate housing, lack of legal documentation, and insufficient infrastructure, all of which severely affect their quality of life.

The selection of Wards 2 and 48 for this project was based on their representation of critical challenges faced by informal settlements in Ajmer, as well as their strategic importance for understanding the dynamics of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) issues and community resilience. Both wards are home to marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and migrant populations, all of whom experience socio-economic deprivation and limited access to basic services. Ward 2, located on the outskirts of Ajmer, comprises newer informal settlements largely populated by migrant families who struggle with frequent water shortages and inadequate sanitation infrastructure. In contrast, Ward 48 is an older settlement within the city, where entrenched gendered power dynamics limit women's participation in governance despite their key role in managing household water resources. Notably, the marginalization of women in decision-making is exemplified by the case of a female ward councillor whose authority is diminished by her husband's influence. These two wards were chosen not only for their geographical and socio-economic differences but also for their potential to provide insights into the intersection of gender, governance, and WASH challenges. Additionally, PRIA's longstanding rapport with the communities in these informal settlements facilitated access to Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Settlement Improvement Committees (SICs), ward councillors, and local residents, further strengthening the relevance and feasibility of the project "Finding Effective, Contextual Solutions for Urban Resilience: Piloting the Proposed Decision Support Framework (SECURE) with an emphasis on GESI in the Indian Context". The narratives and observation from the field, revealed that informal settlements, particularly in Wards 2 and 48, are severely affected by critical deficiencies in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services. These challenges include irregular water supply, poor sanitation infrastructure, and inadequate waste management systems, which significantly impact the quality of life for residents, especially women. The field data collected reveals that water is supplied only once every 48 hours in some areas, with instances of even longer gaps, such as five to six days without water in Ward 48. The water that does reach these communities is often of poor quality, leading to health issues such as frequent bouts of diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases. Additionally, the community has raised concerns about the poor quality of water being supplied from Foyasagar Lake, which has a bitter

taste and is suspected to be causing health issues such as tonsillitis and weight gain. The economic burden on residents is further exacerbated by the need to purchase water from tankers, despite receiving water bills for the inadequate supply. Additionally, low water pressure further exacerbates the water supply issues, making it difficult for residents to collect sufficient water for daily use.

Climate change has intensified water-related challenges in Ajmer by altering rainfall patterns, resulting in both prolonged droughts and sudden, intense rainfall events. While city-specific data is limited, the broader trends observed across Rajasthan are likely affecting Ajmer as well. The Rajasthan State Action Plan on Climate Change 2022 indicates positive trends in total annual rainfall and an increase in extreme rainfall events across the state (Rajasthan State Action Plan on Climate Change, 2022, p. 15).¹ For Ajmer, this likely translates to more erratic precipitation, with periods of water scarcity interspersed with intense rainfall that can overwhelm the city's drainage systems. The document also notes significant variability in monsoon and non-monsoon rainfall patterns (Rajasthan State Action Plan on Climate Change, 2022, pp. 14-15), which could disrupt traditional water management practices in Ajmer. Furthermore, as rainfall is the principal source of groundwater recharge in Rajasthan (Rajasthan State Action Plan on Climate Change, 2022, p. 15), these changes potentially impact Ajmer's groundwater levels, exacerbating water stress during dry periods. These climate-induced alterations in rainfall patterns pose significant challenges for Ajmer's urban water management, agriculture, and overall resilience to climate extremes.

As field data shows that These fluctuations disrupt the already irregular water supply, making access to clean water even more unpredictable. The increased frequency of heavy rains overwhelms the existing poor drainage systems, leading to frequent flooding in the narrow streets of these settlements. This not only hampers waste collection, as Municipal Corporation (AMC) vehicles are unable to navigate the flooded streets, but also exacerbates the accumulation of garbage, forcing residents, particularly women, to clean drains themselves. Furthermore, the poor construction of roads, which are built higher than the houses, contributes to the flooding, leaving homes inundated with water during rains. The ineffective waste management and poor drainage systems, coupled with climate-induced flooding, create ideal conditions for the breeding of mosquitoes and other vectors, heightening the risk of vector-borne diseases. The stress and anxiety caused by these unsanitary conditions have further deteriorated the mental and physical health of the community.

Moreover, jurisdictional conflicts between the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA) have created significant barriers to efficient service delivery, especially in informal settlements like Ward 2 (Gujjar ki Dharti) and Ward 48 (Bairwa ki Basti). These conflicts stem from unclear roles and overlapping responsibilities, resulting in prolonged delays in addressing basic service needs such as water supply and sanitation. The water department (PHED) is notorious for its slow response to community complaints; residents often report waiting weeks for pipeline repairs, with water supply disrupted for 5-6 days at a time. Despite submitting formal complaints through helplines like 181, bureaucratic procedures often require community members to engage with multiple levels of administration, further delaying resolution. For instance, when water supply is interrupted, local community members are forced to rely on temporary measures such as water-sharing networks while waiting for the authorities to address the issue. Additionally, sewage treatment plants remain largely non-functional,

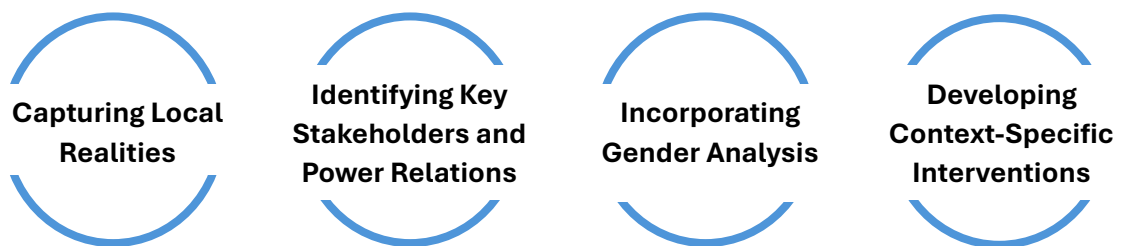
¹ Rajasthan state action plan on climate change,2022

allowing untreated waste to flow into Ana Sagar Lake due to administrative inaction. These delays are compounded by rapid urbanization and deforestation, which have disrupted natural resources and led to increased flooding, further straining the already inadequate infrastructure. The lack of coordination between AMC and ADA, combined with a complex and slow-moving bureaucratic structure, has resulted in a chronic lack of accountability, leaving vulnerable communities at risk. Traditional gender norms further complicate the situation by limiting women's involvement in decision-making processes, even though they are the primary managers of household water resources. Women also face additional social challenges, such as the need to seek permission from male family members before taking any significant actions, which restricts their ability to address these pressing issues effectively. The community also struggles with high levels of alcoholism, particularly among the Male members of the community, which exacerbates issues of poverty, illiteracy, school dropouts, and domestic violence.

Intervention Rationale

The primary motivation for conducting field visits in Ajmer's informal settlements, particularly in Wards 2 and 48, was to gain an in-depth understanding of the intricate challenges affecting Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services in these areas. While existing literature & data pointed to significant issues such as water scarcity, poor sanitation, and inadequate waste management, it did not capture the full extent of how these problems were interwoven with local power structures, gender norms, and community dynamics.

Recognizing these problems & gaps, the field visits was designed to:



1. **Capturing Local Realities:** To accurately document the lived experiences of residents, particularly how they interact with WASH services and navigate systemic barriers. Field data revealed that water supply in Ward 48 is highly irregular, with some households receiving water only once every 48 hours. This forces residents, especially women, to find alternative, often expensive, sources of water. The data also highlighted that women are primarily responsible for managing and storing water, as well as cleaning, tasks that are time-consuming and physically demanding, yet often go unrecognized in formal discussions about WASH services.

2. Identifying Key Stakeholders and Power Relations:

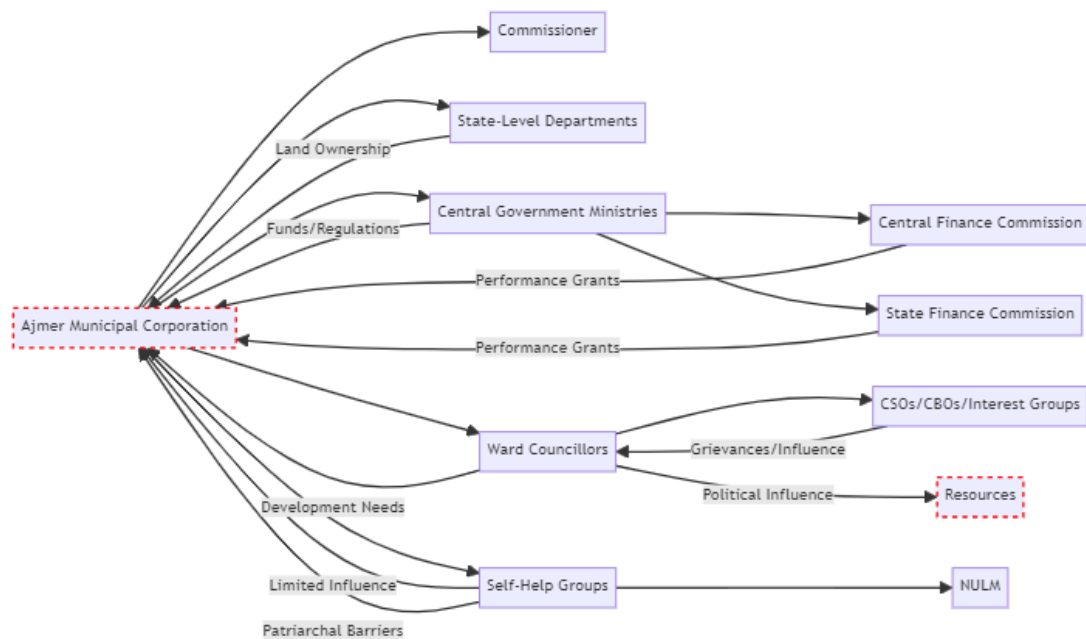


Figure 1: Stakeholder Relations Map Illustrating Key Interaction levels

Identifying key stakeholders and power relations is crucial to understanding how resources are controlled, how decisions are made, and which groups are excluded from the process. Field visit in Ajmer, particularly in Ward 48 (Bairwa ki Basti), revealed that decision-making power is highly centralized, often excluding marginalized groups such as women, lower-caste communities, and economically disadvantaged populations. Despite having elected female representatives, such as the ward councillor in Ward 48, gendered power imbalances persist, where the actual authority remains with male figures, in this case, her husband, who controls her decision-making. This reflects broader patriarchal dynamics within local governance structures, where women's voices are marginalized, even when they hold formal positions of power.

The power relations extend beyond gender to include socio-economic and caste hierarchies, further sidelining groups such as the Koli, Harijan, and Muslim communities. These marginalized populations often have limited access to resources and are excluded from key decision-making processes. The Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA), which play central roles in urban planning and service delivery, are often uncoordinated, leading to inefficiencies and a lack of inclusion of vulnerable groups in critical decision-making forums.

Moreover, although Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), such as those active in Ward 48, strive to advocate for better services, their influence remains constrained due to a lack of resources and formal recognition. Control over essential resources like water remains with the water department (PHED), which demonstrates a pattern of bureaucratic delays and minimal responsiveness to community complaints. This results in a concentration of decision-making power within formal institutions, further excluding marginalized voices. The centralization of power and the exclusion of marginalized groups, including women, underscore the unequal power dynamics in Ajmer's urban governance.

3. **Incorporating Gender Analysis:** To examine the gendered dimensions of power and how traditional norms limit women’s participation in decision-making. Despite being responsible for critical household tasks like water management and cleaning, women have little say in how WASH services are provided. This gender analysis was crucial for understanding the unique challenges women face and ensuring that our interventions address these disparities.
4. **Developing Context-Specific Interventions:** To inform the strategic design of interventions that are grounded in the actual needs and dynamics of these communities. Field insights emphasized the need for interventions that address not just infrastructural gaps, but also the social and gendered power dynamics that perpetuate these issues.

To achieve these objectives, we employed a range of participatory research methods, including Transect Walk, Social Mapping, Historical Mapping, Venn Diagrams, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). These tools were chosen for their ability to generate rich, qualitative data while actively engaging community members and stakeholders.

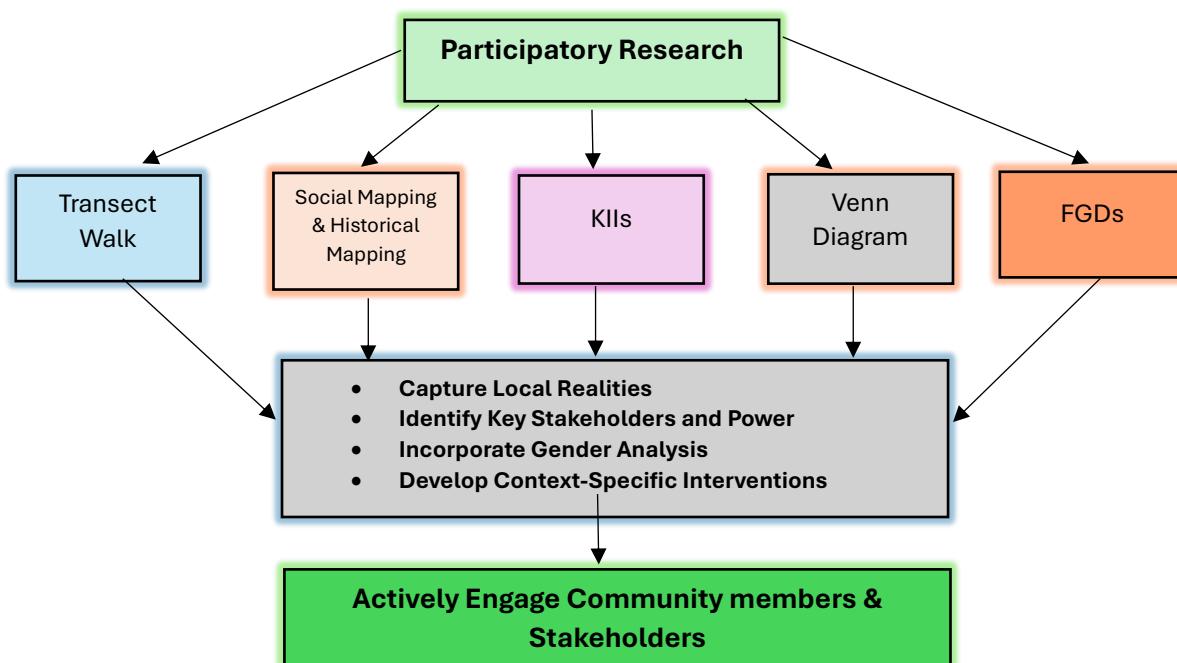


Figure 2: Engaging the Community: A Participatory Research Approach

1. **Venn Diagrams:** Used to map relationships and influence among various institutions and community groups, Venn Diagrams revealed critical insights into power dynamics. In both Wards 2 and 48, it became evident that while institutions like the PHED and Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) are vital for service delivery, they are perceived as distant and unapproachable by residents. Conversely, local committees like Slum Improvement Committees (SICs) were seen as more accessible but lacked the resources and influence to drive significant change.



Figure 3: Venn diagram with community women

2. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** The formal governance discussions refer to the structured meetings and decision-making processes that occur within official government institutions or bodies responsible for urban planning, resource allocation, and service delivery. In the context of Ajmer, these discussions typically involve key stakeholders such as the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC), the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA), and specific departments like the water department (Jal Bhawan). These formal forums include meetings related to the SMART City Mission, AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation), and other government-led initiatives aimed at improving urban infrastructure, water, and sanitation services.

These discussions primarily take place within government offices, council meetings, and formal planning sessions, where decisions about service delivery, infrastructure projects, and urban resilience strategies are made. However, these forums are largely inaccessible to marginalized groups, including women and lower-caste communities, who are often excluded from participating in or influencing these decisions.



Figure 4: FGD & Historical Mapping with Community

In the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted during fieldwork, women in Ward 48 expressed that while they play a critical role in managing household water and sanitation, their concerns are not adequately represented in these formal governance settings.

Despite being directly impacted by WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) challenges, their voices remain marginalized, and decision-making is dominated by male leaders or higher administrative bodies without sufficient community consultation. Consequently, formal governance discussions are shaped by a limited perspective, excluding the experiences and needs of those most affected by water and sanitation issues.

3. **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with ward councillors, representatives from the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA), and community leaders revealed significant jurisdictional conflicts between the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the ADA, which are major contributors to the inefficiencies and delays in delivering essential services, particularly water supply and sanitation. These interviews underscored the deep-rooted challenges in coordination between the two governing bodies, as both are responsible for different aspects of urban management but often lack clarity on their specific roles and boundaries.

The jurisdictional disputes between the AMC and ADA have a direct impact on the maintenance and expansion of water infrastructure. For instance, in informal settlements like Ward 48, ongoing conflicts over which body is responsible for repairing water pipelines have led to prolonged water shortages. As a result, residents have been forced to rely on alternative sources, such as hand pumps or water tankers, often at high costs. These conflicts not only delay immediate repairs but also prevent long-term infrastructure improvements, leading to unreliable and inconsistent water access in many areas.

Additionally, the sewage treatment and sanitation services are also affected by these jurisdictional issues. In some cases, the AMC is responsible for managing sewage systems, while the ADA oversees urban planning and expansion. This divide often results in poor communication and a lack of coordinated efforts, leaving critical WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) services underfunded or neglected. For example, sewage treatment plants in Ajmer have been reported as non-functional due to the failure of these two bodies to collaborate effectively, causing untreated waste to flow into water bodies like Ana Sagar Lake, further compounding environmental degradation. These jurisdictional conflicts thus hinder the timely delivery of services, exacerbate infrastructure gaps, and significantly impact the WASH conditions for vulnerable populations, especially those in informal settlements. The lack of clear leadership and accountability between the AMC and ADA leaves the residents in limbo, forcing them to navigate between multiple layers of bureaucracy to address their basic needs.

4. **Gender and Power Analysis:** The gender analysis examined how power is distributed between genders, particularly within households and local governance structures, revealing systemic imbalances that marginalize women. In Ward 48, a clear example of this is the female ward councillor whose decision-making authority is controlled by her husband, reflecting the gendered power dynamics prevalent in local governance. This is not an isolated case. In other wards, women reported similar challenges—despite bearing the primary responsibility for managing water and sanitation in their households, they are routinely excluded from formal governance discussions and community decision-making processes.



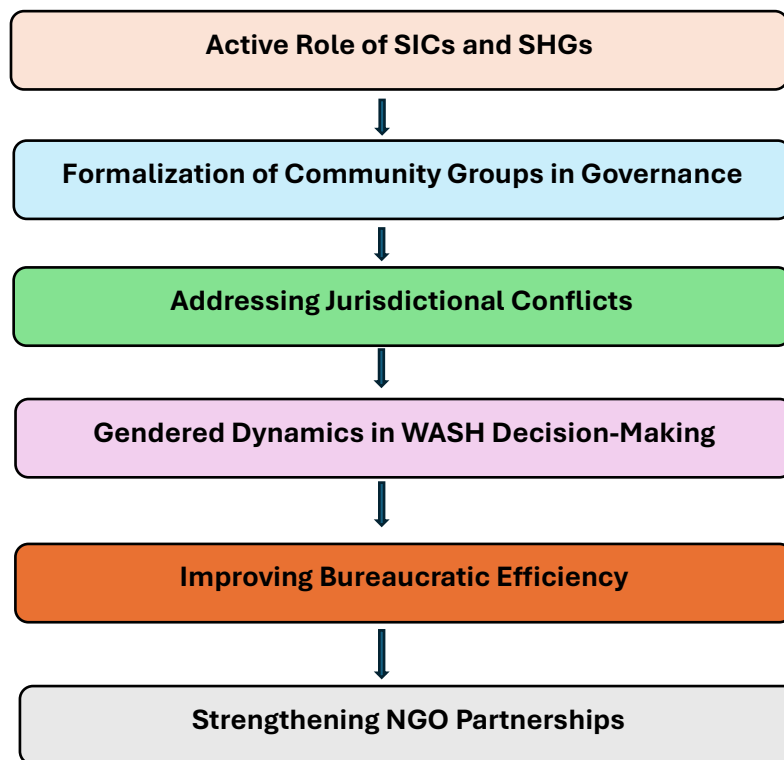
Figure 5: FGD with Community Women

In addition to governance, the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women highlighted that their concerns regarding water shortages and sanitation challenges are rarely prioritized in broader community meetings, which are typically dominated by male leaders. Even when women are present, their input is often overlooked or dismissed. For instance, women in Ward 48 noted that while they are tasked with securing water for their families, men are the ones who attend public meetings and liaise with local authorities, perpetuating their exclusion from critical decision-making platforms.

This analysis was crucial in shaping interventions aimed at not only addressing infrastructural deficiencies but also challenging the underlying patriarchal norms that limit women's participation. Ensuring that women's voices are included in governance and empowering them to take active roles in decision-making processes is a key step toward achieving more equitable service delivery in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). The analysis also prompted the need for capacity-building programs to enhance women's leadership roles within their communities, fostering more inclusive and balanced power dynamics.

The field visits in Ajmer's informal settlements were critical in uncovering the nuanced, complex dynamics that shape WASH service delivery. By directly engaging with residents and stakeholders, we were able to collect detailed insights that go beyond what secondary data could offer. These insights have directly informed our intervention strategy, ensuring it is tailored to the specific needs and challenges of these communities. By addressing both the systemic barriers and the social dynamics at play, including the unrecognized labour of women in managing water and sanitation, our interventions are designed to be more effective, equitable, and sustainable. This approach will ultimately lead to improved WASH services and greater resilience for the most vulnerable populations in Ajmer.

Key Learnings



- 1. Active Role of SICs and SHGs in WASH Management:** Field data highlights the crucial role of Slum Improvement Committees (SICs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in managing local WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) challenges. These groups act as vital community mediators and problem-solvers, especially during crises. For instance, in Ward 2, when a water crisis emerged due to the breakdown of local pipelines, SHGs successfully mobilized to secure temporary water solutions. They worked with community leaders and CBOs to negotiate the provision of water tankers, which helped avoid prolonged water shortages. This example demonstrates their potential in managing emergency responses and ensuring the community's access to clean water during disruptions.

In early 2024, Ward 2 in Ajmer faced a severe water crisis when a key pipeline broke down, leaving the community without access to clean water for over a week. With summer heat worsening the situation, the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Slum Improvement Committees (SICs) swiftly mobilized to provide a solution.

Recognizing the urgency, SHGs (Maa Durga, Prerna, and Priya) took the lead in organizing the community and negotiating with local authorities. They successfully arranged water tankers to deliver clean water to the area. With the help of SICs, they devised a fair distribution system, ensuring water reached all households. Meanwhile, they kept pressure on the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) to expedite pipeline repairs.

This prompt response prevented a prolonged crisis and showcased the effectiveness of local groups in managing emergencies. The efforts of the SHGs not only secured clean water but also empowered women leaders in the community. Their role in WASH management highlighted the need for formal recognition and inclusion of these groups in local governance.

This case emphasizes the importance of community-based organizations in solving WASH challenges and calls for stronger partnerships between SHGs, SICs, and municipal authorities for more inclusive governance.

2. **Formalization of Community Groups in Governance:** The field insights reveal the importance of integrating SICs and SHGs more formally within local governance structures. While these groups have shown their capability in crisis management and advocacy, their efforts could be further strengthened through official recognition and representation in local decision-making forums. Establishing formal communication channels between these groups and municipal bodies like the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) could ensure that WASH issues are addressed more systematically. By institutionalizing their role in governance processes, the long-term impact of their initiatives would be enhanced, leading to more inclusive and effective management of community concerns.
3. **Addressing Jurisdictional Conflicts:** One of the significant challenges identified in the field data is the jurisdictional conflict between the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA). These disputes, particularly over responsibility for water pipeline maintenance in Ward 2, have delayed essential repairs, exacerbating water shortages. For example, a pipeline ownership conflict once left the community without water for over a week. The recommendation moving forward is to establish a joint task force with representatives from both AMC and ADA, as well as community leaders and SICs, to facilitate the coordination of WASH projects and swiftly resolve jurisdictional issues, ensuring that essential services are not compromised.
4. **Gendered Dynamics in WASH Decision-Making:** Field insights highlight the exclusion of women from decision-making processes related to WASH, despite them being primarily responsible for managing household water needs. Women in Ward 48 and Ward 2 expressed frustration over their lack of influence in decisions affecting WASH services, which impacts their daily lives. Empowering women in these processes through leadership training in SHGs and SICs is essential. By increasing women's representation in governance discussions and advocacy, particularly related to WASH, more comprehensive and equitable solutions can be achieved that address the specific needs of female community members.
5. **Improving Bureaucratic Efficiency:** Bureaucratic inefficiencies, particularly within the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), have led to delays in addressing critical WASH issues. For instance, a broken hand pump in Ward 48 remained unrepaired for 10 days despite repeated complaints. These delays not only disrupt essential services but also erode community trust in public institutions. There is an urgent need to streamline processes within PHED and other relevant bodies to ensure timely responses to community complaints and minimize service disruptions.
6. **Strengthening NGO Partnerships:** Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as PRIA and CFAR have been instrumental in supporting community-driven WASH initiatives, particularly in areas where municipal intervention has been slow or absent. These NGOs have empowered SHGs and SICs by providing advocacy support, resources, and training. For example, CFAR facilitated the establishment of ward committees that helped secure temporary water solutions during crises. Formalizing partnerships with

these NGOs through municipal planning and execution frameworks can ensure that community-driven efforts are aligned with broader municipal strategies, leading to more sustainable and impactful WASH interventions across Ajmer.

These key learnings emphasize the need for a collaborative approach that integrates community groups, resolves jurisdictional conflicts, improves bureaucratic efficiencies, and empowers women to create a more inclusive, effective, and resilient WASH service delivery framework in Ajmer's informal settlements.

Power Analysis

The WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) crisis in Ajmer's informal settlements, particularly in Wards 2 and 48, underscores significant power imbalances and resource disparities among key stakeholders. As of 2011, only 55% of urban households had proper latrines, and the city only achieved Open Defecation Free status in 2019. With sewerage coverage at just 40% of the population, informal areas face significant sanitation challenges. The paper highlights issues such as improper fecal waste disposal, inadequate infrastructure, water scarcity, lack of public awareness, and weak institutional frameworks. These factors, combined with financial constraints and rapid urbanization, have led to poor WASH access and practices in Ajmer's informal settlements, reflecting similar challenges in many Indian cities (Gupta & Malik, 2021)²

A power analysis, informed by extensive field data, reveals the intricate dynamics of influence, control, and decision-making that perpetuate these challenges. Gaventa's (1980)³ three-dimensional power structure is evident here. Both John Gaventa's three-dimensional power structure and the SECURE framework offer a deep understanding of how power dynamics shape the lives of marginalized communities. While Gaventa's framework focuses on the mechanisms of power and their effect on marginalized groups, the SECURE framework provides an actionable approach to empower these groups and build resilience against vulnerabilities, particularly in urban settings.

1. **First Dimension (Visible Power) vs. Institutional Control in SECURE:** In Gaventa's first dimension, visible power is held by governmental bodies such as the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA), which have the overt power to make decisions on WASH services. However, these actions often favor more privileged groups, neglecting informal settlements. Similarly, the SECURE framework emphasizes the importance of addressing institutional structures that contribute to the marginalization of certain groups. It advocates for co-production by marginalized communities to confront and challenge the structural causes of their vulnerability, ensuring that power does not remain centralized in governmental institutions.
2. **Second Dimension (Hidden Power) vs. SECURE's Focus on Asymmetric Vulnerability:** Gaventa's second dimension involves the creation of barriers that prevent marginalized groups from voicing their concerns. In Ajmer, jurisdictional conflicts between AMC and ADA and bureaucratic inefficiencies act as hidden forms of power that suppress the grievances of residents in informal settlements. The SECURE framework echoes this by

² (Gupta, S., & Malik, N. S. (2021). Why We Lack in Basic Sanitation? An Assessment of Challenges in Ajmer and Solution Strategies. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 4(3), 119-130.)

³ Power & Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley. CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD, 1980.

identifying how social norms and intersectional identities create asymmetric vulnerability patterns. It recognizes that some groups are systematically excluded from decision-making and, therefore, designs interventions that target these hidden power dynamics by supporting marginalized actors to self-organize and confront these barriers.

- 3. Third Dimension (Invisible Power) vs. SECURE's Focus on Empowerment:** Gaventa's third dimension explores how invisible power shapes perceptions, causing the marginalized to internalize their lack of power. In Ajmer, this manifests in women's acceptance of their limited role in decision-making and the community's normalization of poor service delivery. The SECURE framework aligns with this dimension by seeking to empower marginalized populations, challenging the internalized norms that perpetuate vulnerability. The SECURE framework goes further by promoting self-organization and aligning marginalized groups' incentives to overcome these invisible power structures, ensuring that communities not only survive but also flourish despite external pressures, such as climate change.

Both frameworks speak to the systemic exclusion and vulnerability of marginalized groups, with Gaventa's three-dimensional power structure offering a lens to understand how different forms of power operate, while the SECURE framework provides a roadmap for dismantling these power structures and promoting resilience. The common ground lies in their recognition of the need to address structural inequalities and the empowerment of marginalized communities. However, while Gaventa's framework is more diagnostic, SECURE offers a proactive approach, focusing on how to actively engage and support these communities in overcoming the power dynamics that constrain their adaptive capacities. Both frameworks reinforce each other, with Gaventa's analysis highlighting the problem and SECURE offering the solutions to build resilience.

Actor and Resource Mapping

The Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC), Ajmer Development Authority (ADA), and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) are the primary institutions responsible for urban planning, water supply, and sanitation in Ajmer. However, the distribution of resources and decision-making authority remains heavily centralized within these higher-level institutions, leading to a disconnect between resource allocation and the actual needs of local communities, particularly those in informal settlements.

Resource allocation is concentrated at the municipal and state levels, where funding, technical expertise, and decision-making power are controlled by a small group of actors within the AMC, ADA, and PHED. These governmental bodies prioritize certain urban areas, often neglecting informal settlements, which suffer from limited access to essential services such as water supply and sanitation. Jurisdictional conflicts between AMC and ADA exacerbate these problems, as overlapping responsibilities and lack of coordination often delay critical infrastructure projects, leaving marginalized communities without the services they need.

For example, in Ward 2, water pipeline maintenance has been severely affected due to disputes between AMC and ADA over jurisdictional responsibilities, causing prolonged delays in restoring water supply. Residents in informal settlements face prolonged hardships as a result of these jurisdictional disputes and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), such as Slum Improvement Committees (SICs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), play a critical role in bridging the gap between residents and formal institutions. These organizations advocate for better service delivery and connect marginalized

groups with municipal authorities. For example, SHGs in Ward 2 successfully advocated for temporary water supply solutions during a crisis by mobilizing resources and working with community leaders. However, despite their grassroots efforts, CBOs and SHGs have limited influence in formal decision-making platforms, as their access to resources and support from municipal authorities remains constrained.

Moving forward, it is crucial to formalize the role of these community organizations within local governance structures, ensuring they have a stronger voice in decision-making processes. Establishing regular communication channels between SHGs, SICs, and municipal bodies like AMC and ADA will help address the gaps in resource allocation and service delivery, particularly in vulnerable and underserved areas.

Gendered Dynamics of Power

Our analysis also examines the gendered nature of power dynamics within these communities, particularly in informal settlements where women face multiple barriers to accessing resources and participating in decision-making. Traditional gender norms significantly limit their involvement in critical discussions, despite the central role they play in managing household water resources. This exclusion not only marginalizes women but also weakens community resilience by preventing the inclusion of diverse perspectives in addressing WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) challenges.

One striking insight from the field is observed in Ward 48, where the female ward councillor, despite holding a formal position of power, has her decision-making authority overshadowed by her husband. Women, who are primarily responsible for securing, storing water, and cleaning, are often excluded from formal governance discussions. For instance, in Ward 48, women reported that while they are tasked with ensuring water availability and maintaining household sanitation, their concerns are rarely addressed in decision-making forums, and they are often left out of discussions involving municipal authorities.

In Ward 2, data from the field shows similar gender dynamics. Women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) shared that, despite their active involvement in advocating for better services, they are often pushed to the periphery when decisions are being made about water and sanitation infrastructure. Women in this ward, though they bear the brunt of water shortages—spending hours collecting water and managing sanitation issues—rarely have the opportunity to voice their concerns in municipal meetings or influence decisions made by the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC). Field insights show that when the community faced water shortages, male community leaders dominated negotiations with authorities, leaving women with limited influence despite their crucial role in managing the household water crisis.

Another insight from the field reveals how women in informal settlements are often excluded from ward-level committees or meetings, where decisions regarding service delivery are made. Women reported feeling that their input was seen as secondary or irrelevant, even though they are the ones managing daily water needs and dealing with the impacts of inconsistent water supply and poor sanitation conditions. Their exclusion reinforces the patriarchal norms that diminish women's autonomy and influence in both public and private spheres, making it harder for the community to effectively address WASH challenges from a holistic perspective.

These field insights highlight that gendered power dynamics in Ajmer's informal settlements not only limit women's agency but also hinder the effectiveness of efforts to address WASH issues. Empowering women and ensuring their voices are included in decision-making processes is

essential for building resilient communities and addressing the challenges related to water and sanitation in a more inclusive and effective way.

Blockers and Enablers

Blockers:

- Jurisdictional Conflicts:** Field data indicates that the overlapping responsibilities between the AMC and ADA are significant barriers to effective service delivery. These conflicts result in delays and inefficiencies, particularly in informal settlements where basic services are already inadequate. The lack of clear jurisdictional boundaries exacerbates these challenges, hindering efforts to allocate resources effectively and build community resilience.

Aspect	Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC)	Ajmer Development Authority (ADA)	Overlapping Responsibilities	Impact on Service Delivery
Urban Planning	Responsible for basic urban services like sanitation and local development within municipal boundaries.	Oversees broader urban planning, land use, and infrastructure development.	Lack of coordination between local service provision and larger urban planning efforts.	Delays in infrastructure projects, affecting slum areas the most.
Water Supply	Manages water distribution within city limits, including informal settlements.	Responsible for planning large-scale water infrastructure and future expansions.	No clear jurisdiction on water pipeline maintenance, particularly in informal areas.	Prolonged water shortages in informal settlements due to unclear responsibility for repairs.
Sanitation	Provides sewage and waste management services.	Plans and develops city-wide sanitation infrastructure, such as treatment plants.	Disputes over who maintains and upgrades sanitation systems.	Sewage treatment plants remain non-functional, leading to untreated waste in water bodies.
Resource Allocation	Allocates budget for immediate municipal services.	Controls larger-scale funding for infrastructure projects and urban growth.	Inconsistent allocation of resources, with gaps in service delivery in marginalized communities.	Resource allocation delays, particularly in informal settlements.
Community Engagement	Works with local communities for service delivery, particularly in water and sanitation.	Focuses on broader urban development, often overlooking direct community engagement.	Limited joint planning with community organizations like SHGs and SICs.	Disconnection between planning and actual community needs, particularly in vulnerable areas.
Resulting Challenges	Inability to address immediate service needs in informal settlements effectively.	Delays in long-term infrastructure development for growing urban needs.	Conflicts between the two bodies create inefficiencies and slow service delivery.	Basic services remain inadequate in informal settlements, reducing community resilience.

(The above chart highlights how the overlapping responsibilities between the AMC and ADA lead to delays, inefficiencies, and inadequate service delivery, particularly in informal settlements. These jurisdictional conflicts hinder efforts to allocate resources effectively and undermine community resilience in informal settlements.)

- **Social and Cultural Norms:** Traditional gender norms severely limit women's participation in decision-making processes, as seen in Ward 48. This exclusion not only marginalizes women but also diminishes the overall effectiveness of community advocacy for improved WASH services. These deeply ingrained norms present a significant barrier to equitable resource management.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** The bureaucratic structure within the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) poses a significant barrier to effective WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) service delivery. Field data highlights several critical issues that contribute to this challenge. PHED operates with different levels of hierarchy, where decisions and complaint resolutions must pass through multiple layers of approval, resulting in delays in addressing community grievances. For example, issues such as broken water pumps or disrupted water supply go through numerous levels, significantly slowing the process and making it difficult for residents to access the appropriate officials.

Moreover, the department is largely inaccessible to local communities, especially in informal settlements. Many residents struggle to navigate the bureaucratic system to raise their concerns, and centralized decision-making prevents clear communication between the department and the community. This leads to unresolved complaints, as water shortages, broken infrastructure, and sanitation issues often go ignored or are lost within the system. As a result, communities experience prolonged hardships, with slow response times further eroding trust in PHED.

Additionally, these bureaucratic hurdles cause delays in service delivery for essential services like water supply maintenance and sanitation infrastructure repair, leaving residents without adequate services for weeks or even months. The bureaucracy also stifles the efforts of community-based organizations (CBOs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and Slum Improvement Committees (SICs), which play a critical role in identifying problems and advocating for solutions. However, PHED's bureaucratic barriers limit these organizations' ability to influence decisions or push for timely resolutions. Overall, these bureaucratic inefficiencies delay critical services and stifle community participation, exacerbating the WASH challenges in informal settlements.

Enablers:

- **Community Mobilization:** On the positive side, community-based organizations like SICs and SHGs have proven to be key enablers in addressing local WASH issues. These groups have successfully mobilized resources and community efforts, demonstrating strong grassroots support for resilience-building initiatives. Their ability to advocate for community needs, despite limited formal support, highlights their effectiveness as change agents within these communities.
- **Active Local Leadership:** Active Local Leadership plays a critical role in addressing WASH challenges, even within the constraints of limited power and resources. Despite facing significant barriers, such as gendered power dynamics and bureaucratic hurdles, local leaders, particularly ward councillors, have been instrumental in coordinating responses during emergencies. In many cases, ward councillors have acted as the

primary point of contact between the community and higher government bodies like the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and Ajmer Development Authority (ADA).

For instance, during periods of severe water shortages, ward councillors have facilitated the distribution of emergency water supplies, organized community meetings to prioritize urgent needs, and escalated unresolved issues to municipal authorities. Field data also indicates that in informal settlements where residents have limited access to formal decision-making platforms, ward councillors serve as intermediaries, advocating for their communities despite their limited decision-making authority.

In emergency situations, their active involvement has been essential in rallying community support, ensuring the mobilization of resources, and coordinating with Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Slum Improvement Committees (SICs) to find temporary solutions. Though their scope of influence is often restricted by bureaucratic and institutional limitations, their ability to mobilize communities, create temporary fixes, and act as a liaison with formal institutions has been pivotal in addressing immediate WASH issues. These efforts, although constrained, demonstrate the potential of local leadership to mitigate pressing challenges and improve community resilience, even within a limited scope.

- NGO Support:** PRIA and local NGOs like CFAR and have played a critical role in empowering marginalized groups and facilitating their participation in local governance. These organizations provide essential support through training, advocacy, and resource mobilization, making them invaluable partners in the community's resilience-building efforts. Their involvement has been key in bridging gaps between formal institutions and grassroots initiatives, ensuring that marginalized voices are included in decision-making processes.

The power analysis of Ajmer's WASH sector reveals a complex interplay of actors, resources, and influence patterns that both hinder and enable effective service delivery. While jurisdictional conflicts, social norms, and bureaucratic hurdles present significant challenges, the strength of community mobilization, local leadership, and NGO support offers a pathway to overcoming these barriers. Addressing the identified power imbalances, particularly the exclusion of women and marginalized communities from decision-making, is essential for ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and equitably to meet the needs of Ajmer's most vulnerable populations

3. Description of the intervention and anticipated results

Input & Activities	<p>Validation of the findings with communities Research findings co-analysed and validated by communities in informal settlements and used by communities for advocacy with the city authorities.</p> <p>Dissemination of Reports to Key Stakeholders Present reports to the key service providers- Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) & Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) with the aim of raising awareness and sensitizing them about the identified issues</p>
Output	<p>The information provided fosters empathy among stakeholders, allowing them to better understand the realities faced by the community. Our goal is to enhance service delivery in the WASH sector, ensuring regular water supply, waste collection and consistent maintenance of drainage systems.</p>

Expected Outcomes	Coproducted data with the community for decision-making and enhanced institutional capacity for improved service delivery.
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Open Reflections on the SECURE Framework

The SECURE framework provided a robust foundation for our interventions in Ajmer’s informal settlements, particularly in Wards 2 and 48. This section reflects on the strengths and areas for improvement in the framework, specifically focusing on the power analysis and tools used throughout the project.

The power analysis framework within SECURE was instrumental in identifying key stakeholders, mapping out power dynamics, and understanding the influence patterns that shape resource distribution in Ajmer. It effectively highlighted the jurisdictional conflicts between institutions like the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA), as well as the social and cultural norms that limit women's participation in decision-making processes.

Strengths:

- **Comprehensive Stakeholder Mapping:** The framework allowed for a detailed analysis of stakeholders, making it easier to identify both blockers and enablers of collaboration. This was critical in understanding how power is concentrated and how it can be redistributed to include marginalized groups.
- **Contextual Relevance:** The focus on local power dynamics and socio-cultural factors ensured that the analysis was grounded in the specific realities of Ajmer, which improved the relevance and impact of our interventions.

Areas for Improvement:

- **Usability Enhancements:** While comprehensive, the power analysis framework could benefit from simplification to enhance its usability, especially for community-based organizations and local stakeholders who may not have advanced technical expertise. A more streamlined process for stakeholder mapping and power analysis could make it easier for these groups to engage with the framework.
- **Integration of Dynamic Feedback:** The framework could be improved by incorporating mechanisms for dynamic feedback, allowing for real-time adjustments based on ongoing changes in power dynamics and stakeholder relationships. This would enhance the effectiveness of interventions by ensuring they remain responsive to evolving conditions.

Tools Used During the Project

The SECURE framework employed a variety of participatory tools, including Transect Walk, Mappings, Venn Diagrams, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). These tools were invaluable in gathering qualitative data, fostering community engagement, and mapping out relationships between stakeholders.

The use of participatory tools has proven to be highly effective in engaging the community, ensuring that diverse voices were heard. Specifically, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Venn Diagrams facilitated a deep exploration of social dynamics and resource distribution, yielding critical insights that informed our interventions. Additionally, the flexibility of these tools allowed them to be adapted to various contexts within the community, enabling a tailored approach that addressed specific issues in Wards 2 and 48.

However, there are areas for improvement, particularly concerning efficiency. One of the main challenges encountered was the time-intensive nature of these tools; while they provided rich data, the process of conducting multiple FGDs and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) was resource-heavy. To enhance efficiency, it would be beneficial to focus on digital tools or rapid assessment techniques that can maintain the depth of analysis while reducing the time and resources required.

Another area for enhancement lies in tool integration. The effectiveness of interventions could significantly benefit from better integrating these participatory tools within a unified framework. For instance, combining insights from Venn Diagrams with those from FGDs and KIIs into a single cohesive analysis could streamline the process and provide a more holistic view of community dynamics in a shorter time frame.⁴

The SECURE framework proved to be a valuable asset in guiding our interventions in Ajmer City, particularly in navigating the complex power dynamics and socio-cultural challenges within the community. However, there are opportunities to enhance its usability, effectiveness, and efficiency. By simplifying the power analysis process, integrating dynamic feedback mechanisms, and refining the participatory tools used, the framework can be made more accessible and impactful for future resilience-building efforts.

Analysis of the SECURE Framework in the Indian Context

The SECURE framework is designed to enhance urban resilience through co-production methodologies, particularly in urban environments. However, its implementation in India uncovers several critical gaps that require rectification.

Firstly, while the framework emphasizes the necessity of understanding local contexts, it often fails to reconcile its theoretical principles with the practical challenges encountered by marginalized communities within India's varied urban landscapes. The complexities introduced by local governance structures, socio-economic inequalities, and cultural norms significantly affect informal settlements, yet these elements remain inadequately represented within the framework.

Secondly, although the SECURE framework promotes the reduction of power asymmetries through co-production, marginalized groups frequently experience exclusion from meaningful

⁴ *Community Needs Assessment: Steps, Tools, and Examples*. (2024). maptionnaire.com. <https://www.maptionnaire.com/blog/community-needs-assessment-process-and-tools>

participation in decision-making processes. Existing power dynamics at the local level impede their representation, resulting in interventions that neglect their specific needs and priorities.⁵

‘Thirdly, there exists a substantial deficit of reliable data concerning vulnerabilities and risks in many informal settlements, which obstructs effective planning efforts. Resource limitations hinder local governments and organizations from compiling and analyzing crucial data, thereby diminishing the framework's capacity to guide targeted interventions.

Furthermore, the SECURE framework inadequately addresses the integration of informal systems and practices that are essential for fostering resilience. Community-led initiatives and indigenous knowledge systems are often disregarded, leading to an overemphasis on formal approaches that do not accurately reflect the realities of informal settlements.

Lastly, access to climate finance remains severely constrained for numerous urban locales, particularly for informal settlements, which obstructs the mobilization of financial resources vital for resilience-building initiatives. Local governments often lack the necessary budgets to implement comprehensive strategies aimed at enhancing urban resilience.⁶

In conclusion, it is imperative to address these deficiencies to bolster urban resilience in India, especially in informal settlements. Adapting the SECURE framework to align more closely with local realities, ensuring inclusive participation, improving data collection methodologies, integrating informal practices, and enhancing access to financial resources will contribute to a more effective and equitable approach to urban resilience, ultimately benefiting marginalized communities.

⁵ *mainstreaming-urban-resilience.pdf*. (2022). [teriin.org. https://www.teriin.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/mainstreaming-urban-resilience.pdf](https://www.teriin.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/mainstreaming-urban-resilience.pdf)

⁶ Jain, G. & Bazaz, A. (n.d.). *Urban Risk & Resilience in India*. Indian Institute for Human Settlements.