

## SUMMARY

# Rajasthan Rising: Valuing Institutional Capacity as Much as Infrastructure Improvements



Junior engineers Neelam Meena (left) and Nisha Beniwal (right) check on the progress of trenches being dug for a new sewer line.

Female engineering students are offered internships to diversify the state's workforce. Photo credit: Amit Verma, ADB.

*India's Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project offers practical operational lessons and best practices for forging more livable cities.*

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## Overview

The Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project pioneered urban development on a statewide scale, with institutional strengthening at its core. From the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) first investment in 1998, the project has grown into a nationally renowned urban development corporation.

Among its accomplishments are

- 24/7 water supply where hardly a few hours of supply had been available a few times a week;
- documentation of lessons experienced and applied in improving state-wide urban infrastructure; and
- exceptional implementation and management of basic urban infrastructure projects on water

supply, wastewater, drainage, and roads, and the development of hospitals, heritage sites, and slum areas.

This article is a summary of *Rajasthan Rising: A Partnership for Stronger Institutions and More Livable Cities*, a 20-year retrospective of more than \$2 billion worth of investments into cities in the harsh desert landscape of this northwestern state in India.

## Summary

From the outset, ADB and the state government envisioned strong institution-led development and diverse urban initiatives. The Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project was designed to create a permanent, corporatized institution devoted to securing investments in urban development in the state and facilitating the design, implementation, and management of those investments. The state-wide project could not be implemented by just a typical project management office tucked away in a corner of some government building with its leadership and staff dividing their time between the project and other government duties.

**Lessons.** The project offers lessons and practices that could benefit other urban operations teams and institutions. The solutions are based on the implementation experience of the project staff and were incorporated into the corporation's standard operating procedures and the next investment phases with ADB.

Looking at the operational good practices by project stage (design, implementation, and monitoring), and by project feature (organizational arrangement, financial and procurement management, implementation management), some of the learnings are:

### *Lessons for better financial management*

- Link mobilization advances to actual progress.
- Use easily cashable security deposits only.
- Offer bonuses for early completion.
- Current needs should be the determinant for use of consultants.

### *Lessons for better procurement management*

- Complete all pre-feasibility work before awarding contracts.
- Include suggested guidelines for work schedules in bid documents.
- Embed long-term operations and maintenance in construction contracts.
- Use performance-based contracting.
- Offer detailed pre-bid meetings.
- Standardize tender and bid evaluations.
- Use e-tendering to build transparency and contractor confidence.
- Build and maintain databases on contractors, consultants, and key experts.

### *Lessons for better implementation*

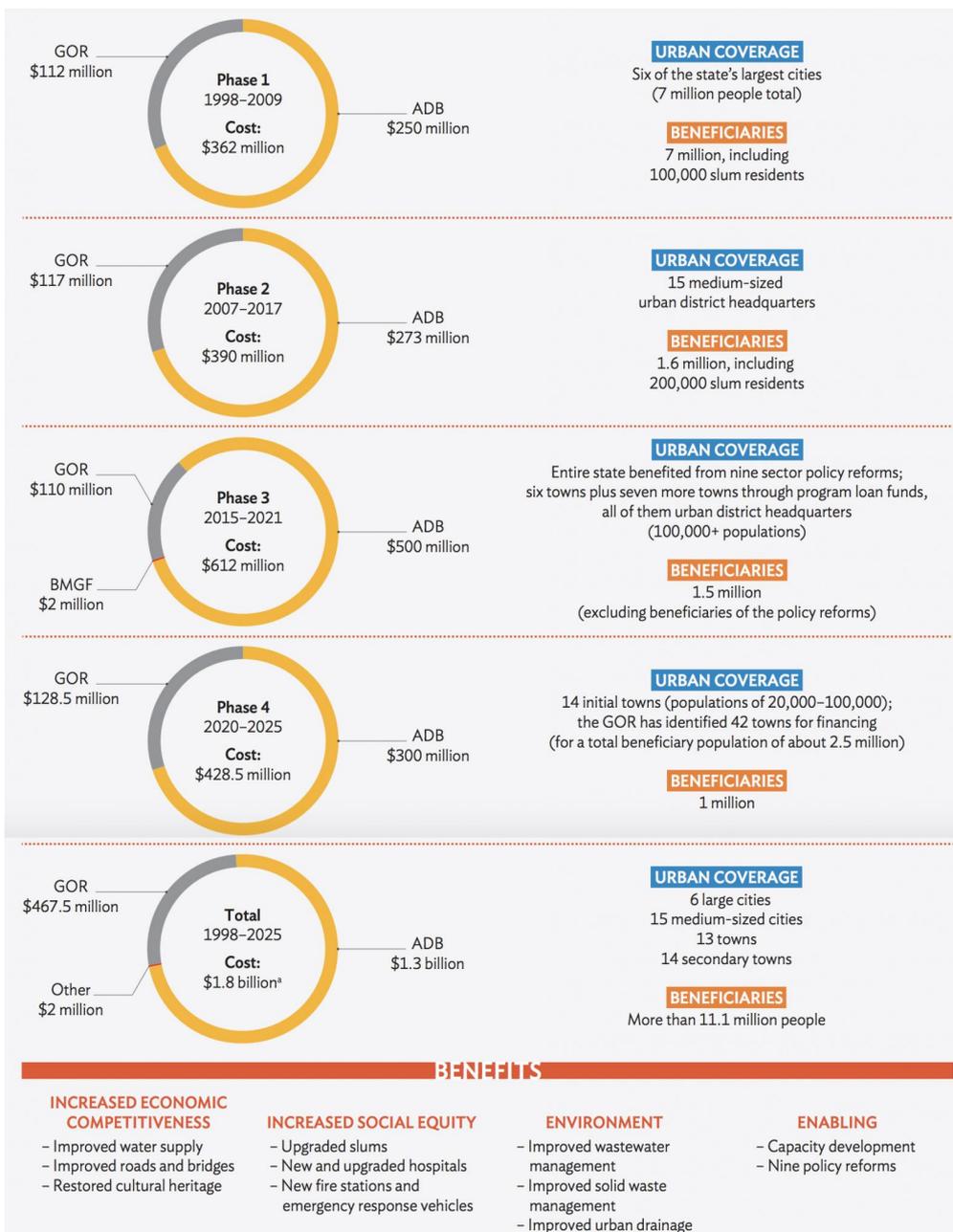
- Customize capacity building.
- Mainstream community concerns into the process.
- Monitor contracts with web-based systems.
- Use stringent criteria to ensure use of only high-quality construction materials.
- Reduce delays caused by resubmitted designs.
- Minimize road excavation and expedite road restoration.

### *Lessons for better monitoring and evaluation*

- Use third-parties for quality assurance and quality control.
- Use accredited quality auditors.
- Use accredited firms for implementing exit protocols.

**Impact.** The Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project has established one of the country's best urban development corporations. It has made a significant difference in the economies and living standards of Rajasthan's cities and citizens. The program's experts, systems, and practices have created what is dubbed "a development ecosystem." The table below summarizes the scope of its investments in terms of dollars, cities, and beneficiaries.

### **Brief Overview of the Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project, 1998–2020**



ADB = Asian Development Bank, BMGF = Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, GOR = Government of Rajasthan.

\*The total here is slightly higher than the sum of the component figures due to rounding.

Source: Authors.

Taking into account its achievements, India—as well as its neighbors in South Asia, and in Asia and the Pacific as a whole—need to study the case of the Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project more than ever, as urban planners and decision makers look to the future. The program’s results demonstrate the “5Es” of livable cities:

- **Economic competitiveness:** Increased competitiveness of urban areas in Rajasthan through investments in priority infrastructure (especially water supply systems), urban services, and capacity building for more efficient living, commuting, working, and conduct of business.
- **Environmental sustainability and resilience:** Investments in sewerage and drainage systems, solid waste management, climate- and disaster-resilient infrastructure, urban planning, and disaster reduction and preparedness for more adaptable, climate-ready cities.

- **Equity and inclusion:** Upgrading of community-based infrastructure and connecting informal users to the main systems—converting them into paying customers of urban services; improvements in access to health services; rehabilitation of community assets (ponds, heritage sites, and parks); and involvement of marginalized groups in planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- **Enabling environment:** Strengthened enabling environment through institutional development and capacity building of urban local bodies, line agencies, and executing agencies; policy reforms and stronger urban governance for more integrated planning and financial sustainability.
- **Engagement:** Greater engagement by the public achieved by mainstreaming and mandating consultations, raising awareness, and involving public participation as standard operating procedures throughout the project cycle—successfully demonstrating Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project’s value to contractors and engineers.

The Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project has also become a career maker for up-and-coming engineers, specialists, contractors, and seasoned professionals.

Lessons and practices detailed in the *Rajasthan Rising* publication can teach urban development planners who are looking to apply efficiencies and good practices to basic infrastructure development, which much of Asia and the Pacific region’s cities still need.

## Resources

M. Sharma and M. Alipalo. 2021. *Rajasthan Rising: A Partnership for Stronger Institutions and More Livable Cities*. Asian Development Bank. Manila.



### Manoj Sharma

Chief of Urban Sector Group, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, Asian Development Bank

Manoj Sharma is leading ADB’s efforts on “Making Cities More Livable,” following a cross-sector and cross-thematic approach of providing integrated solutions. Manoj has 28 years of experience working with ADB and the Government of India. He also leads the strategic development of the urban, water, and industrial sectors at ADB and countries in Asia.



### Melissa Howell Alipalo

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Melissa Howell Alipalo combines her academic training and experience in journalism, anthropology, and social development to leverage communications and knowledge solutions for better development. She has worked with the Asian Development Bank for 15 years designing, implementing, and documenting various projects in more than 10 countries.

Follow Melissa Howell Alipalo on 



## Asian Development Bank (ADB)

The Asian Development Bank is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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