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# From slum[1] to ordinary neighborhood in a provincial town of South India: Resident-induced practices of participation and co-production

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# Rethinking Precarious Neighborhoods

Scientific Editor: Agnès Deboulet

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# From slum<sup>[1]</sup> to ordinary neighborhood in a provincial town of South India: Resident-induced practices of participation and co-production

*Bhuvaneswari RAMAN, Éric DENIS, Solomon BENJAMIN*

## 1. Participation: performance, actions and intent

This paper illustrates the bottom-up process of participation by which the settlers of a squatter settlement named Pomudi Nagar (PMNGR) influenced the state agencies to legalize their occupation, access basic infrastructures and secure titles. PMNGR is a cluster of three settlements on the outskirts of Villupuram, a small town located 16 km from Chennai metropolis (in the State of Tamil Nadu). The town is the administrative capital of the District and has approximately 100,000 inhabitants (GOI, 2011). PMNGR developed incrementally on an irrigation tank bed over four decades. It is home to approximately 250 households. The settlers' experience illustrates the communities' capabilities to mobilize with minimal or no external support, to influence the actions of government institutions through everyday engagement with different scales of government.

Drawing on our fieldwork undertaken between 2012 and 2013, we discuss three key features of the bottom-up process of participation.

Firstly, PMNGR settlers influenced the decision of government institutions and circumvented legal obstacles by mobilizing the opportunities as well as the ambiguities of institutional procedures, practices, and schemes. Unlike the ritual of top-down participation where the registration of local voices becomes a standardized procedure controlled by external agents, the settlers, here, constantly adjusted their actions in response to the ever-changing situations.

Secondly, while one central aspect of their actions is the generation of information and securing information recorded in the government registers, another dimension is pressuring

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[1] *Slum*: in India, the term "slum" denotes highly diverse groupings of housing, both in terms of the buildings themselves and socio-economic composition and economic activities. It can cover simple shacks built out of waste materials as well as buildings several stories high. *Slums* are also characterized by the illegal occupation of public or private land. Finally, they correspond to a precise administrative category; a notified *slum* may be eligible for rehabilitation programs (Arabindoo, 2011).

the concerned institutions to create title documents for their plots. They organized surveys on their own and lobbied the concerned government agencies to undertake official surveys. In the process, they generated sketch maps, identity documents, *parchis*,<sup>[2]</sup> and cadastres.

Thirdly, the settlers drew on the support of their networks in the mid-level bureaucracy and elected representatives, in their efforts to influence the actions and decisions of various public institutions.

Based on our observations of a bottom-up participatory regularization process,<sup>[3]</sup> we call for more attention to the ordinary ways by which people attempt to improve their conditions without waiting for external intervention. There are numerous examples of squatters incrementally regularizing their de facto land-tenure status on their own (Banerjee, 2002; Payne *et al.*, 2009). However, the literature on participatory development of squatter settlements in India published since the 1990s has focused on the projects implemented by governmental and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) to grant land titles to residents.<sup>[4]</sup>

Squatters' participation in projects is imposed top down, as an invitation to participate that may turn into an injunction. In projects with a component of titling, squatters perform compulsory routines of attending weekly public meetings, surveying and mapping their settlement, organizing votes/consultations, etc., as instructed by the project implementers. Advocates of participatory mapping argue that such rituals of mapping and surveying render the titling process transparent. This transparency is supposed to create the proper conditions for the inclusion of the voices and interests of the relatively weaker groups, whose concerns are usually overlooked in processes, led by community leaders or elected representatives (Herlihy *et al.*, 2003). Further, it is suggested that squatters can own information and use it to directly negotiate with government institutions to influence their decisions, bypassing the exploitative middlemen (Appadurai, 2001; Park, 1993; Tolman *et al.*, 2001). The participatory mapping process brings the community together to pool and share their knowledge about their settlement, and acquire new skills (Patel *et al.*, 2012). The support of the NGOs as mediator and knowledge partner to mobilize communities and impart skills to them is underscored in the arguments for participatory mapping (Livengood *et al.*, 2012; Mitlin *et al.*, 2012; Chambers, 2006; Appadurai, 2001; Boonyabanacha, 2001).

The reality on the ground tells a different story. Evidence of squatter dwellers securing titles under these "participatory projects" is limited in the Indian context (Raman, 2015; Payne *et al.*, 2009; Dupont *et al.*, 2015; Bardhan *et al.*, 2015). Participation, as Mosse (2001) points out, has become an ideology – an end in itself. While at the outset the rituals of participatory mapping may appear to promote transparency and the voice of the poorest, in reality communities participate within the framework established by the project formulators, facilitators, and

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[2] *Parchis* – meaning slips of paper, including paper tokens and acknowledgement slips issued by the government institutions. These are critical evidence required to move one's file through the system.

[3] The fieldwork was conducted between 2011 and 2013, contributing to a comparative research project on titling, supported by the *Mission de recherche Droit et justice* (Ministry of Justice, France).

[4] See for example Appadurai (2001), de Wit *et al.* (2009) and Patel (2012).

donors, whose interests differ from those of the communities (Cooke *et al.*, 2001; Hickey *et al.*, 2004; Whyte, 2011; Bryan, 2011). Further, far from mining local knowledge, the top-down participatory process constructs “local knowledge” (Mosse, 2001) and often reinforces the interests of powerful groups (Cooke *et al.*, 2001: 8; Flyvberg, 1998; Raman, 2015). This is critical in the context of titling, as power relations influence how and which types of information are recorded and used (Bryan, 2011; Ferguson, 2007).

The rest of this chapter is divided into four sections. The next section (Section 2) illustrates the PMNGR residents’ trajectory and strategies of engagement with the government agencies. Sections 3 and 4 focus on community-led surveys and PMNGR residents’ alliances in their engagement with the State. Discussions in these sections point to the need to review three key concepts in the literature on participatory development. First, the residents initiated the reconfiguration of the institutional practices and rules for assigning individual titles to land, creatively mobilizing opportunities in law, schemes and administrative procedures, and electoral politics. Contrary to de Certeau’s conception of squatters’ actions as tactics and those of the State as strategies (de Certeau, 1984), we suggest that the former’s actions are strategic, as they influenced a shift in institutional practices. At one level, the spaces claimed by the PMNGR residents parallel Miraftab’s (2009) description of invented spaces through which they strived to change the legal status of their land claims, but the political dynamics is far more nuanced, comprising individual and collective action. Second, differing from Appadurai’s (2001) arguments on participatory planning, we found that the PMNGR residents’ involvement in the surveying and mapping process was not only to be enumerated, but more crucially to register their claims, in different administrative records. The residents of PMNGR appropriated state practices to reinforce their claims and in the process influenced the co-production of official information about their settlement. Third, similar to Björkman (2015) and other works on popular groups’ engagement with the State, we found that the role of the neighborhood’s elected representatives and their ties with mid-level bureaucrats enabled them to navigate state procedures.

## **2. The performance of participation: trajectory and strategies**

The bottom-up process of participation concerns the PMNGR residents’ prolonged engagement with various government institutions at different scales. Their actions, coordinated by the PMNGR Resident Welfare Association (RWA), focused on three aspects: (i) assembling documentary evidence to prove their occupancy; (ii) lobbying different institutions to influence their decisions to create titles; and (iii) co-producing information for the official registers.

This section describes the trajectory of the residents’ actions and how they navigated multiple institutional procedures for their title documents.

### **2.1. Residents’ actions for securing titles**

The PMNGR cluster of three settlements was consolidated on the banks of two irrigation tanks (or *eris*), namely the Erumanthangal and the Keezhperumbakkam tanks, separated by a main

road. Today, the settlement on the Erumanthangal tank bank follows a gridiron layout with plots organized in three parallel streets, while the other two settlements on the Keezhperumbakkam bank grew linearly along a main road and two streets off the main road. There are varying estimates of the number of households, ranging from 110 households to approximately 250.<sup>[5]</sup> Our survey showed also that dwellers are from diverse caste backgrounds: they are predominantly from the Mudaliar, Vanniyar and Nadar caste communities and the historically disadvantaged Scheduled Caste community. These dwellers held public-sector jobs, were self-employed (running a tea stall or driving an auto-rickshaw, for instance) or wage laborers, such as manual laborers (loading merchandise) in the town's market or the construction industry.

The history of the settlements can be traced to the early sixties, when a few residents of Erumanthangal village occupied the lake bed and constructed temporary structures. Until then, the villagers had used the lake bed for grazing. The first settlers were joined by migrants working in Villupuram town and government officials posted to surrounding villages. In the 1970s, the Government allocated the lake bed and the lake bank occupied by the PMNGR settlers to the construction of a new college. A college board was created and the Public Works Department (PWD) was entrusted with the responsibility of constructing the college. The PWD design located the college in the lake land and the staff quarters on one of the lake banks. Several times, the College Board attempted to evict the settlers with the support of the Revenue Department. The threat of eviction accelerated the residents' actions to demand land titles.

The PMNGR settlements developed on the banks of two minor irrigation tanks, administratively categorized as *eri poramboke* land or its English equivalent, "common land". *Eri* means "lake", *poram* means "outside" and *boke* signifies a "revenue record". Thus, the term *poramboke* can be defined as non-arable land that can be assigned to common purposes. The British introduced the *poramboke* category to bring the village common land under unified administrative control. There are several sub-categories of *poramboke* land: village grazing land (*meichal*), village common land (*grama natham*), lakes and tanks (*eri*), and land earmarked for public utilities, such as roads and railways. Different local, regional or federal government agencies control/administer the *poramboke* land depending on their use. By law, titles can be created for developments on *natham poramboke* land. The *eri poramboke* land of PMNGR had to be reclassified as *natham poramboke* or *grama natham*<sup>[6]</sup> before it could be titled. The lake had to be declared as "abandoned" or "disused" by the agency administering lakes.

The timeline below provides an overview of residents' struggles to secure title documents to consolidate their claims.

[5] Based on community surveys and official surveys undertaken in 1977, 1983, 1986, 1993 and 2006, and a house-to-house survey undertaken for the research in 2012 in one of the three settlements.

[6] *Grاما natham* is defined in law lexicon as land upon which houses can be built in a village. This was brought into existence in order to stress that the land could be used for housing sites where the owner could build houses. Land can be classified as privately owned *patta* (titled) land, government *poramboke* land or *grama natham* land. In *grama natham*, the first occupier of the land is considered the rightful owner and, generally, no *patta* is issued to him/her. However, it is still possible to apply for *patta* while owning *grama natham* land.



Year	Key Actions
1966	Village panchayat <sup>[7]</sup> levies a penalty ( <i>Bhim</i> ) on PMNGR residents occupying <i>eri poramboke</i> (lake bed).
1968–72	The land of the PMNGR settlement allotted by the Revenue Department to construct a college. Lake and lake bed transferred to the College Board.
1975–77	Three attempts to evict PMNGR settlers by the college authorities and the Revenue Department.
1977	PMNGR settlers submit the petition to the Governor of Tamil Nadu; the governor issues an order to provide housing for the residents. Settlers mobilize to set up a public distribution shop and ration card.
1982	College authorities renew their attempts to evict the settlers.
1977–83	Settlers submit several petitions to the District Collector and the Revenue Administration (RA), and simultaneously lobby via the elected representatives; and secure information and survey maps of the area through their networks in lower- and mid-level bureaucracy of government agencies.
1983	Lobby the RA to survey the settlement and prepare the sketch maps.
1984	The PWD recommends transfer of lake bed to the settlers. The college authorities decline to issue a non-objection certificate (NOC) to transfer the land to the settlers. RA suspends the titling process.
1986	Change of political regime in the State. Residents' renewed attempts to title their land; Lobby the RA through their elected representatives and petition the PWD to survey the area a second time. Petitions to the RA to reclassify the lake bed from <i>eri</i> to <i>natham poramboke</i> to enable the creation of titles. RA surveyors visit the area and prepare sketch maps. Process stalls as negotiation with college authorities fails.
1984–89	Several written communications to the PWD, college authorities, the RA and elected representatives to influence the College Board to issue an NOC. College authorities orally agreed to issue an NOC = to allot the land to occupiers.
1990	The executive engineer of the PWD resurveys the land; submits report on the land occupied by the settlers, which was fixed at 5.90 acres. The PWD issues a non-objection certificate to assign titles to occupiers.
1996	College authorities withdraw their agreement to issue an NOC. Setback in titling process until 2004. Settlers demand change of leadership in the resident association.
1996–2003	Resident association lobby the elected representatives for infrastructure.
2004	Change in the political regime. Residents revive negotiations with the College Board and the Revenue Administration, which was then the Ministry of Social Welfare.
2004–2008	Resurveys and finalization of the household list and sketch maps. Registration of resident welfare association in 2006. Village panchayat extends piped water supply along the main access to the settlement. PMNGR territory annexed to the municipal administrative limits.
2009–2013	Proposal prepared for granting free <i>pattas</i> (title documents) under the free house <i>patta</i> scheme. <i>Pattas</i> issued to 190 houses in 2009. Conflict over easement rights, and individual plot owners mobilize a municipal tax for vacant land to record their claims. Municipal officials encourage residents to file property tax and, in the process, to regularize development in the settlement.

[7] A *panchayat* is the village local government.

As can be inferred from the above timeline, the PMNGR residents' efforts to secure territory and titles span more than three decades. Different government agencies influenced the titling process. The collector, who is the head of the district administration, is authorized to assign titles. The collector relies on the advice of other institutions including landowners (the College Board), administrators of land and the lake, and the Revenue Department. The village panchayat was in charge of administering the two lake beds of the PMNGR until these were annexed to the Villupuram Municipality. The Revenue Department is in charge of creating, maintaining, and updating land records. The role of the Revenue Department's field officials (the surveyors, village administrative officer, and revenue officer) and the panchayat officials is crucial, as they are responsible for collating the information on the ground and recording it in different registers. The department is headed by the collector. Titles can be assigned to squatters only if the landowners (i.e., the College Board) issue a no-objection certificate (NOC). In addition, other factors like the land tenure and the administrative category of land have a bearing on the collector's decision.

In negotiating the rules and procedures of various institutions, the residents creatively mobilized opportunities opened up by legal provision, electoral politics and welfare schemes, as shown below.

## 2.2. Residents' strategies for negotiating institutions

- Mobilizing the provision in law for adverse possession

The PMNGR settlers started to consolidate their land claims prior to the Revenue Department's eviction drive. They used a widely prevalent practice among encroachers on *poramboke* land called the "B-Memo", locally known as the *Bhim* (penalty), as evidence of their length of occupancy. A settler on *poramboke* land constructs a temporary shed, on the basis of which the government agency levies a penalty and issues B-Memos. The B-Memo is a statement showing the details of the land encroached and the fine levied for illegal occupancy. The *Bhim* is the acknowledgement issued to an occupier for payment of fines. An occupant can use such receipts to prove twelve continuous years of occupancy and claim titles in the form of adverse possession.<sup>[8]</sup> This practice is common among the occupants of *poramboke* land in Tamil Nadu.<sup>[9]</sup>

Not all households succeed in proving their occupancy using the "*Bhim* route". To start with, an occupant on *poramboke* land would have to lobby the rural local government to levy a fine and issue the B-Memo record. Some agencies, like the Railways or the Roads Department, do not issue B-Memos, as it means recording a household's occupancy in official registers. Further,

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[8] The practices of claiming land through occupying common land and regularizing their occupancy using penalty procedures is a common way by which a large proportion of low-income households in both urban and rural areas secure land in India (Joda, 1986). In recent years, such land is also targeted by state institutions to set up Special Economic Zones and other productive sites, reducing the opportunities for individuals to occupy such land (Balakrishnan, 2013).

[9] Similar practices exist in North India where farmers pay *girdhawari*, which is the equivalent of *Bhim* in Tamil Nadu.

the concerned government agency may disrupt the continuity by not collecting fines in one year. The early settlers of PMNGR were able to prove their length of occupancy based on the annual B-Memo receipt series. The village panchayats discontinued issuing B-Memos to the occupants on the Erumangal lake bank after 1995 and, to those on the Keezhperumbakkam lake bank in 2001. Consequently, the poorest households and those who moved into the settlement at a later stage faced difficulties in building the chain of documentary evidence to prove their length of occupancy.<sup>[10]</sup>

- **Mobilizing schemes to build documentary evidence**

The PMNGR residents faced difficulties in providing proof of identity and address to support their application to the government for titles or other welfare schemes. In the Indian context, the ration card – a document issued by the Department of Food and Civil Supplies – is recognized as evidence of identity and residency. However, securing a ration card is not an easy task (Sriraman, 2011). Households applying for a ration card must provide proof of residence, but they often face difficulties in generating proof of address, as their settlements are not recognized under the provisions of the town planning law. They face a catch-22 of generating valid evidence of their address to secure a ration card and securing a ration card to generate proof of address (Sriraman, 2011). Circumventing this problem, the PMNGR residents collectively lobbied to start a public distribution shop and individually applied for a ration card. They used a provision in the administrative norms to set up a ration shop for every 150 households and in localities with no ration shop within a distance of 1.5 km (Justice Wadhwa Committee, 2007). The leaders of the PMNGR's RWA enlisted 230 households from their settlement and nearby neighborhoods to submit an application to start a Public Distribution System (PDS) shop. The governor, who then recommended issuing land titles to the dwellers, inaugurated the shop.

- **Appropriating administrative practices**

The residents faced another hurdle due to the administrative category of their settlement territory. As mentioned earlier, the settlement developed on an *eri poramboke* (tank bed land), which has to be converted into *natham* land before titles can be assigned. Creating titles for lake bed land is not an easy task, as its reclassification to the *natham* category is highly restricted. According to the ruling of the Government of Tamil Nadu, creating titles in individual names on such land is not allowed. The PMNGR residents appropriated an ambiguous administrative nomenclature in official records to influence the Revenue Department to reclassify their *eri poramboke* land. In the context of the PMNGR, the PWD declared the minor irrigation tanks

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[10] The practices of land management vary from one public agency to another. Some agencies, such as the Railways or the Road Department, evict squatters on *poramboke* land under their control every year to break the continuity in occupancy. The alternative route is to use an electricity bill to prove occupancy. In the context of inheritance or sale, the relatively poor households are unable to pay the charges for transferring the utility bills to their name. Moreover, in the case of inheritance, a no-objection certificate is required from all members of the household, which may be difficult to secure when there is an intra-household dispute over property.

as an abandoned water body when the Government of Tamil Nadu decided to construct a college on the tank land. After reclassifying the land, the Revenue Administration transferred it to the Department of Education and the College Board. The official communiqué refers to the converted lake and lake bed as “college *poramboke*”. Officials we interviewed were unable to explain how and when this category was created. The PMNGR residents appropriated the same nomenclature in their applications to different agencies, to convert their territory to *natham poramboke*.

- **Petitioning, pleading, pressuring government institutions**

The PMNGR residents resorted to various forms of collective action such as petitioning and lobbying via their elected representatives, and used the legal provision for the Right to Information (RTI) Act to pressurize government agencies based on updated intelligence. The RWA’s records show that the settlers submitted numerous petitions between 1976 and 2006 to the state governor of Tamil Nadu, the district collector heading the Revenue Administration, the *tehsildar* (the district head of the Revenue Administration), the College Board, the Department of Education, and the PWD. These petitions pleaded for title to be assigned to them, for the process of land category conversion to be initiated, and their land surveyed. The earliest petition was submitted by the leaders in 1977 to the governor of the State of Tamil Nadu. Titles were ordered to be assigned to PMNGR dwellers by the governor’s office, which was appealed to by the residents association to put pressure on the Revenue Administration. The residents also mobilized during several other events, such as visits by political leaders and special camps organized by the Revenue Administration, to voice their grievances on land records. They utilized a free house title scheme to secure their document. The negotiations between PMNGR residents, the Revenue Administration and the College Board were lengthy and interrupted numerous times. Despite the governor’s recommendation, the Revenue Administration refused acknowledgement of the dwellers’ petitions on twenty occasions. Acknowledgement by the Revenue Administration is critical, as it indicates the administration’s willingness to initiate the process of titling. The PMNGR residents faced another obstacle in that the landholders, namely the College Board, refused to issue the no-objection certificate until 2006. The dwellers frequently lost hope about the prospects of securing title to their land. Despite the setbacks, the resident association kept the issue alive through petitioning, lobbying or using the RTI Act to force the institutions to act on their file.

The residents’ actions were coordinated by a few influential male leaders who were ex-government employees or had close connections to political party leaders. The leaders functioned as a loose coalition until 2006. They registered an association in the name of the “Navalur Nadu Theru College Nagar Village Residents”, which was renamed “Ponmudi Nagar Resident Welfare Sangam” later in 2009, after the minister who was instrumental in assigning titles under the free house site patta scheme. Their knowledge and experience with institutions enabled them to draw on their networks in different institutions to secure information, organize official visits to survey their land and, most importantly, to navigate the complex institutional rules and scheme requirements.



The Resident Association President presenting a folder of petitions, official registration of claims, newspaper cuttings and sketch maps in September 2011.

Photo credit: Authors

As can be inferred from the above discussions, the residents creatively mobilized a variety of opportunities to have their territory titled. We suggest that the actions of the PMNGR residents are strategic in themselves as, in the process, they influenced the reworking of an institutional procedure, namely creating title for squatters occupying the lake bed area. We suggest that a binary interpretation of the State's and residents' actions, as viewed through de Certeau's lens of strategy and tactic, is limited. He associates strategies with the boundaries imposed by government institutions and corporations via the maps and documents, and tactics as the defensive and opportunistic actions of the marginal group in response to

powerful strategic relations (de Certeau, 1984). As the discussion in this section reveals, the PMNGR residents creatively appropriated institutional practices, vocabulary and schemes to push the boundaries established by the Government in order to obtain titles to their land. The changes in institutional practices emerged from the residents' actions of improvising (creative mobilization) administrative procedures as much as negotiating through existing ones. Their actions culminated in their claims being recorded in official registers and documents that were treated on par with titles being assembled. India does not have conclusive titling, and a variety of documents, including those assembled by the residents, are used as deeds.<sup>[11]</sup> Further, the residents co-generated the information for official records described in the next section. Having a surveyor visit the settlement and preparing official documents prior to the official titling agreement are not merely tactical maneuvers within the boundaries set up by the Revenue Department. Interpreting the everyday actions by the PMNGR residents as tactics/strategies is not useful because it conveys a sense of rigidity of state plans to which the community responds, whereas, in reality, the State also adjusts its actions in response to demands from below.

The case of PMNGR is not an isolated or unique episode. This type of consolidation of occupancy and claims is the dominant practice whereby settlers claim land in periurban locations, as can be inferred from the table below. It has concerned 561,000 households over the last ten years in Tamil Nadu alone. The scale is massive but uneven, and still insufficient. Such instances of securing land title exist in each neighborhood, albeit through different routes, each with their setbacks and chances.

Rather, specialized programs for titling and redistribution of land – especially for poorer groups – are implemented in Tamil Nadu (as well as in other Indian states) through a multiplicity of schemes and legal procedures. It is important to be aware of the diversity of routine procedures of the government institutions through which the redistribution of land claims takes place.

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[11] Deed system: definitive property deeds do not exist in India. What is recognized as proof of ownership of land or property is the documentation of the transaction and previous transactions, or other documents evidencing ownership, validated by an officially registered sale deed. It is thus the transaction that stands as the guarantee and not the good itself. This means that ownership can be contested by anyone who can furnish proof of earlier possession, or who contests the validity of the documents compiled by the sellers and buyers.

Number of <i>pattas</i> issued to <i>Adi-Dravidars</i> in Tamil Nadu (2002–2003 to 2010–2011)			
Year	Amount spent (in 100,000 rupees)	No. of house sites issued by the <i>Adi-Dravidar</i> Welfare Dept.	No. of house sites assigned by the Revenue Dept.
2002–03	290.50	1,308	26,593
2003–04	381.84	13,395	28,750
2004–05	407.53	15,087	31,266
2005–06	442.65	12,469	25,716
2006–07	526.04	12,215	26,388
2007–08	571.13	13,100	112,503
2008–09	459.72	9,349	42,022
2009–10	428.14	6,871	15,907
2010–11	319.04	6,126	37,058
2011–12	301.92	4,284	31,044
2012–13	298.51	1,903	36,116
2013–14	252.51	912	51,434
<b>Total</b>	<b>4679.53</b>	<b>97,019</b>	<b>464,797</b>

Source: Government of Tamil Nadu (2015).

### 3. Bottom-up vs. top-down process for surveys and mapping (co-production vs. mapping as a resistance/lobbying artefact)

In this section we describe the process of enumeration and surveying at the PMNGR settlement to illustrate the capability and competences of the inhabitants (Berry-Chikhaoui *et al.*, 2002) to self-organize, not only to generate information and knowledge about themselves but, more importantly, to shape the institutional information and knowledge. The co-production of information and knowledge about PMNGR is a significant outcome, as it provided the legal basis for creating the title documents. In this light, the progress made by PMNGR differed from the top-down participatory models that have had limited influence over shaping institutional knowledge, specifically in the Indian context. The PMNGR experience illustrates the community members' capabilities and knowledge of institutional practices and community, in contrast to the assumptions undergirding the top-down model of participatory mapping, where residents have to be guided.

As can be inferred from the timeline (Section 2), the RWA initiated several surveys to generate demographic and spatial information. There were five surveys in total, some of which were jointly organized with mid-level bureaucrats of different government institutions. The RWA organized the first survey in 1976, following the letter from the governor recommending

the assignment of free *pattas* to the households. It became necessary to enumerate the households. The settlers conducted a second survey to generate proper evidence of the number of households to support their application to set up a public distribution shop. This list included households in the three clusters, as the community required a minimum number of applications to set up a ration shop. The third survey was conducted primarily to facilitate the negotiations within the community over the area of land that could be allotted to each of them. The RWA leaders drew on their ties with the mid-level bureaucrats and surveyors of the PWD to identify the settlement boundaries and secure the layout map. Establishing the boundaries was critical in order to calculate the total land area of the settlement and the area that could be allotted to each household. According to the rules of the free *patta* scheme, each household was to be assigned a minimum area of 4 to 5 cents.<sup>[12]</sup> The available land area of the PMNGR settlement was inadequate to accommodate all the families. The RWA organized another survey of the area of land that could be allotted to each household. Eventually, an area of 2.5 cents was fixed for each house after the survey of 2002. A fifth survey, organized by the office of the District Collector, was a house-to-house survey of occupation, caste and income in order to ascertain the eligibility of applicants for the titling scheme. It resulted in the District Administration stalling the distribution of titles for eighteen households. Following a re-survey by the Revenue officials, nine of the eighteen *pattas* were finally assigned.

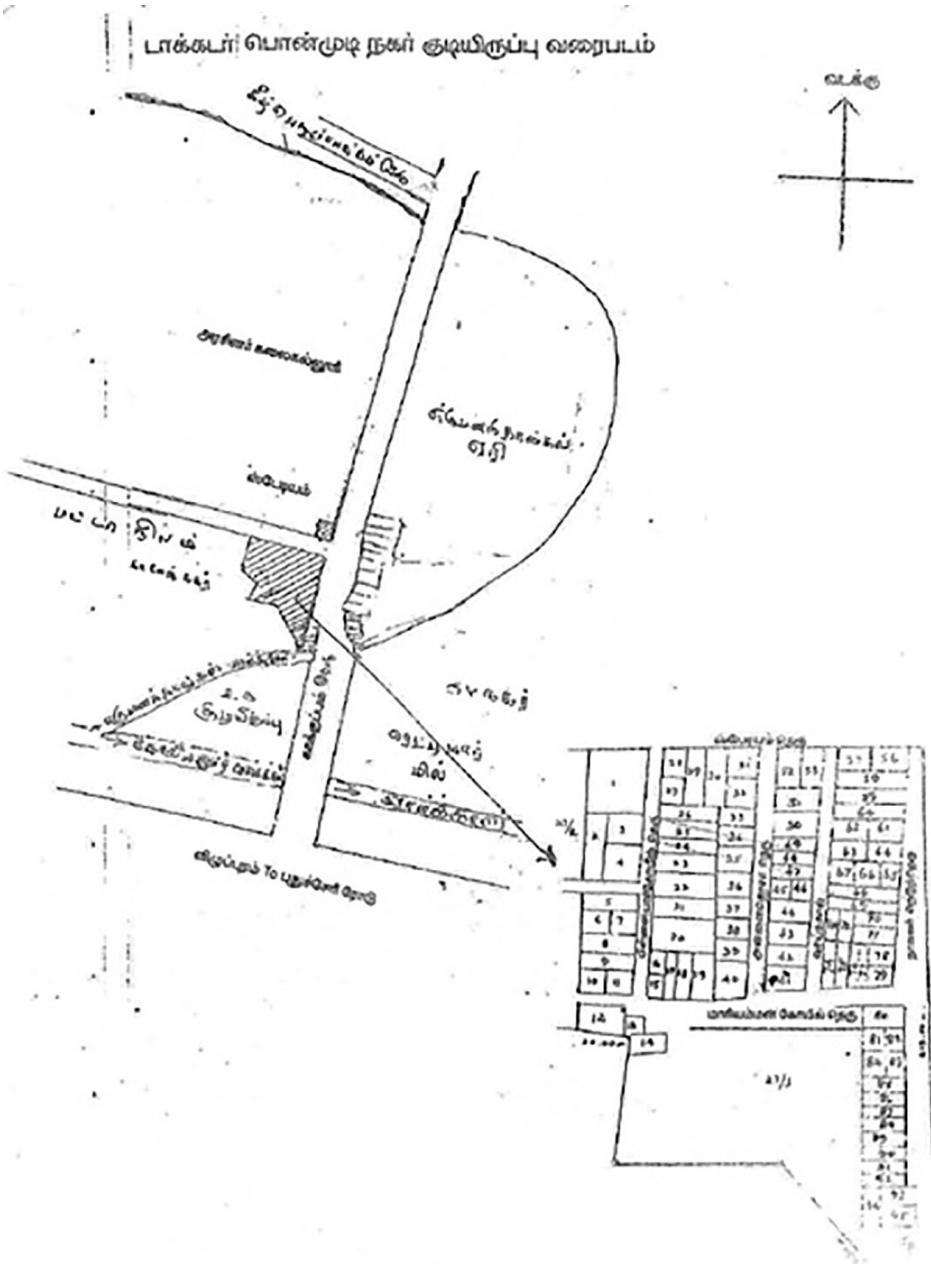
The surveys were conducted alongside the residents' struggle (lobbying directly or via the elected representatives) to influence the decision of the collector's office to issue titles. In parallel, the association lobbied – both via the elected representatives and directly – the surveyors of the District Revenue Administration and the village administrator officers to survey their land, fix plot boundaries, establish boundary stones, and prepare an official sketch map. When surveys were undertaken by the government agencies, the RWA played a major role in shaping the information compiled by the concerned agencies. This involved checking the number of households enumerated in the official list, ascertaining the plot boundaries, accompanying the surveyor on the field, and subsequently lobbying the surveyors to generate the settlement map and the sketch map. In contrast to participatory mapping by invitation, the PMNGR case points to the ability of communities to self-organize in order to influence and accelerate the institutional process.

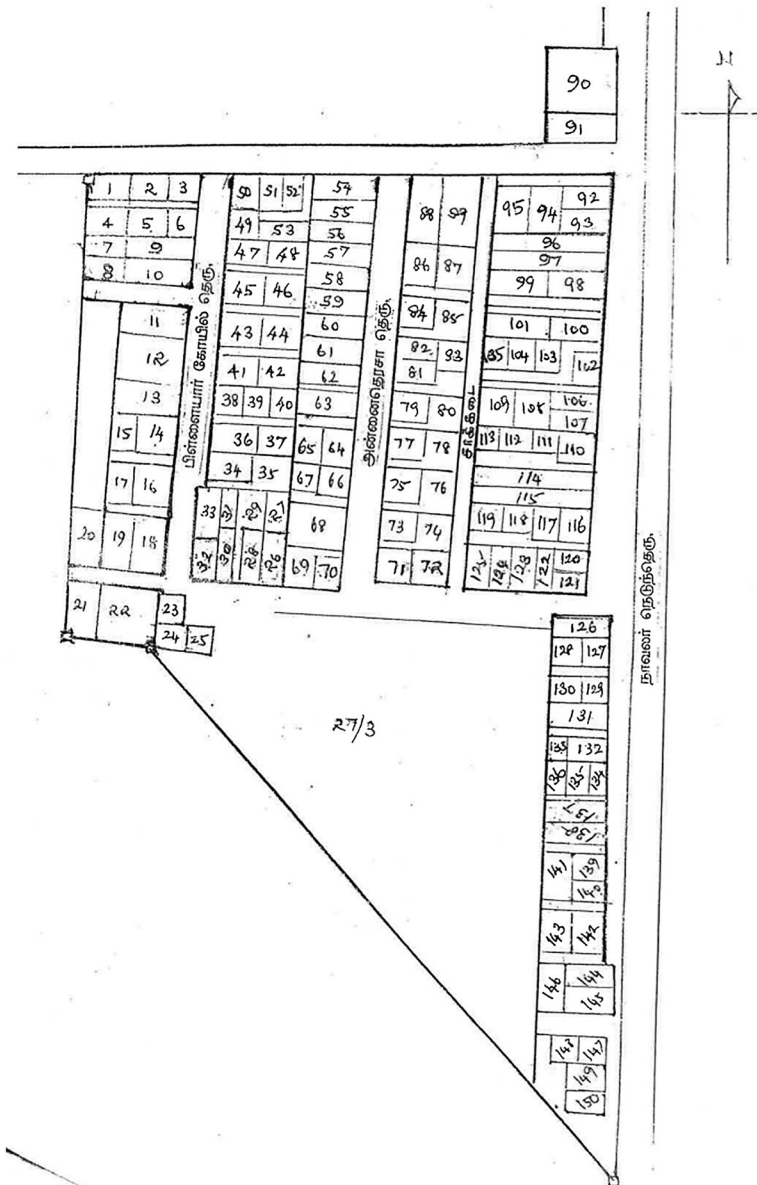
Ordinary self-mapping is envisaged to counter the official information – *i.e.*, as a tool of resistance. By contrast, the PMNGR RWA organized surveys and prepared maps to generate evidence about each household, negotiate internally between residents and with the government agencies and, most importantly, to generate official records. One such essential record is the sketch map, which constitutes the reference for creating title for individual plots. Getting the Revenue Department officials to visit their settlement is, as Hull (2012) notes in the context of Pakistan, a consuming process.

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[12] A cent equals 40.46 m<sup>2</sup>.







Map 2: The 2008 Resident Association (re)survey.  
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The repeated surveys and the shifting numbers observed in the PMNGR context may at a surface level resemble a conflictual phenomenon. A closer look reveals other reasons for these shifts. The first survey was organized to petition the governor, and it counted only 97 households. The number on the list kept changing over time, ranging from 100 to 140 due to the formation of new households by old settlers and the arrival of new settlers. The first survey, in 1976, counted only those residing in the largest of the three clusters. The subsequent lists also included households from the other two settlements.

Unlike the PMNGR experience, the participatory enumeration and mapping activities undertaken in the pilot project of a centralized poverty alleviation program (RAY) rolled out in 2008 spurred a spiraling web of lists and plans due to conflicts between the community and the government institution over the number of eligible households (Raman, 2015). The participatory planning and surveying promoted under these projects, though seemingly a bottom-up approach, are, in reality, controlled by the NGOs in view of sifting the “eligible” from the “ineligible”.

There are two underlying assumptions: first, that communities do not have the skills to generate information and knowledge about themselves and, second, that somehow the mapped information owned by residents would enable them to represent their needs to the State. Contrary to the above assumptions, a community map in itself may not be adequate to protect land claims and cannot overpass the legal complexities involved in creating records. What are critical are the manner in which the government agencies record the information, and the community’s knowledge of institutions – their procedures and practices. The ability to influence decisions outside the existing administrative procedures is no less important.

#### **4. Participation: patron-client ties or strategic alliances?**

Are the bottom-up practices described in the earlier sections merely tactical maneuvering reinforcing the status quo? Does the promotion of bottom-up practices, in reality, perpetuate backward patron-clientelistic practices? We argue that both these positions should be re-examined.

The PMNGR case can be erroneously read as a celebration of regressive clientelistic politics, in which residents drew on their alliances with elected representatives and lower- and mid-level bureaucrats in their engagement with the government institutions. Such alliances are exploitative and work against the interests of poor groups. Instead, the involvement of NGOs is promoted as a progressive avenue to protect different interests, especially the marginalized groups. This is based on the assumption that the NGOs, unlike the elected representatives, do not have any biased interests. They are thus neutral actors who can channel the demands of poor citizens, especially those with weak voices.

On the contrary, available evidence on the ground shows that the poor predominantly engage with the State through their elected representatives and their ties embedded in the mid- and

lower-level bureaucracy (Benjamin, 2008; Harris, 2007). Based on his research on metrocities, Benjamin (2008) argues that, with the ascendancy of middle-class politics and their alliance with senior bureaucrats, the conduits already available to the poor via the elected representatives becomes important to route their demands. We suggest, rather than hierarchizing one form of participation over the other, viewing participation as a political process. If empowerment is linked to the voice that communities have in influencing decisions, there is evidence to show that conflicting and individual interests within an organization or between organizations can also influence NGO mediation.

Evidence of participatory mapping projects led by NGOs resulting in in-situ titling is limited in India. Experience of squatters affected by slum rehabilitation programs and urban renewal in Mumbai and other metropolitan projects shows that participation and titling have been mobilized both in government-led and NGO-driven projects for resettlement (Raman, 2015; Doshi, 2011). These projects use new planning instruments such as the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and land sharing as strategies to finance the construction of houses. Land sharing in the Indian context does not necessarily mean sharing the land area between the occupants and the developer. Rather, the flexible interpretation of land sharing and TDR with respect to any part of the city means that squatters in the city center are targeted to be moved to the periphery. A developer is allowed to construct multi-storied buildings on the periphery in exchange for a high-premium real estate plot occupied by squatters. TDR and land sharing arrangements create favorable conditions for slum eviction and rehabilitation in the name of providing titles to the poor.

The TDR projects implemented in Mumbai assign a specific quota for non-governmental organizations to implement slum rehabilitation projects. An influential international federation of NGOs in Mumbai – the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers (SPARC) and the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) – is among the beneficiaries of TDR-based slum rehabilitation projects. Its lobbying led to the inclusion of participatory mapping and surveying in the official poverty programs. However, the financial incentives for the NGOs' participation in TDR projects conflict with the community causes they espouse. Given the changing (shrinking) funding (aid) scenario for the development sector in India, government-led projects are an important source for raising funds. The TDR benefitted the developers and the NGOs turned into builders (Doshi, 2011). The NSDF-SPARC alliance, with its connections to international federations of shack/slum dwellers (SDI) and its special status in international organizations like the Cities Alliance, the World Bank, or the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), has an extremely limited impact on the ground in terms of in-situ titling (Sanyal, Bishwapriya and Vinit Mukhija, 2001). It played a major role in the resettlement of squatters under the World Bank-funded Mumbai transportation project and, subsequently, in shaping the RAY project document. While the NGOs and their allies have moved on to promote courses on participatory planning in academic institutions, many slum dwellers, called "encroachers", remain stuck in transit camps in Mumbai, and squatter tenants are excluded. In 2015, the NSDF-SPARC alliance advocated for social tenure in lieu of titles, claiming that the regular land-for-the-poor schemes, such as the one led by the PMNGR residents, were not

performing well. The record on strengthening squatters' land claims through contemporary approaches in India – including the most participative ones – supported by large national civil society organizations and international NGOs has been poor.

Strategies for squatter redevelopment in ongoing poverty reduction projects (e.g., RAY) draw on the Mumbai model. Planning instruments such as TDR and land sharing are designed to attract private developers' participation in redeveloping squatter settlements under Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). Although titles were promised to squatters through official poverty programs, these have not materialized. Under the RAY program, only 4% of squatter settlements were selected for in-situ rehabilitation (Simpret *et al.*, 2014). In 42% of the cases, the approach induced the displacement of squatters. The RAY program thus extended the approaches of large-scale eviction and resettlement, adopted under the previous program, such as the Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme (IHSDP) complemented by the Basic Services for Urban Poor (BSUP). The second phase of the RAY program implemented between 2013 and 2016 has, moreover, moved away from the ambitious plans to grant titles towards an affordable housing policy, whose meaning is unclear. The slogan of "the right to housing", interpreted as resettlement for titling, replaced the previous attempts of squatters to secure the right to settle through incremental regularization. Meanwhile, the socio-political movement in favor of the Property Rights to Slum Dwellers Bill (2011) did not materialize.

It is critical to reconsider earlier policies of incremental regularization of squatter settlements given the large number of households living in precarious conditions, estimated to reach 93 million (+18 million over the last decade), or 7.7% of the total population of India – 17% of world slum dwellers.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we aimed to draw attention to the self-mobilization efforts of squatters to improve their life. Although there is a vast literature on urban poverty and development studies focusing on the top-down process of participation, unmonitored bottom-up processes are overlooked. This paper is firstly an attempt to contribute to fill this gap. The PMNGR residents' course of action described in Section 2 illustrates the predominant ways through which popular groups claim land and record their claims in official registers, by mobilizing welfare schemes and a variety of political and legal opportunities – keeping in mind the diversity of these ways. Our intention is not to celebrate the agency of squatters, while overlooking the structural constraints. It is to draw attention to the possibility of supporting a community's efforts to secure their claims. We argue that consideration should be given to the multiple schemes and regular administrative procedures through which societal resources are redistributed in India, especially in the welfare States of southern India, as compared to the more centralized and supposedly innovative approaches involving participation. Titling and participatory planning have been mobilized in projects for slum redevelopment to relocate squatters to the city's periphery. Participation is imposed to serve different interests.

The findings presented in this paper point to the usefulness of reviewing some of the dominant concepts in the discussion on squatters in general and the titling process in particular, namely: (i) the nuances of the titling process and the binary conception of squatters' strategies as tactics and government actions as strategies; (ii) the role of communities in the mapping process, and (iii) the assumed links between transparency and NGO/civil society mediation and the notion of patron-clientelism.

In Section 2, we illustrate the nuances of the titling process and show the involvement of different institutions and actors. We argue that the actions of PMNGR residents cannot be reduced to "tactics" and those of government institutions to "strategies". Rather, this binary framework is reductionist if we understand strategies as actions that push and reconfigure the boundaries set by a dominant actor. We show the complex ways in which communities mobilize state institutions and schemes to realize their interests. In Section 3, we underline the usefulness of tapping local knowledge and community expertise. We show that the members of the PMNGR communities drew on their knowledge of institutional practices and networks to generate their community's information and knowledge. Generating information on the community is crucial to creating a title document. The survey process initiated by the community resulted in the residents co-producing the information recorded in state registers. What enabled them to influence the state agencies to reinterpret state documents was their ability to work with the political parties and institutions. They were capable of "shopping" in both the relevant schemes and state provisions to secure their occupation, to access services and, importantly, to secure titles. Knowledge about the settlement was generated through their intensive interactions with street-level bureaucrats and locally elected politicians.

In Section 4, we plead for a move away from a hierarchical and ideological bias when inferring the various circuits that squatters such as the PMNGR residents used to secure titles. Here, community ties and relationships with the elected representatives are central to influencing institutional actors' decisions on granting titles. The findings point to a critical review of the role of NGOs. The large NGO federation, with extensive connections to national governments and international agencies, tends to standardize and orchestrate the participatory process. The excessive focus on organized participatory rituals has masked, in a way, the diversity of the local co-production of neighborhoods initiated by residents on their own without any external advocacy, outside of the regular political and electoral game, both local and regional.

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