

Title: Beating a Path: Creating a basis for Government Organisations to become accountable to Communities of the Poor.

An explorations of how shelter delivery in India can be re organized, and the roles that NGOs can play in this transformation using SPARC's experiences as a basis for discussion.

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Introduction

"All over the region, partnerships are being formed between Governments and NGOs. Willingly or unwillingly, NGOs are accepting the reality of their own limitations and their Governments' potential as a partner in development work. In seminar after seminar, better relationship with Government has become the inevitable refrain. Perpetually hard pressed for funds, NGOs probably have no choice. However in rethinking their relationships with Government, NGOs must not lose sight of one simple thing: Governments are not benefactors...only stewards. Whatever the people, through NGOs demand from the Government is theirs by right. That Governments accede to the people's demands is a responsibility and not largesse. That NGOs are now constrained to make an alay of Government in order to get it to do its job is a proof of Government's failure, and should not be left to NGOs (to get governments to recognise this) as a challenge they have to take on their own."(Editorial note of LOKNITI June 1991 Volume 7, Number 2)

In his article "Civil Society, The State and Roles of NGOs" 1991, Dr Rajesh Tandon questions the reference to organisations, voluntary sector and networks of civil society as a third sector. "On the contrary, the historical role of civil society and the democratic principles of people's sovereignty both point to the essential primacy of the civil society as the only legitimate first sector. Tracing the decline of the power of the civil sector to the post world war two, he continues that..." many newly independent countries of the south embraced a concept of state alien to their social, cultural and political melieu. As the state consolidated its power it began to take over more and more of the economic, political, cultural, and social functions of civil society. In so doing it has dismantled historically rooted institutional arrangements in neighborhoods, of voluntary associations and citizen's initiatives.

Thus the role of the active citizen engaged traditionally in all forms of governance and production of culture, economy and society, is now reduced to a client of the bureaucracy, a passive consumer of products of development set up by the state. Recent developments in eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia clearly indicate that the time has come for the civil society to reestablish its primacy and assume accountability of both state and business sectors to the sovereign people. For this the concept of "public" needs to be redefined, and removed from the monopoly of the state. Civil society is a public formation itself, and the appropriate role of "enabling" conditions for civil society is the alternative. As stated by Chandra Fonseka in his article "Alliance of Convenience" Lok Niti June 1991, removing from state control if seen as public, has to transfer not into the "privatization" but into social privatization, or peoplelisation. Where service delivery and not profit continue to be the main goal, and efficient service delivery the basis of reduced costs.

However there is evidence to suggest that such an investment will not be made by both national governments and International Bi and multi lateral agencies for the following reason:

- 1.The opposition it will receive almost certainly from politicians and bureaucrats
- 2.Lack of powerful and organised force of NGO and People's Organisations to first apply pressure on government implementations of this policy (if it exists); and to withstand counter pressures from governments to co opt the NGOs.

3. The unpreparedness in terms of adequate conscientization, management skills and organisation of the recipient NGOs and People's Organisation to whom these services and functions will be transferred to.

In the decade of the 90s, the language used globally in what communities of poor need as reflected in Bilateral and Multilateral Agency documents is remarkable and significantly similar to the articulation of NGOs. The challenge before NGOs lies in whether this common use of words can lead to a common understanding of activities and resource allocations to serve the needs and interests of the people. It is the experience of many in the NGO sector that the relationship of NGOs with MM the GOs and IOs is largely ambivalent as NGOs committed to greater participation of people in resource usage, are seen to be breaking, or even challenging existing structures.

Lax Jain, in his article " NGOs and Government: Forever Different, Forever at Odds?", quotes a urdu saying ... " You and I cannot get along, but neither of us can do without the other" as describing the relationship between government and NGOs. As long as GO remain distant from people in a situation which demands their interaction with them the NGO which locates its role with people and seeks to mediate between the two, can never be in any comfortable position. In the long run, many NGOs, (as suggested by David Korton refers to in many of his publications), NGOs are moving from reactive to proactive roles. They are seeking to direct citizen leadership in the creation of new demands on the government. The purpose is not to do away with the government functions, only to reduce its pervasive presence and control gradually moving to new systems of relationships that assure accountability and responsiveness to the people.

In the Ultimate analysis the government and the people's organisations will have to make choices of the kind of relationships they wish to make, in this process NGO can at best be a mediator. Relationships between the NGOs and GOs must include POs.

These partnerships between the NGOs and Peoples Organisation, and between NGOs and Government Organisation can be of several types:

Consultative partnerships: information exchange, dialogue for an exchange of ideas, information and possible future activities to be undertaken.

Coordinate partnership: In order to avoid duplication of activities and towards greater efficiency, such a partnership creates basis of interaction especially in areas of relief and goods distribution.

Complementary partnership: Each partner has a separate initiative yet all are guided by common principles.

Collaborative partnership: each institution agrees to work together sharing a common objective, goals, and a plan of action on the program level.

Critical partnership: This is the highest form and level of partnership where each institution considers the other as indispensable partner in pursuing broad based developmental goals and visions.

INDIA AND ITS COMMITMENTS TO SHELTER:

India is a signatory to the UNCHS promoted global shelter strategy¹ and the UN covenant of social economic and cultural rights² citizens of signatory nations.

1. Internationally, the global shelter strategy seeks to encourage its signatories to consider shelter as a human need which must be addressed urgently. It highlights "enablement" as it means to provide shelter to all. Earlier posture of state providing housing for its citizens have clearly been enviable, shelter for themselves and the state seeks to facilitate this.

2. The signatories to the UN Covenant for Social, Economic and Cultural rights among other things also assures citizens of all signatory nations, no evictions without resettlement. Shelter is seen by both as a very basic need and in acknowledging this, the governments take on the responsibility of protecting, upgrading and facilitating peoples pursuit of secure shelter.

This is an acknowledgment the importance of secure shelter for all, especially the poor and through this, India has accepted in principal at least that the rights of all to secure shelter must be respected, and that there would be no eviction of people or demolition of houses constructed by them without any resettlement alternative. Further, as part of the long-term shelter strategy, it would adopt an enabling strategy. This accepts the inability of state/government institutions to deliver the necessary quantity of housing, infrastructure and amenities essential to pronounce shelter as secure and adequate.(3) It is now stated in national policies that Government now seek formulation of strategies in keeping with the Global strategy.

(3)The 8th Plan Expert Committee Report on Housing has made the following observations.

The present backlog in housing calculated by the 1991 census and the National Building Organisations is 31 million houses of which 10.4 million are urban. The National Building Organization estimates 21.77 million dwelling units need to be constructed including 5.82 million to be upgraded - estimated to cost Rs.97,530 crores - which is recommended in the target of the 8th Plan (1992-97). This will require 12.2% of the budget outlay (public/private) as compared to 9% in the 7th Plan. Studies also indicate that 80% of housing loans (NIUA) come from nonformal sources. While another calculation (Report) states only less than 10% investment in housing is from formal plan outlay.

While rural housing problems is in the form of occupancy rights, access to material and assistance for construction, the urban poor face scarcity of reasonable shelter -manifested in overcrowded slums and squatter settlements. The poorer segments seem to have no chance to acquire legal housing and squatter housing provides the only affordable form of housing. With affordability however goes in-security of tenure, threat of eviction, lack of basic services and poor environment quality. In the absence of reasonable alternatives it may be necessary to confer occupancy rights to requesting dwellers. With secure land tenure people will have access to land from Housing Finance Institutions.

Clearly the provision of shelter will require government to provide land and infrastructure and housing finance assistance to people and support peoples initiatives to address the shelter back log. Such a desire, to be translated into actual action remains something in the distant future. In fact, on the ground, at the community and grassroots level such a possibility is more of an exception rather than the rule for a very long time to come.

Several factors contribute to this problem.

Shelter as a whole, and housing in general has not been a priority in any of the previous government planning procedures, and remains under developed in all aspects. Overtly some obvious reasons come to mind such as:

1. Planning mechanisms have not acknowledge reality.: India has always seen itself as a country of villages. Its planners have always sought to provide the village residents with a good quality of life, a dream which has yet to be fulfilled the government plan to eradicate rural poverty continues while a process of in-migration to urban areas is also apparent. The transformation of rural areas into small and medium level towns has also made rural villages into district towns. Planners of cities, in the last several decades after independence, continue to make projections of investments, industrial production, infrastructure necessary for these growth factors, but continue to ignore the in-migration that such wealth resources create in their wake. In a sense, despite being rid of its colonial rule, Indian cities continue to follow almost Victorian planning processes, in which those who toil are "allowed" to work in the city, but there is never any provision of housing, basic amenities or any basic infrastructure provided to them.

While not undertaking any action itself, the centralised planning and institutional control by government departments have aborted whatever initiatives developed by people themselves, often deeming them illegal because they do not ascribe to standards considered by the government as essential.

2. As a result in both large and small cities all over India, a population of between 30-50% can be said to live in sub human conditions, without adequate shelter, water, sanitation, roads, electricity and so on. In studies leading to the 8th Five year Plan, there is a clear acknowledgment by the committees appointed by the planning commission that in the foreseeable future, the government will not be in any position to provide housing to the urban poor, and that the resources of the poor themselves will continue to be the main resources to create and maintain shelter for them. It recommends an array of enabling strategies to assist the poor in their efforts.

3. Unutilized pro-poor legislation

Some very good legislation which could have lead to improved shelter (such as the urban land ceiling Act) have never been utilized, mainly due to lack of political will. Ironically it now stands to be either scrapped or altered dramatically because it was not found effective. With no clear legislation to provide for secure land tenure to the poor there is little chance of any "enablement" to occur.

4.. Structural Adjustment Program

This is anticipated to have several effects.

- i. Reduced Government expenditure, and withdrawal of public institutions in shelter delivery.
- ii. Market controlled land markets.
- iii. Increasing urbanization, as modes of production change, expanding numbers of cities with reduced resources for shelter in cities already very anti poor.

Presently shelter continues to have the least priority in every way - in resource allocations land use strategies and in anti poverty programmes. For the poor its more of the same - that cities continue to provide two meals a day worth of wages to the migrant fleeing lack of employment in villages, but never any arrangement to stay. Poverty alleviation programs focus on income generation but ignore completely that physical space is essential for production and trading of any commodity.

NGOs as Vanguard of change : in search of the people

Many international documents in shelter related development expounding development strategies for NGOs to initiate, innovate, execute and sustain alternatives for solutions. It is almost as though the era of expectations of Government run institutions is over and so the new savior has been located. This burden of expectation has none of the advantages that state institutions had, and the chances are that this "moment of honor" will quickly fade away unless NGOS locally and nationally reformulate the terms of reference of their own functioning.

Problems faced by NGOs:-

1. Antagonism towards NGOs

In every country, depending on the political climate there is a earmarked space within which NGOs have to function locally and nationally - as a result NGO character and style emerge as a result of this space - and the elasticity of NGOs is fully tested in survival and little else. By and large, while increasing demands are being made on NGOs the kind of government restriction of their activities, the persecution NGOS face when supporting people's demands and the host of legislations which seek to control NGOS are on the increase in India, as well as in South Asia.

There is clearly a dissonance between stated demands and expectations of NGOS in societal transformation and the real situation in which political parties and government administrations are suspicious, hostile antagonistic and aggressive towards NGO action which seeks to either get acknowledge of the problems of the poor, seek to facilitate dialogue between the poor and the state or any such activity which changes the status quo.

The only role that is promoted strongly is one of the NGO being a cheap and effective sub contractor of development projects where NGOS just do the job, do not question scope, allocation of the resources or impact of such an intervention. There is widespread hostility about NGO flexibility and access to resources other than what the state has provided. Very often politicians and administrators resent international

assistance or direct central government assistance coming to NGOS without their supervision and so the list goes on.

One increasingly emerging phenomenon resulting from this situation are what the Indian NGO sector calls "gongs". Government promoted NGOS - these are independently registered trusts/public societies actively set up by governments - administrators and politicians, to whom government and International aid is channelised.*

*see VANI documents on the NGO council promoted by the Chairman of the Planning Commission.

2. Co-option of NGO strategies or its annihilation

The evolution of NGO created alternatives are very slow, often unconventional, with very low fund absorption capability and how replication level initially - its often a paradox that when NGOS can't absorb funds, they are offered opportunities for resources and when they need funds - these are never available.

Because NGOs respond to community priorities and needs, and they evolve the alternatives gradually, depending on government response one of three things happen.

1. There is total non recognition of the need and no space provided for innovation or initiatives, and lack of resources and support might just kill the process.
2. The acceptance by the state is enthusiastic and there are demands for rapid expansion and execution of the alternative. In many instances this has distorted, damaged or destroyed the emerging initiatives.
3. Very positive about alternative strategy the state/government takes over the strategy and executes it.

There are several illustrations of these three possibilities and especially in other sectors of development - health, education, and with no visible mechanisms to alter this course, the challenge remains of how to actually manage a process of development change in which communities face a problem NGO are the catalyst and the government is in the "Drivers" seat with resources and power.

3. NGOS as victims of their own and others stereotypes about them - where and how they should function. Historically NGO leadership has emerged all over the world out of a concern for the poor, response to crisis of floods, famines and earthquakes and more recently, manmade disasters such as massive development projects which did not consider impact on the poor. Such persons and the institutions they create have tended to tilt windmills, fight conventional wisdom and demand equity and equality where these don't exist.

They operate frugally, often reacting to calamities and problems and generally work against all odds such as low cash flows, state persecution, and low societal support levels. Increasing international acknowledgment of their role of not accompanied with real support mechanisms increases anger of local governments.

Activists over work, face personal crisis and often burn out mentally and emotionally. This is hardly the situation conducive for the voluntary sector to reproduce itself, emerges the people and innovate in the face of due need on a long term and sustainable basis.

Exploring the present development paradigm

Transformation is never painless, and very rarely does it get achieved easily. What space there is to experiment and innovate alternatives, how they are sustained by being translated into policies and institutional structures are choices which national government and society must decide. NGOs have shown that they are effective as catalysts for innovation, and this increasing recognition has led to wide support in some countries, harsh suppression in others, indifference in others.

It is very essential to explore the present development paradigm to understand why valuable innovation and effective field interventions are unable to multiply and grow. Why so many "projects" either remain as "pilots" for their entire life or die a sudden death and change only occurs in such "oasis of transformation."

Changes in the development paradigm

Development (at least its international and national face) is a clearly vertical hierarchy and so have continued with national governments to design what is necessary on their own without too much consultation with the poor or their leaders. If we examine very strong movements among the poor, they have often had to exhaust themselves just surviving confrontations with the state and reacting to designs of development projects concerned and executed without their knowledge and consent.

The peoples opposition to teaming down forests, to dams construction, to a wide range of projects including sites and services in shelter, only receive recognition in posterity like the painter who died starving, but whose paintings earn millions for art galleries. Those poor communities whose life and traditions are destroyed only occasionally get acknowledgement in development text books. This situation so occurring much too often in every country in the works, and these processes must be the forces of accountability of so, national governments and NGOS.

However, the vertical and hierarchical structure of today's development process cannot accommodate such a possibility. Decision making remains exclusive and "excludes" all the real actors affected by the possible changes development will affect. This is so in government structures as well as with NGOS.

The devolution of power and resources and decision making does not occur along with responsibility of execution within international organizations and government departments. The protocol and power struggle so consumes everyone, that ultimately interventions are hardly able to match the dimensions of the problems that the poor address and become "token" in nature.

Among NGOS the situation is worse, because they generally have no power, no political legitimacy and security of resources. A number of problems besiege them, and often, the very corrector which ensures they survive against such odds - either allows for no dialogue with the state or IO, or threatens to subsume them and annihilate the very spirit for which they were landed for.

NGOS successful in identifying and supporting people's struggles get as marginalised and isolated as the peoples movements. This makes dialogue with state or IO's difficult for them. And realistically the basis of dialogue and negotiations are hardly "equal" often the dialogue is a superficial concession to international pressures to negotiate.

NGOS seeking to create, experiment and develop alternatives also face tremendous odds. They quickly face a crisis of collusion with state agencies competing with them (in which case its hard struggle). Or they face cooption with state agencies seeking to subcontract the entire project on terms only suitable to the government. The choice is hard and usually destroys the NGO. Its to fail if you do (because NGOs are not designed to undertake massive production) and fail if you don't (because NGOs get accused by the State and by communities for not using resources).

NGOs which may not work directly with the poor, but seeks to take on roles of lobbying and advocacy have another set of problems. They have always to operate in the style and manner of the IO/GO with whom they negotiate. Often over a period of time, they stagnate, as they function in the rhythm of the International development community and become as prescriptions as the organizations they seek to transform. Community needs and aspirations, the diversity of alternatives needed, the flexibility and decentralised nature of peoples solutions ends up sounding like a prescription itself until everyone agrees they are saying the same thing!

The vertical hierarchies of IO/GO has created a similar hierarchy unwillingly in NGOs as well. Those who work in the field with communities become foot soldiers and those who design alternatives at global level - the generals in the army. The most involved and communities NGO sector person gets drawn into this process and this itself has created much dialogue and discussion in NGO circles.

Therefore futuristic strategies at International level which seek to make quantum leaps in their demands and expectations of member signatories must not put their new ideas in the existing structures and development paradigms, but instead must seek to sharpen and strengthen new goals and objectives with

new mechanisms, new world views which reorganize how change occurs. This is the responsibility of the new world order as the decade of the 90s moves into the 20th century.

But the most crucial and hard to explain in all debates about societal transformation is the total absence of the poor, their communities and their leadership.

However essential this participation is concerned, the present arrangements of structures do not allow for the poor or their representatives to articulate their needs and aspirations or their possible solutions around which resources can be arranged - which is how real and true enablement should be. NGOs and governments have not design and evaluate their interaction on the basis of how much scope there is for communities to participate in attaining secure shelter with governments.

Challenging the present community organisation strategy.

Community organization as articulated in many UN documents is seen as a strategy or "means" to get the community agreeable to participate in development projects designed and executed by the outsider - NGO/GO. Such an intervention may be considered good intervention by some and "manipulation of the community" by the external change agent to ensure community cooperation and consent to an external intervention - good or bad.

Community organization as developed by Paul Abisky and presently used by many community organisers is a process of an external catalyst engaging the community energies to attach those elements/persons or resource agents who block the community for achieving its resources and fulfill its needs. Very popular in the 60-70s and developed in the ghettos of the, this has been a well designed and extensively used strategy even today in many countries in Asia. Its strength is it energizes people around common needs, and creates strong peoples groups who then make demands themselves. Its weaknesses are that it cannot be sustained, it works well in times of crisis and most of all it works only at local levels. So if the problem requires intervention at 4-5 levels of government it does not do so.

These and other forms of CO's have failed on three counts.

1. Creating space for women's participation in community decision making.
2. Democratizing communities to ensure equitable distribution of resources within the communities.
3. Sustaining the momentum of the process of mobilisation to withstand long and difficult negotiations.

But despite their weaknesses they highlight the potential of human resource which lies in communities and seeks to create mechanisms to link this energy with those forces outside the local situation which seek to assist, support and transform these communities.

While self help is a means to generate confidence and improved self image of community, solutions to real problems that the poor face cannot be resolved in the present resource available within the community. This inadequacy of resources has often been the cause the problems. Third combined with the isolation from mainstream ensures no change in the existing status quo. Therefore the resources - financial (etc.) and technical must flow in and the conduit has to be the communication network developed by the community (re) organization process.

The challenges of reorganizing poor communities presently require to address mechanisms by which

1. communities democratise internally

To ensure: i. Informed community participation

- in problem identification
- selection of leadership
- equitable distribution of resources once they come

ii. Womens participation

- acknowledging roles women play and strengthening their skills and capacity to continue to do so.

-increasing women's participation in decision making and leadership.

2. Communities participate centrally in the problem solving process with the "outside".

-communities articulate their problems in a manner unchallenged by the "outside"

-identify critical elements of the solution essential to the solution

-negotiate with resource holding organizations.

3. Communities break their isolation by creating networks/federations/unions - which

- support and sustain each group and provide solidarity

-Provide an educational milieu for horizontal or peer learning.

-create at a future date organizations and institutions which they control and which fulfills on a long-term and sustained basis the needs of similar poor communities.

NGOS in shelter activities in India and their stances vis a vis Government

Both in the present as in the past, by and large, there is a general consensus that government has the responsibility to provide resources to ensure that poor have land tenure/security, infrastructure and amenities. Right upto the mid 80s most shelter activities of various state governments were called "slum clearance". It portrayed non provision of any services in any adequate form to the poor, and demolition through clearance of peoples own alternatives (slums) because they were deemed inhabitable by the rules and regulation and building norms laid down by the state. As a result between 30-50% of dwellings in each Indian city, (with may be an exception of New Delhi where these were removed) were and continue to be slums. A new housing policy has been on the anvil for several years and on several fronts the stance of senior government officials is becoming more pro poor - at least in discussion and in documents. However there is no great visible change of approach seen by NGOs and communities on the ground in the area of the state's role in providing shelter to the poor.

To date, the Hyderabad slum improvement program undertaken in conjunction with British ODA remains the major success story, while the initiative of a District Collector in Kerala of creating a training centre to develop building materials called the "Nirmati Kendra" now adapted by HUDCO as its Building Centre projects are examples new and far between of State initiatives. And Laurie Baker's mud architecture has so enthused HUDCO that its promoting this material for shelter alternatives.

SPARC's own experience in seeking to get a building center established for assisting communities in construction activities, although supported on paper by various government department has no chance of actually being set up, as land to set up the centre requires permission from the Municipal Corporation of Bombay, This has two years to consider, after another planning authority of Maharashtra took three years to locate the possible land for this Centre.

India has a long and well establish history of voluntarism. Through various milestones such as the various reformist movements during British rule and later the Independence struggle citizen participation in issues of local and national importance have created many secular institutions, trusts and public societies - all of which are now also called NGOS. Today, India has a wide range of NGOS working in different areas and undertaking a wide range of activities. Interestingly the number of NGOS working in shelter in general - urban and rural are few.

The national Campaign for Housing Rights established in 1985 by a wide network of NGOs, trade unions urban and rural mass movements represents an acknowledgment in the NGO sector about the dire urgency of assisting the poor defend their present shelter situation and to demand comprehensive legislation by government on ensuring housing rights for all. Its activities range from supporting organizations to include shelter as a sector in their activities, to assist communities facing eviction survive this crisis to negotiate for alternatives and to examine development politics which would affect shelter security for the poor adversely. Among its most recent activities, the campaign seeks to examine the impact of structural adjustment programme on shelter for the poor. It has also written up a housing policy which will be introduced very soon in the parliament.*

*For material and more information contact Minar Pimple, Yuva, 8 Ground Floor 3332, Mughbhat Cross Lane, Bombay 400 002.

NCHR, represents a very important intervention in the shelter sector - which seeks accountability of the government, the laws and resources of the government to the provision of shelter. In a situation where no earlier practice of such a nature existed, this is a very important and essential mechanism which supports NGO activism.

The NGO activities specifically focused towards shelter as a sector is very limited. Unlike the areas of health, education, shelter related activism among NGOS is relatively less developed. Construction of houses by NGOS especially in disaster mitigation has occurred in rural areas. In some other instances, houses, basic infrastructure have been part of an integrated development package. By and large, the NGO has constructed the houses with external development aid and there has not been much replication of these strategies. Among the possible reasons, some are:-

- * NGOs had no additional capacity to construct
- * NGOs have not generated more resources to construct
- * There was no land available for further work.

By and large this approach has not worked. More recently in both urban and rural context Development programs, urban and rural are anticipated to displace very large numbers of people whose livelihood and shelter will be destroyed without compensation or alternatives. Government as the main actor of designing this intervention in the first place, has ended up confronting the poor and NGOs working with them instead of being a mediator.*

*see Narmada SSP oustees demands as articulated by the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

In this paper, focusing on urban shelter issues, and on SPARC's experiences, we examine how the Government and the NGO and communities of the poor relate to each other presently.

Poor slum dwellers have been active on shelter... first two project their settlements from demolition and eviction and later seek recognition for their rights for resources to improve and upgrade their homes. However very few have received these resources and government schemes to assist them. Since shelter remains the most ignored of basic needs. The reason for this is very obvious. Shelter more than any other area of basic needs is one which requires the most political will. Its fulfillment required land security and therefore its solutions can never emerge from technical or managerial interventions. Such political choices inhibit most NGOs (especially in urban areas) to take on shelter as its activity as it immediately complicates the NGO functioning - from funding, to projects, to "output". As though this was not enough, all housing and shelter related professionals and technicians further complicate the issues by a clutter of confused technicalities - guaranteed tie everyone into knots.

In such a situation there are many different NGOs who are undertaking a wide range of innovation to provide various valuable components for the solution, and we see ourselves as part of that network locally and internationally.

SPARC's work in the last 8 years represents a threefold approach. in which it has sought to develop its own work along what communities of the poor need:

- it has assisted the development and strengthening of people's organisation,
- linked itself with them in a critical partnership in which they all collectively aspire to achieve commonly articulated goals,
- finally through people's experiences and in the explorations of new initiatives, identified solutions which communities require for their own development.

Based on these early precedent, it has then sought to challenge existing practices of service deliveries by the state, engaged the state agencies to relate directly to communities to reorganise their relationship with each other, and finally, with state support, it now seeks to create institutional arrangements where communities own and control organisations and institutions which provides services for the poor.

We begin with a brief description of the organisation, its strategies and partnerships, and some of its experiences in the presence of shelter for the poor in India.

SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres) is a registered public trust which was established in 1984 by professionals from diverse fields.¹ SPARC's involvement in shelter redistribution of resources in cities. Its role and function emerges from an analysis of work of NGOs in urban areas which indicates that most interventions have so far not addressed issues which concern the poor. Rather, they have focused on how some resources gathered through philanthropy or allocated by the State can best be distributed among those who could benefit by them. We label this as manifestations of the "management of poverty" approach.²

SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centers) is a registered public trust which was established in 1984 by professionals from diverse fields.¹ SPARC's involvement in shelter related activities emerges from its commitment to the equitable distribution of resources in cities. Its role and function emerges from an analysis of work of NGOs in urban areas which indicates that most interventions have so far not addressed issues which concern the poor. Rather, they have focused on how some resources gathered through philanthropy or allocated by the State can best be distributed among those who could benefit by them. We label this as manifestations of the "management of poverty" approach.²

SPARC was established in 1984. Foremost in its agenda was to develop its own organisational capacities based on what the communities needed... i.e. what issues the poor wanted to address and therefore, based on those priorities, what skills and capacities the poor needed to develop to get access to resources to fulfill those needs. Assisting groups of poor to build these capacities would thereby create a list of organisational skills, capacities and mission for SPARC.

Area resource centre (or ARC) is the term used to define a space or place where people who are poor, who have common problems and issues, come together to share their problems, to analyze why they face these problems and to seek ways to change their present situation.

In its work, SPARC has chosen:

- i) to support the efforts of community groups wherever they already exist, creating area resource centres where there is a need, and to assist isolated communities to join together through such processes;
- ii) to strengthen communities' own efforts with whatever resources (information, training, networking, advocacy) SPARC can generate;
- iii) to ensure that, within these organizations of the poor, there is a clear and defined space for women to participate as partners in the process of change; and
- iv) to create an information base, through participatory research, on the poor and their problems, so that this information base (created by the poor themselves) can become the basis for dialogue, planning and action for change.

All of SPARC's activities are directly linked to working for a just resource allocation and free access to resources for the poor; and, within the communities of the poor, working to ensure women have rights and access to resources.

In 1993, SPARC's work programme has three distinct sections:

- i) working with issues of urban poverty;
- ii) networking with and between women's organizations formed within low- income rural and urban communities.
- iii) Creating institutional support structures for the people's organisations with whom it is working.

Each of these work areas has developed from SPARC's work either with the poor or with other NGOs. Each operates as a separate division with different offices and coordinators. All share the same basic goals although each section has developed its own strategy in different ways.

Shelter as a crucial focus of SPARC's Urban Programme

Communities of the urban poor in India consider shelter society as a critical and most essential need for urban survival and one which requires legitimacy by government for any security of tenure, infrastructure and amenities. With urban land being an increasingly attractive market commodity shelter for the poor is in a state of crisis in large cities and small in India. In such a situation it is paradoxical that an NGO becomes a mediator between the state and the poor, when in fact the state should mediate on behalf of the poor in the shelter market.

SPARC's Roles can only be described in relationship to

- a) Capacity Building of communities of the poor to negotiate with government.
- b) Interactions with Government to agree to relate interact and collaborate with communities.
- c) Initiating institutions of and for poor to sustain their investment in community developed and community controlled strategies.

SPARC's relationship with Communities of the urban poor:

SPARC is a member of a three way alliance of three different organizations with SPARC, being the NGO - with middle class trained professionals, the national slum dwellers federation (NSDF) and Mahila Milan as its two partners. In this three way partnership, SPARC facilitates training, research and documentation on all issues and concerns raised by MM and NSDF. It has trained NSDF and MM leadership to participate in research, trained them to conduct workshops for their member federations and to support and assist them in negotiations with the State, with researchers, with bankers, architects and engineers. Over the last several years, it has facilitated more and more people's organisations to participate in negotiations which earlier, it had to do on behalf of the poor. NSDF not only raises issues which affect local and national policies affecting the poor but also creates a forum where communities allow women's central participation. All fruitations of this process which emerge as specific projects are taken on by Mahila Milan... both at the local community level and the larger state and national level.

Mahila Milan is a federation of women's collectives.⁴ Although it began as a network of women's collectives who resided on the pavements, today, it has grown extensively. It has a membership from different slum settlements in Bombay and other parts of the country. Mahila Milan first seeks to get recognition for the role that women play in communities and builds up the credibility of the women's collectives within the community by supporting and training women's collectives to undertake tasks which are crucial in creating changes.... this process, apart from ensuring women are included in local community decision-making, also allows women to participate in both local and larger issues and debates related to their lives. Mahila Milan also undertakes the responsibility of setting up "projects". These may range from credit and savings groups, consumer co-operatives, ration shops, housing co-operatives etc.

The National Slum Dwellers Federation is a national federation which has many city based federations as its members. Each city federation in turn has members of pavement and slum settlements from the city. All office bearers of NSDF are slum dwellers. At local levels, it undertakes all basic community organization and mobilization work and seeks to support communities in attaining their needs at both the local and national level. At regional and national level, it lobbies for changes in policies which affect the urban poor. Although at present its leadership is mainly men, it is committed to have 50% women's participation in critical key positions in another 5 years. Its main focus lies in creating structures for the poor through which they can undertake negotiations, in equipping the leadership of the poor to participate in the policy and program decisions which affect their lives and to provide support and solidarity to any of its members who are negotiating with the State or any other institutions.

EXAMINATION OF KEY CONCEPTS :

Some insights for any agent of change to keep in mind:

*Communities of the poor represent the same inequities as are seen in the society that they are a part of. As a result, all aspects of unequal distribution seen in larger society is often reflected in the micro communities, and it is essential that the process of change deals with this as it does with getting additional resources for the community.

* Community organization is a dynamic and ongoing process which occurs at all times. It is a term describing the mechanisms of interaction, and communication on the basis of which individuals, families and groups behave as a group. Those who seek to facilitate a change must ensure that the strategies of change:

- create solutions and alternatives which work for the poorest,
- establish precedents rather than model projects
- Link groups of poor to each other to reinforce change processes.
- Create capacities among the poor to set up and establish and run their own institutional arrangements through which change will be sustained
- Provide the leadership with skills to undertake further rationing within the group of the poor so that they can reproduce themselves, thereby building long term capacities to further refine and develop the process of change.

Women's central participation: To locate viable solutions, those who face problems must be central to the process of seeking the ingredients of the solution and testing its viability. In all identified problems of the urban poor, women always bear the brunt of the crisis. Yet they feature only as consumers of the solution. Neither is their presence considered essential nor is any mechanism established to ensure their participation. Therefore, all strategies had to ensure the development of mechanisms to ensure this role and function for women. It is possible to move women towards greater equality and participation in local and community decision-making through this process.³

People-centered priority building: Policy making and development strategies have increasingly become distant from the groups whom they have been designed to serve. This distancing is also accompanied by the increasing centralization of decision-making whose gestures seem unable to fulfill the needs of people. They end up working against them. Creating an alternative, creating solutions in which people feature centrally is the foundation and basis of all strategies that SPARC has devised. It requires building up the capabilities of small communities to articulate and develop the mechanisms by which they can participate in wider and wider debates and creating the "space" in forums of decision-making for this articulation to be acknowledged.

Creating a knowledge base: Ambitious objectives must have pragmatic strategies. The traditional mutant behavior of the poor, the paternalistic planning on their behalf and their non participation in all assessments of why things go wrong has been a trend which is persistently occurring in all areas of working with the poor. When things don't work, the rationale is provided by everyone other than the "poor". Breaking this vicious circle needs a process, not a messiah. In the modern social system, the wheels of action run on information systems. Power and decision-making flow from those who produce, control and wield information. Most groups of the poor, both urban and rural, have been unable to make this quantum jump from traditional communication patterns to modern ones. They need to KNOW how to participate before they can contribute. SPARC seeks to play that catalytic role. It seeks to make these issues critical components in creating strategies which work for the poor. Seeking to assist the poor to organize and articulate their needs and develop alternatives; assisting institutions of the State and the private sector which aspire to interact with the poor to create projects which would serve them; demonstrating new systems of creating sustainable alternatives in urban shelter where the State and the poor are not constantly engaged in a war of attrition but work towards a common goal.

Within this methodology SPARC perceives itself as a catalyst initially whose presence breaks the status quo. However, in the larger process it clearly locates "output" to emerge from creating institutions and processes owned and controlled by peoples federations which will enter into arrangements with government or other agencies both locally and internationally.

Over the last 7 years, the federations (NSDF and MM) have a wide range of settlements which are in over 10 cities and living in a range of circumstances associated with this process.

The nature of the problem these communities face, the various actors - government and private sector they have to deal with, and the kinds of alternatives that have emerged form the knowledge pool from which other federation members learn from.

Since SPARC's work with Pavement dwellers is the oldest and yet most difficult it would illustrate the strategy and how SPARC relates to Government most effectively.

Problem Identification

1. Initially identification of problems emerged as a "reaction" to specific event or government policy. Gradually it became possible to have a greater insight into the present situation to anticipate certain eventualities and begin to formulate "pro-active" solutions or inputs.

2. Having identified a need it was necessary for its various manifestations to be located - communities and affected groups of poor needed to understand how the situation was affecting them, they needed to learn how to develop suitable micro alternatives, and build up to demanding changes in what the state had planned. While we played that role initially, affected communities who had participated in the initial process were the best trainers for other affected groups, and soon, federations of the poor were facilitating this process.

3. This also required understanding and analysis of how the government and its various institutions perceived the problem, what they sought to do about it and why. It required setting up of a dialogue with them. Initially, when this practice was not easily accepted, SPARC had to undertake various strategies to ensure that the policy makers at least tried to meet with the people. but gradually these roles are now undertaken increasingly by the people's federations.

4. Linking people's situation to the "outside" (i.e. government, private sector etc.) became the next step. This had several dimensions.

- a. Creating legitimacy - that there is a problem and the state needs to think about it.
- b. Creating information/data base on which debate can take place.
- c. Locating groups of poor who want to seek alternatives because it's urgent in solving their problems and supporting them to move ahead - so that this experiential understanding will assist creating alternative and building up capacities.
- d. Educating everyone within and outside to examine the various components of the process and exploring what resources are available and can be got - its terms and conditions and so on.

Completing this form of pilot process so that we explore an alternative and evaluate its output locate roles and functions of actors present, past future explore how to scale up and locate resources to do this.

- e. Enter into a negotiation between the poor, the state and any other actors needed.

Pavement dwelling is probably as old as cities themselves. Every city has its share of the homeless and Bombay more than most. In fact an English woman, who lived in Bombay in the 1920s, wrote of her shock and distress at the numbers of people for whom the pavement were the only home. The only real change since then has been **in the magnitude** of the problem and in the **nature of official reaction to it**.

Pavement slums are a phenomenon peculiar to the largest Indian metropolises (especially Calcutta and Bombay, but are now increasingly seen in other cities as well.) They are radically different from what people generally understand slums to be. They are not the **juggi-jhopadis** or **bastis** which spring up on vacant lots or stretches of land, but hutments actually built on the footpaths/pavements of city streets, utilising the walls or fences which separate building compounds from the pavement and street outside.

Employed and supporting the other half, virtually none are beggars. Far from being a burden to the city's economy, they are supplying it with a vast pool of cheap labour for the unpleasant jobs which organised labour does not like to do. They clean our homes and garbage dumps, lift loads, move goods from one place to the other and bring a myriad daily consumption items to our street corners and doorsteps at a low price which is the result of their own undervalued labour.

They can afford to do this and yet survive themselves **because they are living on pavements**, and incur no overheads on transportation. This point cannot be over emphasized. Unlike any other segment of Bombay's working population, they are the only ones who do not even step on to the city's already overloaded transport system.

Dwelling initially as a temporary measure, until they can locate and afford better housing. Unfortunately, most are never able to acquire better housing and live out their lives on the footpath. In over half the pavement clusters in 'E' Ward (around 1500 households) where SPARC has been working, almost all the families have been living on the pavement ever since their arrival in Bombay - which could be as much as 30 years ago.

To look into the pavement dwellers' past is to see a history of hunger, impoverishment and marginalisation...the fact that an overwhelming majority (over three quarters) of census pavement households owned no assets in their place of origin and that the major pre-migration occupation was agricultural labour, is testimony to the validity of the above analysis.

Source: "We the Invisible" a census of pavement dwellers, SPARC, 1985.

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SPARC found that there is no acknowledgment in any shelter document right up to 1985, about these families, and at no level of government from local to centre was their concern about the plight of these families 1.5 million just in Bombay, who live in these horrific conditions. Against all odds, through the work of the last 7 years, the Pavement dwellers in the city of Bombay have created an entire resettlement strategy for themselves, this strategy includes the design of house and settlement, construction technology, skill development for construction, setting of housing finance mechanism. All the government has to do is to give them land. This is something which the Local municipal corporation is unwilling to do. Even today, as we speak, every day some houses on the pavements in the city are demolished by the Bombay Municipal Corporation.

This battle of attrition between the pavement dwellers and the city administration will continue until the State and Central governments intervene, that they have not intervened reflects one of the major problems in shelter issues. Who is to make the investment in shelter of the poor. In the case of pavement dwellers, these are migrants from all over the country, and from the poorest districts of the various states. It is only fitting that the central Government make policies about these families. Lobbying towards this recognition by NGOS has one lead to a very small resource available to some large cities to provide some infrastructure facilities for pavement dwellers, but nothing else. In the city of Bombay there has been no reaction, and the city treats the communities of pavement dwellers as permanent adversities.

Interestingly, this strategy developed by SPARC and the pavement dwellers has been accepted by other cities, and in some instances such as in Madras, SPARC was commissioned to do a census of pavement dwellers and plan a resettlement program for them all. This is a programme which is going on at the moment, and the training of communities in Madras is undertaken by the pavement dwellers of Bombay.

The value of initiating alternative strategies with the poorest and most vulnerable urban poor goes against the accepted communal wisdom of change strategies in use at the moment. By starting the most difficult and hardest situation, we have sought to address the toughest problem first so that:

-Although the solution will take long it will provide the community leaders the period of time to prepare themselves.

- We believe that solutions developed for the worst off can be altered to become viable for better off but there is no "trickle down" of development solutions.

-By assisting community leadership of these most vulnerable poor/in this case the pavement dwellers are the creators of alternatives who will assist other "better off" poor, they are assured of a place in a wider movement of the urban poor. Even more special is the fact that women's collectives from pavement settlements are the "trainers" and problem solvers, the focus on poorest and women is assured.

In India, those who have defended their shelter and have registration/or proof of residence can challenge eviction, and whatever the case, seek upgradation, redevelopment or resettlement.

Using an approach developed through working with pavement dwellers, now a wide number of poor settlements are engaging in interaction with Government.

In each instance the general strategy remains same, the nature of relationship differs depending upon, issues, strategy etc.

As already explained, the BMC continues to demolish pavement dwellings, refuses to dialogue with SPARC and rejects even state and central government requests to halt demolitions and consider alternatives.

The same municipal corporation has commissioned SPARC to construct toilets for pavement dwellers, to form cooperatives of resettled slum dwellers for redevelopment .

The PMGP (Part of MHADA) the planning body for Dharavi has fought every step of the way with SPARC/NSDF on the rights of residents to redesign, reconstruct their own dwellings in Dharavi. There have been arguments of statistics in Dharavi DVS (Dharavi Vikas Samiti) survey shows 81,000 structures with 1,20,000 households, while their survey indicates 55,000 families of which only 35,000 can reside.

Much of the collusion arises out of the "competition" which communities bring to state provided housing. By building better designed, efficiently managed and cheaper houses, this further weights crisis of state provided housing.

Though work in Bombay is very slow, it has produced strategies and community leaders who can not only sustain their own work but also assist communities in other cities to build their own federations and enter into negotiations for secure shelter.

All these activities are based on our observation that in India PRECEDENTS work miracles. If somehow some housing cooperatives of the poor in each city actually get themselves registered, negotiate for land tenure, secure housing finance and finally construct houses, while this is a mammoth task, it is able to achieve several ends:

For communities it represents hope. Most have given up hope of any change. This "Zinda misal" or live example demonstrates possibilities - and peoples federations can grow and get strengthened and more seek this goal.

By using existing laws and resources communities learn to use them, challenge them, modify them as long as government holds resources to shelter, access and availability need to be tested and challenged. Once a possibility is demonstrated others can use it on precedent.

Government functionaries having never seriously believed communities can undertake shelters have never operationalised existing legal mechanisms. As in the case of Markandeya Cooperative Housing Society - which was the first peoples cooperative sought land lease from the BMC and it took 2+ years and the document traveled 136 tables before lease was granted.

For NGOS too this is critical - if innovations are located strategically in contexts which allow resources to flow, then there is a good possibility for multiplier affect. Also, in situations where NGOS seek to operate as partners of peoples organization sit is essential that understanding of rules and regularizing and delivery services already operational are understand by the poor and through this exposure they begin to negotiate for better utilization or changed conditions.

Concrete processes are the most effective mechanisms to explore relationships - between government and NGOS between NGOS and between GO and CBO's. However conceptually clear the policy is, the historical process in India clearly indicates that there is no space at all in practice for the poor to these state provisions. The total allocations are very limited and further screwed against the poor by the practical arrangements where access is blocked.

SPARC's experiences clearly indicates that the poor and their organizations are entirely capable to designing executing settlements and managing them and is doing so their human investments are crucial contributions to reduced costs, improved material management and quality control. The NGO and governments now need to explore how the enablement process can occur.

SPARC's work in many cities has led to a very wide spectrum of relationships with different levels of government, different departments and different institutions. Following are some of the observations.

- Politicians and administrators at all levels react very differently to the rights of the poor for shelter. Reaction ranges from total hostility and anger to total support. This is based on their own past experiences with the poor and in shelter.

- A maze of departments, ministries, institutions and regulatory bodies have rules and regulations which no one other "office" can change. As a result any effective alternative must have tremendous staying power to survive.

- Shelter delivery is a game of passing the buck and often municipal authorities who have historically been hostile to the city's resource consumption by the poor are left to deal with shelter problems which they resolve by demolitions of the houses. This is especially true in cities with booming land prices and real estate.

Many government departments themselves are land owners on which squatters have settled. Official attitudes of those departments therefore are hostile.

The relationship with GO's in SPARC's instance ranges from Confrontations/collusion. Rather than seeing these as static and reacting to each instance, we see each reaction as a move on the continuum of reaction so that GOs have to go through in their relationships with people's organizations. The essential aspect of this process is that the basis of interaction and negotiation exist between two parties who have traditionally never related to each other except in confrontations and hostility, with the state always in a position of power.

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