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**SLUM NETWORKING IN AHMEDABAD:  
THE SANJAY NAGAR PILOT PROJECT**

**Dwijendra Tripathi**  
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## SECTION 1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### 1.1 The Actors

There were six principal stakeholders involved in the pilot phase of the Slum Networking project in Ahmedabad: the engineer Himanshu Parikh; Arvind Mills; Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC); SAATH; the residents of Sanjay Nagar; and Shri Mahila Sahakari SEWA Bank (SEWA Bank).

#### *a. Himanshu Parikh*

Himanshu Parikh was trained as a structural engineer and after a number of years working in the United Kingdom, he returned to India to work on a low-income housing scheme in Indore. Based on this experience, Parikh went on to develop a plan to address the housing problems evident in slums throughout India, calling that plan 'Slum Networking'. At the heart of the idea was the belief that the slum problem could only be addressed in the context of the entire city and not in isolation. Parikh, therefore, rejected the notion that slums could be eliminated by simply providing better quality alternative housing for the slum dwellers, and instead, he stressed the need to improve the infrastructure in the slum settlements as a means to integrate them into the rest of the city. The networking approach also visualised providing in-house services under individual control, as opposed to common facilities envisaged under most of other methods. If these things were done, Parikh believed, then the slum dwellers themselves, inspired by the improved surroundings, would upgrade their own dwellings, consistent with the available resources and their needs. Two other principal features of the networking strategy were the stress it laid on the slum dwellers' financial participation in the project in order to foster their commitment its success, and also the emphasis placed on the need to improve the quality of life for slum dwellers. Thus, providing medical, educational, recreational, social and cultural facilities through an integrated community development programme (CDP) was considered to be as important as the upgrading of the physical infrastructure, while the need for training and income generation programmes was also recognised. In the opinion of Parikh, such an approach would enhance the slum dwellers' sense of self-respect, add to their self confidence, develop their capacity for self help, and reduce, if not altogether eliminate, the dependency syndrome that he believed characterised the life of poor communities.

Parikh's first opportunity to try out his slum networking ideas came when he was appointed a consultant to the Indore Habitat Project - a slum upgrading scheme launched by the Indore Development Authority and funded by the Overseas Development Administration of the

British government. While winning a World Habitat Award, the Indore Habitat Project did not allow slum dwellers to participate either in the planning or financing of the initiative, and so Parikh decided to introduce these elements in a similar project in Baroda, Gujarat, sponsored by the Baroda Citizen's Council, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), with some financial backing from the local industry. For this experience, Parikh evaluated that private enterprises and NGOs could undertake project implementation tasks, thereby improving the chances of success of the slum networking concept. The role of private industry would be not only to provide funds, but also to make the implementation process much more flexible and efficient, characteristics often lacking in public system agencies. Likewise the NGOs, with their closer links with the population at the grassroots levels were in a better position to handle the Community Development Programme. After his experience at Indore and Baroda, Parikh was looking for an opportunity to try out this comprehensive approach when he met Sanjay Lalbhai of Ahmedabad-based Arvind Mills.

#### *b. Arvind Mills Ltd*

Arvind Mills of Ahmedabad is a major constituent of the Lalbhai Group of Companies. Established in 1931, the company was still regional, or at best national, in its reach until the mid-eighties when Sanjay Lalbhai, a grandson of the founder Kasturbhai Lalbhai, took over as managing director. Under his leadership, the company developed a global character within a few years. A major producer of denim, Arvind's supply network soon extended to more than seventy countries, but Lalbhai had still more ambitious plans to expand and consolidate his firm's global presence. A competent managerial cadre and workforce was considered necessary for this purpose, however, Lalbhai and his associates feared that the prevailing state of civic amenities in Ahmedabad might impede their progress. There were reports that many talented people were hesitant to join the company because of the poor quality of life in the city, and there were also occasions when overseas partners, customers, and suppliers were reluctant to visit Ahmedabad because of perceived health hazards.

Partly on the grounds of self-interest, the managing director and his associates, therefore considered it imperative for their company to launch or participate in any worthwhile venture to improve the urban environment. In fact, some projects to bring about ecological improvements had already been planned when the networking idea was presented to the firm. In addition, Lalbhai was also motivated by the work of his grandfather to support social, cultural and educational activities in Ahmedabad, and he was also influenced by Vikram Sarabhai from to another well-known industrial family, who had founded a number of education and research institutions. Finally, the

desire to act was also stimulated by the organisational structure of Arvind Mills that was characterised by quick decision making and speedy action, a non bureaucratic structure and emphasis on flexibility and results, thereby ensuring that Arvind could effectively participate in the implementation of programmes for urban improvement.

*c. Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC)*

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, perhaps the most critical agency in the slum networking programme, is responsible for the management of the seventh largest city in India. The Corporation came into being in 1948, soon after India attained Independence, replacing the Ahmedabad Municipality. While the Mayor and the elected Corporators constitute the elected wing, the actual powers of administration are vested in the Municipal Commissioner, assisted by a vast bureaucracy. Usually a member of the elite Indian Administrative Service, the Municipal Commissioner is appointed by the State government. He occupies the most critical position in the functioning of the corporation, and without his support no change can be initiated or implemented. It is he who at the first instance recommends a plan of action which the elected representatives may accept, reject or modify; they on their own have limited powers to initiate any initiative. In 1994, when the networking idea began to take shape, Ahmedabad had one of the most energetic Municipal Commissioners in its recent history, and soon after assuming his responsibilities Keshav Verma declared publicly that he would transform Ahmedabad into a city of international standards. Despite having to work within the constraints of a highly bureaucratic administrative culture, Verma succeeded in injecting a dynamism into the AMC which proved invaluable to the success of the slum networking project.

*d. SAATH<sup>1</sup>*

SAATH is an NGO based in Ahmedabad that operates on the principle of initiating and consolidating processes of social change, rather than merely meeting planned targets. SAATH has been working in selected slums since 1989 with a small team of community workers, and with health care and children's education being the NGO's main concerns. Shunning publicity and operating on a modest budget, like many other NGOs, SAATH had always been rather suspicious of industry as well as governmental systems, but nevertheless became the NGO in charge of community development in the pilot project site of the slum networking programme.

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<sup>1</sup> SAATH can be translated from Hindi to mean 'togetherness'.

*e. The Slum Community*

The pilot project for the slum networking programme in Ahmedabad was implemented in the slum of Sanjay Nagar, located on a triangular plot of land measuring about two hectares. The settlement started developing around the early 1970s with 17 households, but by the mid-1990s housed 181 households, or a total of 1,200 people. With about 84 per cent of the total population being of the *Vaghari* caste, the Sanjay Nagar population may be considered more or less homogenous, and of the remaining 16 per cent, *Chamars* comprised 12 per cent, while several other small caste groups accounted for 4 per cent. All of them belonged to the so-called 'backward castes', as classified by the Gujarat Government.

According to a survey conducted in Sanjay Nagar in 1995, households in the settlement had an average of 6 members, with more than 50 per cent of residents being illiterate, and the rest having only basic literacy skills. The incidence of sickness and death in the slum was abnormally high, with infants accounting for about 70 per cent of deaths. About 50 per cent of the population also had no fixed occupation, while most of the remaining 50 per cent were self employed as vegetable vendors, were unskilled workers, or undertook miscellaneous tasks requiring low skill levels. The average income per household, according to the survey, was roughly Rs 2,800<sup>2</sup> per month. With no sewerage system, no water supply, no power connection, no roads or paved pathways, and inadequate or unusable toilet facilities, Sanjay Nagar allowed its residents only the most basic of living conditions before it was selected for the slum networking experiment.

*f. Shri Mahila SEWA Sahakari Bank (SEWA Bank)*

SEWA Bank was established by the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) with the mission to provide various kinds of financial services to poor self-employed women in professions such as vegetable selling, home-based working and rag picking. The role of the Bank in the pilot phase<sup>3</sup> of the slum networking project was to advance loans to Sanjay Nagar households so that they could participate in the project financially. Financial participation by the beneficiaries is a critical element in the networking strategy, and the Sanjay Nagar residents would have found it difficult to satisfy the requirement without help from SEWA Bank.

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<sup>2</sup> The exchange rate at that time was roughly Rs 35 to US\$ 1.

<sup>3</sup> Since the pilot phase, the Mahila Housing Trust of SEWA has become the principal NGO responsible for community development activities in the ongoing slum upgrading programme in Ahmedabad.

## 1.2 Background to the Problem

According to the 17th century historian, Ferishta, Ahmedabad was "the handsomest city in Hindostan and perhaps in the world". By the middle of the 19th century, however, the growing number of cotton mills in the city (at one stage there were as many as 72 factories) caused a steep rise in the population, with services and infrastructure in the city unable to cope and the number of slums increasing rapidly. Areas around the mills were the first to witness the spread of slum settlements, but these later extended to other parts of the city as well. The situation became still worse after the birth of Gujarat as a separate state in 1960, for with Ahmedabad becoming the virtual capital of the new state, it attracted yet more migrants, resulting in an almost three-fold increase in the population between 1961 and 1991 and the further expansion of slum settlements.

At the time of independence, Ahmedabad was still considered to be a reasonably efficient city by Indian standards, but the mid-1990s was increasingly chaotic. No concrete plan of action had been developed to control the city's development except for a few sporadic, half hearted initiatives. In the meantime, the number of slum settlements in the city rose to more than 2,500 by the mid-1990s, with little attempt being made to control their spread, but then in November 1994 there was a plague epidemic in the nearby city of Surat. Although the disease did not spread to Ahmedabad, the Surat tragedy served to underline the urgency of initiating ameliorative measures without further delay.

It was in this context that Himanshu Parikh met Sanjay Lalbhai and explained to him his networking concept for slum upgrading and demonstrated through pictures and slides what the strategy had achieved at Indore. An impressed Lalbhai agreed to join in a similar endeavour relating to Ahmedabad, but suggested that only a pilot project be developed in the first instance. After more meetings between Parikh and Arvind Mills, a memorandum of understanding was signed on 1 April 1995, stating that they would jointly carry out a slum networking experiment in a selected settlement. Shortly afterwards, Parikh prepared a detailed position paper clearly stating the objectives and operational aspects of the pilot. As a result, the slum networking idea began to take shape.

## SECTION 2 THE INITIATIVE

### 2.1 Objectives of the Project

Parikh's position paper set forth the objectives for pilot experiment as being to improve the basic infrastructure within one or two slum settlements in the city, covering about 1,500 families, and to facilitate the process of community development in

those slums<sup>4</sup>. Infrastructure development was to include the construction of roads and the paving of passageways; individual water supply connections and sewerage connections; storm water drainage; street lighting; solid waste management; and landscaping. In turn, the community development segment was to comprise of setting up neighbourhood groups; mobilising community savings; mounting educational activities for school children, school dropouts and adults; setting up health education programmes; and promoting income generation and skill development.

### 2.2 Historical Development

While Parikh was still busy formulating his plans, the Arvind management demonstrated its commitment to the project by entrusting the responsibility to execute the project to one of its senior Directors, V. L. Mote. In addition, appointed to work on the project were a rural development specialist, Niraj Kumar Lal, and an urban and regional planner, Uttara Chauhan. To ensure that the execution of the project would not be hampered by the constraints of an organisational structure meant essentially for manufacturing operations, a separate organisation was set up to manage the project and was called the Strategic Help Alliance for Relief to Distressed Areas (SHARDA), registered as a charitable trust.

The Arvind team then selected three slum areas in the city's North Zone, housing around one thousand families (among the residents were a few past or present employees of the Lalbhai Group of Companies), 500 less than Parikh's suggested number. The Arvind team also prepared a budget for the pilot project based on the costs incurred at Indore, and the proposal was then sent to the Corporation for a no-objection certificate. The AMC authorities were already in touch with Himanshu Parikh to explore the launching of a city-wide project, and upon receiving the Arvind proposal they decided to join the pilot experiment as a major partner. Parikh and Mote in the meantime had also invited the NGO SAATH to become a partner in the project, with SAATH already being known to the AMC authorities because of its work in slums.

The new partners considered it desirable to include more slum settlements in the pilot so that the project could have greater impact, and as a result, three more slums in the city's Central, North and Vasna Zones were identified for possible inclusion. However, only the residents of the Vasna settlement called Pravin Nagar-Gupta Nagar agreed to bear the financial burden envisaged under Parikh's plan, and finally two of the three slums identified by the Arvind team also backed out. Only Sanjay Nagar residents remained firm in their resolve, and it was thus clear that the

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<sup>4</sup> In addition, Parikh also had the long-term goal of building a city-level organisation for slum-networking.

pilot would cover only two settlements, Sanjay Nagar in the North Zone and Pravin Nagar-Gupta Nagar in Vasna. Incorporating all these changes, the Arvind team forwarded to the Corporation a

new proposal on 17 September 1995 with a revised budget and formula for cost sharing by the partners, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table I**  
**Slum Networking Pilot Project: Cost Sharing Formula**

Cost Component	Cost per Family (Rs)	Organisations And Their Share			
		AMC	Slum Dwellers	Arvind Mills	SAATH
Physical Development	6000	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	0%
Physical Survey	30	100%	0%	0%	0%
Design & Consultancy	120	100%	0%	0%	0%
Establishment	330	70%	0%	30%	0%
Community Development	1000	70%	0%	0%	30%
Community Corpus	100	0%	100%	0%	0%

From the table it is clear that the participating agencies were required to fund the component of the pilot that corresponded most closely to their area of expertise, for example, with the slum community asked to pay only for improving and maintaining (through the community corpus) the physical facilities with which they would be particularly concerned. By this time Keshav Verma, the Municipal Commissioner, had already agreed to Parikh's proposal to announce the launching of a city-wide slum networking scheme, based upon the same costings and cost sharing as the pilot, and in addition Verma and his associates had also come to the conclusion that the execution of the project should be entrusted to the private sector, thereby taking advantage of their efficiency and commitment. On Verma's recommendation, the Standing Committee of the Corporation approved the proposal on 28 September 1995 to launch the pilot as the part of a comprehensive project covering the entire slum area in the city to be completed in phases over seven years at an estimated cost of nearly Rs 3260 million.

Additional recommendations approved by the Standing Committee included:

- The setting up of a special cell in the Corporation to facilitate implementation;
- The execution of the project under the overall supervision and control of Arvind Mills to which 20 per cent of the project costs would be advanced to start the project, with additional funds to be released according to the progress of work, as certified by AMC engineers;
- The appointment of Himanshu Parikh a principal consultant to help develop plans and designs, with SAATH to be primarily concerned with community development, and the Corporation to function as the project facilitator.

The Standing Committee resolution set the stage for launching the pilot, and the Municipal

Commissioner formally asked Arvind on 2 November 1995 to begin its implementation.

Underlining the Corporation's commitment to the project and the importance attached to it, Verma placed P. U. Asnani, the Deputy Municipal Commissioner, in charge of operations, with his principal responsibility being to make sure that no problem at the level of the city government would hamper progress. While the procedural foundations for launching the project were being finalised, the slum dwellers were briefed on the details of the project and the nature of participation expected of them, particularly in relation to the financial contribution envisaged under the cost sharing formula. Niraj Lal of Arvind Mills, who had established a good rapport with the Sanjay Nagar residents, and Rajendra Joshi of SAATH, who had been working in the Vasna slums for a number of years, were in constant touch with the slum residents and their leaders, and soon after the Standing Committee had approved the project, Asnani too met the residents of the slums to explain to them the expected benefits.

Preparations for launching the project now began in earnest. Ayojan, a reputed firm of consulting engineers based in Ahmedabad and headed by Suresh Banker, was appointed the project manager. On the basis of survey briefs prepared by him, a technical survey was completed in both the selected settlements, and the project plans were ready by the middle of May 1996. In the meantime, it was becoming increasingly clear that the majority of Vasna slum dwellers would not be able to arrange for the payment of their financial contribution by the deadline of late June. The SHARDA Trust officials had persuaded SEWA Bank to advance loans to the residents, but the Bank as a matter of policy would grant loans only to those who had opened an account with at least Rs 600. By the end of June, however, less than 50 per cent of Vasna residents had satisfied this requirement, while more than 75 per cent of the Sanjay Nagar

residents had opened their accounts to qualify for the loans. Under these conditions it was decided to launch the pilot only in Sanjay Nagar, followed by Vasna in the next phase.

The plans for the pilot that Parikh developed, therefore, pertained only to Sanjay Nagar and were informed by the same principles that had guided the Indore and Baroda projects: extending the municipal water supply system to the slum area and connecting it with each household; upgrading the existing pathways and lanes inside the settlement into paved roads; connecting every household to a modern sewerage system; providing for the outflow of storm water; and planning for street lighting and a waste disposal system. In addition, the plans also included landscaping to improve the physical appearance of the area and provide for natural shade. To carry out the upgrading, the plans required that some residents would have to be resettled during construction work, and most were required to give up a portion of their outer verandas or *otlas* to allow for the widening of roads. About twenty houses, located by the side of one of the three roads skirting the settlement also had to be shifted to the interior of the settlement. Despite this, Parikh obtained the community's support for the project plans when he explained the project to the residents at a meeting convened especially for this purpose. The residents were also told in this meeting that while the sewerage lines and chambers would be laid up to the individual houses, the responsibility and cost of connecting the houses were to be borne by the residents themselves. This they could do by taking advantage of the AMC's '90:10 Scheme', under which slum dwellers were entitled to 90 per cent of the cost as a subsidy, and most residents expressed their willingness to take part. The community's agreement to the proposed plans, despite the difficulties involved, can be explained by the trust it had developed in the executing agency, thanks to the continuous interaction with Arvind's Niraj Lal.

The executing agency in the meantime had already identified a contractor through open tenders, M/s Ramlal Omprakash Jolly of Indore. Not only had they submitted the lowest bid, but they had also been the contractors for the Indore project. They were given the contract on 15 July 1996 and were asked to complete the work within six months. All necessary preparations having been completed, the ground breaking ceremony was finally performed on 5 August 1996 and was organised by the residents of Sanjay Nagar. The AMC's representative, an Assistant Deputy Municipal Commissioner, was so impressed by the community's efforts that he unexpectedly announced the Corporation's resolve to provide toilets to each household for no extra cost. In addition, soon after the ceremony, SAATH began to operate a small dispensary in Sanjay Nagar.

Before the construction work could begin, it was necessary to demolish the *otlas* attached to the houses in order to earmark the space for internal roads and lanes, and allow for the laying of cables for street lighting and power connections to houses, sewerage lines, and water supply pipes. Even though the residents had earlier agreed to losing parts of their *otlas*, there was some resistance to carry this out in actual practice, but Niraj Lal's perseverance and persuasion paid off and the slum dwellers demolished the obstructing structures themselves. As soon this was done and the road layouts were marked, the drainage pipes and electricity cables for street lighting were quickly laid. The progress of the construction work was delayed, however, by the laying of the underground electricity cables to provide connections to individual houses. This was not an integral part of the pilot, but the organisers considered it necessary to lay these cables before building the roads or else the electricity company would dig up portions of the roads whenever the residents decided to have power connections for their dwellings. When this was explained to the residents, almost two thirds of households formally applied for the connection but the Ahmedabad Electricity Company took a long time, almost three months, to provide estimated costs for the connections and then it took another month for SHARDA Trust officials to raise the required funds<sup>5</sup> as these were not provided for the project budget.

Eventually the cabling was completed by the middle of January 1997 when work on the road network began. Further delays were also caused by problems relating to the relocation of some houses which were to be rebuilt on the site of a row of derelict public toilets, which only the Corporation could demolish. The Corporation, however, took a long time to authorise demolition, causing much irritation for SHARDA Trust. When the Corporation finally did demolish the toilet block, the job was left incomplete, and the executing agency eventually asked the project contractor to complete the unfinished work in January 1996. Despite these unexpected delays, construction proceeded more or less on schedule. The laying of the drainage and water networks was completed by the end of December 1996, and the reconstruction of houses was accomplished by the middle of January 1997, by which time electricity cables for individual connections had also been laid. According to the original schedule, all physical upgrading work ought to have been completed by the end of January 1997, but with the delays to the road network, all the work was complete by mid-

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<sup>5</sup> The bulk of funds, Rs 310,050, came from the State Government under a special scheme known as Kutir Jyoti Yojana to provide electricity to backward castes, and the Trust provided the balance which the residents agreed to repay.

April, with the exception of landscaping work and toilet construction (as promised by the Corporation as a supplement to the slum networking pilot project). In addition, not only was the project completed more or less on schedule, but it was

also completed within budget. Table 2 gives details of the work undertaken, while Table 3 illustrates the costs of the pilot project.

**Table 2**  
**Infrastructure Development at Sanjay**

Type of Infrastructure	Units	Quantity
Concrete Pathways	Km	1
Sewerage	Km	1.184
Main Water Supply Line	Metre	700
Connecting Water Supply Line	Metre	750
Electric Poles	Number	18
Manholes	Number	9
Inspection Chambers	Number	46
Gully Traps	Number	181

**Table 3**  
**The Costs of the Pilot Project<sup>6</sup>**

Items	Tender Amount (000 Rs)	Actual Amount (000 Rs)	Difference (Tender-Actual) (000 Rs)
Roads, Paving and Pathways	418	302	116
Sewerage	296	289	8
Water Supply	392	352	40
Extra Work	0	174	-174
Total	1,106	1,117	-10
Cost Per Household	5.69	6.17	-0.48

Despite the successes of the pilot project, the organisational alliance formed to carry out the experiment disintegrated by the time infrastructure development work was completed, with fissures in the alliance having begun to appear soon after the Corporation first approved the project. The gulf between the partners, particularly between the Arvind team and AMC, became wider and wider as the work progressed, with most of the differences rooted in the differing perceptions and organisational cultures of the partners. Such differences can be illustrated by the following examples:

- The Corporation took a long time to pay to Arvind Mills the 20 per cent advance promised in the Standing Committee resolution. This was largely due to the elaborate procedures and decision making process in the Corporation, the constrictions of which the Arvind team failed to appreciate.
- Even though the partners had decided right at the outset that the bills for work completed would be sanctioned by SHARDA Trust after verification by the AMC engineers posted on

the site, the officials in the Corporation's office questioned some portions of the bills submitted by the Trust. This was interpreted by SHARDA as a sign of mistrust.

- The Corporation officials also took a long time to issue a letter authorising the Arvind team to start construction, despite several reminders and meetings. The same thing happened with regard to the supply of a certified copy of the map showing the boundary of Sanjay Nagar.
- Even though the execution was to be carried out under the supervision and control of Arvind Mills, the AMC engineers posted on the site occasionally tried to interfere with the construction, exceeding their brief. This the executing agency resented, while in turn, the engineers felt that they were being sidelined and ignored by the Trust officials.
- The Corporation officials were unhappy with Himanshu Parikh as well, who they felt was not helping the AMC to build up its institutional capacity to design such projects. Parikh on the other hand questioned their commitment and application to learning the intricacies of project

<sup>6</sup> Excludes the costs of landscaping, street lighting and solid waste management.

design.

- The SHARDA Trust officials too had various complaints against Parikh, who they thought did not fulfil his obligations specified in the Arvind-Parikh memorandum of understanding. Parikh on the other hand felt that right from the beginning, he was denied the kind of control over the execution process that he thought was necessary if he were to play a more active role.
- Differences between SAATH and SHARDA Trust remained by and large muted, but the Trust officials were generally critical of the pace of the community development programmes for which the NGO was responsible. Only once did their differences come out in the open when the SHARDA Trust officials, exasperated by what they considered AMC's intransigence, threatened to abandon altogether the plan for upgrading Vasna slums where SAATH workers had built up high hopes among the residents.

All these and several other minor differences tore the alliance apart, ensuring that there was no possibility of the alliance proceeding with the next phase of the project, including the Vasna upgrading that they had planned to take up after the completion of Sanjay Nagar.

Another area in which the Sanjay Nagar project was found wanting was the community development programme (CDP). In the alliance structure, the responsibility for this segment was assigned to SAATH, but while the NGO prepared a comprehensive plan, with the concurrence of the other partners, its targets remained unmet in most cases. The plan had four major components: (i) Community Health; (ii) Non-formal Education; (iii) Skill Development and Income Generation; and (iv) Community Organisation. The plan had a three year perspective, specifying targets to be achieved annually, however most of the targets set for the first year were not achieved. The community health programme was an exception, but here too the residents for some reason did not take full advantage of the facilities provided, including the dispensary. However, there are some grounds to suggest that because of the health awareness programme more and more people with serious ailments came forward for being referred to hospitals. The educational programme remained confined to classes for pre-school aged children, while the teacher development programme remained behind schedule. Little was done in the realm of skill development and income generation activities, and the only achievement in the sphere of building community organisations was the setting up of the Sanjay Nagar Residents' Association, and this too was due to the pressure from SEWA Bank, which for procedural reasons preferred to have an intermediary between the SHARDA Trust and the individual households to manage the loan accounts. As the targets for the first year could not be achieved, a large part of the money allocated for the community development activities thus remained unspent, though this lack

of progress should be viewed in the context of the SAATH philosophy that initiating and consolidating processes of change are more important than meeting project targets.

### **2.3. Current Project status and Future Prospects**

With the completion of the installation of the planned physical infrastructure in Sanjay Nagar, the alliance ceased to exist, though the individual actors continued to work with the community in their own ways. SHARDA Trust, for instance, built the toilets promised by the Corporation primarily because Arvind Mills management made some additional funds available to supplement the subsidy provided by the AMC under its 90:10 Scheme. In addition, the Trust also launched programmes for skill development and income generation for the Sanjay Nagar residents. A programme for training men as car drivers and another to train women as garment workers were begun. SAATH too has continued with the community development programmes with visible progress in the areas of health care and non-formal education, though as yet the NGO has not launched any skill development or income generating activities, and nothing has been done to organise youth and women groups, as visualised earlier. Sanjay Nagar Residents' Association is the only community organisation that has come into being, with the maintenance of the assets and facilities installed by the project as its primary responsibility, however, the Association appears to be inactive at present. Thus any maintenance activities have fallen to the Corporation as a part of its normal duties, though so far there have been no complaints about the breakdown of any of the facilities provided.

### **2.4 Project Finances**

As discussed above, the pilot project was financed through contributions from the alliance partners under a clear-cut cost sharing formula. The electricity connections to individual houses were financed largely by the state government under its Kutir Jyoti Yojana scheme with a small amount provided by SHARDA Trust as a temporary loan. The Corporation bore the major part of expenses for the toilets, with Arvind Mills making a special grant to cover the shortfall.

## **SECTION 3 THE INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PROCESS**

### **3.1 Knowledge and Information**

During the course of developing and implementing the Sanjay Nagar experiment, various kinds of knowledge and information were generated and exchanged between the stakeholders. Perhaps, the most critical of these related to the slum

networking concept. Himanshu Parikh had, of course, tried out the strategy in two different cities previously, but he had to study the situation in Ahmedabad, the typology of slums in the city, and their spatial spread in order to for him to be able to convince the other stakeholders that his approach was superior to conventional methods. In this process, he went through a number of documents relating to slum problems in Ahmedabad and elsewhere. These included accounts of previous experiments made in various parts of the country to deal with the slum situation, the report of a survey of slums conducted by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in 1976, and the history of previous efforts to tackle the slum problem in the city. Parikh used the knowledge and information gleaned from these sources to emphasise the efficacy and superiority of the networking concept to the major stakeholders (Arvind Mills and Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation). He also demonstrated through slides what had been achieved at Indore, emphasising efficiency, coupled with economy, as the most important feature of his scheme. Slides of the Indore project were also shown to the residents of various slums in the course of identifying the settlements to be taken up for the pilot experiment. This was perhaps the first occasion when the slum dwellers were being asked to pay a part of the expenditure to be incurred in improving their surroundings and it was important for them to be convinced that financial participation in the project was a worthwhile investment.

Once it became clear that Sanjay Nagar would be the first settlement to be taken up for slum networking, the organisers conducted a socio-economic survey of the community, in the process of which the history of the settlement was also uncovered. The socio-economic survey suggested that even though poor and ill-educated, the Sanjay Nagar community was desirous of change and thus would be prepared to invest in a credible effort to improve local conditions. In addition, the technical survey of the area to enable the project design work to go ahead also generated a substantial amount of technical data which was mainly the concern of Himanshu Parikh. In the course of implementation, however, a very important set of data was generated on how to get electricity connections to houses in slums. This ranged from technical requirements imposed by the electricity company, such as surveying the area and requiring a plastered wall in each house for fixing up the meter, to the government scheme to subsidise the connection. This matter was handled essentially by the executing agency and it is doubtful that the slum community was sufficiently exposed to the information in order to grasp full import of it. Information regarding the subsidy available for the toilets, however, was effectively communicated by the Corporation through face-to-face communication as well as through handbills printed in the local language.

SHARDA Trust and SAATH too disseminated information to the community about sources of Corporation assistance. The executing agency also gathered considerable information about the sources of finance for the slum dwellers to meet their financial obligations, with the organisations approached including the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO), Gruh Finance, a government agency, and Friends of Women's World Banking, however, their requirements for loans were such that Sanjay Nagar residents did not qualify. Eventually, the executing agency settled on SEWA Bank for assistance and the requirements for accessing its funds were communicated to the community orally in the course of personal discussions. In the realm of community development, SAATH workers gathered information about the facilities for referring complicated and serious medical cases to the nearby public hospitals and educated the community about these facilities through word of mouth. SAATH workers would also accompany a patient to these hospitals during their initial visits. Also three Community Health Workers (CHWs), trained under a qualified doctor, used the information and expertise acquired during the training to spread health awareness, preventive health care methods, information on proper nutrition, and precautions against common ailments. The CHWs also informed the community of the need to immunise children against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus and polio. A special drive was launched to educate the community about the basic symptoms of complicated ailments like tuberculosis and cancer, and encourage people suffering from these to come forward for treatment, as under the prevailing social norms, patients and their families were prone to keeping such diseases a secret. The CHWs also used their medical knowledge to help the community overcome some superstitious beliefs and practices that often prevented the residents from seeking medical help.

During the course of project execution, information concerning the rules, regulations, practices and work culture of the AMC became clear to the SHARDA Trust, which had often to interact with the Corporation. Until they started working together, the partners' knowledge of one another's work culture and organisational environment was weak, but frequent interactions at various levels made this knowledge more definitive. The Corporation employees, particularly the engineers attached to the slum networking project, gathered some useful knowledge from the designs prepared by Himanshu Parikh. Particularly striking was the knowledge gained from a judicious mix of various kinds of water pipes for the water supply system so as to bring down the cost without affecting the efficiency. Thus, the knowledge, information, and skills exchanged in the course of the pilot project were both technical and non technical in nature. Oral, face-to-face

communication dominated the exchanges with very little recourse to written information. This was particularly true of the partners' communications with the slum community, however most of the communication between the Municipal Corporation and SHARDA Trust took place in writing.

### **3.2 Transfer and Dissemination**

While the project was still at the initial stages, information by and large flowed from the design consultants to other partners, particularly Arvind Mills. However, as the project developed and execution proceeded, multi-point exchange of views and information among the partners gained momentum. Understandably, interaction between SHARDA Trust officials and the community leaders was more intense and more frequent, and SAATH workers too were in constant touch with the residents. Contact between the SEWA Bank officers and the community was mostly through SHARDA Trust, and the presence of AMC engineers on the site gave ample opportunity for them to interact with slum dwellers. Himanshu Parikh too met the community on a few occasions.

Practically all the meetings with the community or their leaders took place within the settlement, usually in a small hut that functioned as office, school and dispensary. Open spaces were used for larger meetings. Only the first meeting that P. U. Asnani, the Deputy Municipal Commissioner in charge of the project, had with the slum dwellers was held in one of the zonal offices of the Corporation, and the idea behind holding the meetings on the project site was to convey to the residents that they were not mere beneficiaries but equal partners in the enterprise. The site venue also facilitated maximum community presence. There was no fixed venue for meetings between other partners, with locations being determined according to the mutual convenience of the partners concerned.

Despite mounting differences among the major partners as project execution proceeded, they always remained courteous and civil to one another. The partners, specially the executing agency, kept the politicians at bay from the project, not even inviting them to attend the ground breaking ceremony, though they were informed of the event afterwards. The only time when the political wing of the Corporation came to Sanjay Nagar was when the Corporation organised a function to mark the end of the initiative. Keeping away the politicians is a matter on which the partners had different views, for while SHARDA Trust officials believed that the politicians would exploit the project for their political interests, the AMC officials who had to work with elected representatives were keen to make the elected wing of the city government feel involved. These differing views, however, did not hamper the progress of the work.

The partners also differed about the timing of exposing the project to media. While the

Corporation was keen to permit the press to cover the initiative while it was still in progress, the executing agency was against it. In fact, on one occasion when Corporation representatives took some press representatives to the site without previously informing the executing agency, the latter expressed its resentment in no uncertain terms. After the project was complete, however, many national and international visitors representing various organisations were allowed to see for themselves what had been achieved in Sanjay Nagar. Despite the executing agency's lack of interest in publicity, the local press, and at least one national news magazine, published articles about the pilot project while it was still in progress. These, however, had limited impact on the dissemination of the experiment among the important potential beneficiaries, namely slum dwellers in other settlements of the city. Their primary source of information was the slum fraternity, disseminating information through a quiet process of gradual diffusion. Also a couple of NGOs revealed a keen interest in the Sanjay Nagar experiment with a view to replicating some aspects of it elsewhere in the city. Visits by representatives of international agencies such as World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United States Agency for International Development reinforced the process of diffusion.

All this generated a remarkable degree of self confidence and optimism among the Sanjay Nagar residents, with their leaders always anxious to make sure that the community and the experiment received a good press. As the project was nearing completion, they were also looking into the future and thinking about the need for some other common facilities that could be added, such as a community meeting place. Perhaps, the greatest change was in the self-image of the community. No more did the residents look upon their settlement as a slum, instead regarding it as a housing colony. This was reflected in a slight but significant change in its name, with the previous name of Sanjay Nagar na Chhapra (Sanjay Nagar Huts) being registered simply as Sanjay Nagar upon the suggestion of the residents.

### **3.3 Learning**

Different kinds of learning were derived by different people from the same set of events or situations, and in the case of Sanjay Nagar, the experiment was a learning experience for all partners. For the Sanjay Nagar community the experiment enabled residents to improve their quality of life, reflected in the fact that an average of Rs 20,000 per household was invested in upgrading individual dwellings as a result of the improved infrastructure. However, the residents have yet to appreciate fully the value of maintaining the common assets and facilities created. The Sanjay Nagar Residents' Association that was set up precisely for this purpose is inactive, resulting in a lack of proper

care for the public infrastructure.

The failure of the Sanjay Nagar community to respond adequately to the maintenance functions may be due to its perception that it was only a secondary actor in the pilot project, for while the promoters of the project looked upon the community as an equal partner, the community was seldom actively involved in the planning and implementation process, leaving it to look upon the enterprise essentially as an Arvind-AMC initiative, with the community thus having little responsibility for its upkeep. If the non-involvement of the community in the planning and implementation process kept it from fully realising its responsibility towards post-project maintenance, the non-involvement of its leaders in dealing with external agencies during execution also constrained their learning in this respect. They would have developed a greater sense of autonomy and confidence and would have got some first-hand insight into the working of public system agencies if they had accompanied the SHARDA Trust officials to meeting with public functionaries.

More positively, there are some welcome signs of change in the community's outlook to health care and education. According to a survey conducted in early 1999, the incidence of illness has gone down in Sanjay Nagar, including more serious diseases like tuberculosis. More than 50 per cent of the children are now immunised, indicating a substantial increase in the type and number of immunisations. The result is that the death rate among the children of 4 years of age or less has gone down sharply from around 70 per cent to 37 per cent. In the realm of education, the percentage of school going children has gone up, though the number of school dropouts has also increased. Countering this, however, are findings that at least in a few cases, some dropouts have returned to the school, something that had never happened in the settlement before. As for employment, although there has been no change in the nature of activities through which the community earns its living, a much larger number of men as well as women are now engaged in remunerative work, and as a result the average income per household has gone up by almost Rs 1,000 per month.

Regarding community organisation, although women and youth groups are yet to be organised and the Sanjay Nagar Residents' Association is inactive, each household has paid the membership fee of Rs 25 and the community elections are keenly contested. This may suggest that the Association could gradually assume a more active role in the management of the community affairs, including the facilities and assets installed. As for the other partners, the completion of the pilot experiment within time and budget, should have reinforced their faith in the efficacy of government-business-NGO alliances, and having attained better insights into one

another's work culture, organisational constraints, and decision-making structures, they could have been in a better position to prevent future recurrences of the kind of conflicts and bickering that plagued the Sanjay Nagar project, or at least devise adequate safeguards against these. The partners' learning from the experiment, however, was just in the reverse direction. Sometime before the completion of the project, the SHARDA Trust officials told their trustees that it was impossible to work with the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, where various departments behaved like "separate empires", forcing the executing agency to deal with a multitude of functionaries that caused delay. Most of the problems between the partners, according to this analysis, were caused by the "shared values" of the Corporation's employees, "coupled with its structure and combined with the skills of the people". Arvind consequently withdrew from the alliance and even from physical upgrading schemes to concentrate on the skill upgrading programmes on its own. Since there is little chance of the Corporation undergoing a radical change in its structure or functioning, the possibility of the company returning to the alliance in the foreseeable future is slim indeed. Arvind's learning from the experiment seems to be that corporate and public systems are mutually incompatible, and the problems that the alliance faced, according to SHARDA Trust officials, "are endemic and inherent in government and quasi-government organisations."

The AMC seems to have come to the same conclusion. After the completion of Sanjay Nagar, the Corporation officials did not sound enthusiastic to retain the co-operation of Arvind Mills in future projects, with their experience with the pilot having taught them that the speed and single mindedness that usually characterise the working of a private enterprise can not be easily injected into a public system agency. A highly placed Corporation official, involved with the pilot, compared the two systems to broad gauge and meter gauge railways. This explains why the Corporation made no special effort to persuade Arvind Mills to continue with the joint effort.

SAATH, too, became disillusioned with its alliance with Arvind Mills and openly expressed its resentment of the company in its annual report of 1997, stating that SHARDA Trust officials expected the NGO to adopt approaches and use terminology characteristic of private sector firms. Meanwhile, Himanshu Parikh, whose design everybody had praised and approved, was left isolated. Thus, as far as the principal partners were concerned, learning proved to be destructive, rather than constructive, to the organisational alliance for slum networking. However, for SEWA Bank, a secondary partner and late-comer to the pilot project, the project gave it an additional means to work with the poor, and through giving loans to Sanjay Nagar residents, the Bank began to cater to the needs of entire communities, whereas

previously it had met the needs of individuals. Finally, this involvement of SEWA Bank in the pilot project also revealed to the Bank's parent organisation, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and its Mahila Housing Trust, the potential for their future involvement in community development activities when the slum networking programme was expanded to more than 10 additional settlements in Ahmedabad.

In sum, it can be said that the experiment yielded both positive and negative kinds of learning. While it proved the validity of certain assumptions behind Parikh's concept of slum networking, it also brought into question the viability of the particular multisectoral approach adopted for the implementation of the pilot project, an experience that would have a significant impact on the future of slum upgrading in the Ahmedabad.

### 3.4 Use and Impact

The use and impact of the information, communication and learning processes can be seen in several ways. Perhaps the most important is the validity that the successful implementation of the project provided to the slum networking concept. Despite the differences among them on many other issues, all the stakeholders, residents of other slum settlements, and the informed sections of the society in general were convinced of the superiority of approach taken over earlier conventional schemes. Even though the Corporation engineers were critical of some of the techniques adopted by Parikh to bring down the cost, such as the use of various kinds of pipes for the water supply system, their overall assessment of the designs was positive. This was later reflected in the use of similar designs for the continuation of slum upgrading in Ahmedabad.

While forging an organisational alliance to implement the project, the partners had hoped (though it was never explicitly stated) that in the process of working together, they might become agents of change for one another, with the demonstration effect of efficient project implementation having a positive influence on the stakeholders. This ostensibly did not happen, but there is some evidence that the Corporation officials developed a grudging appreciation for the speedy decision making of the corporate sector. If appreciation is the first feeble step to emulation, the impact of the government-business collaboration may lead to some rethinking in the public system agency about the need and direction for change.

Another of the most significant outcomes of the information, communication, and learning processes was the narrowing of the gulf between the slum community and the Corporation system. Previously, the Corporation officials looked upon the slum dwellers as encroachers on public property or, at best, beneficiaries of the Corporation largess or leniency, while the slum dwellers looked upon the Corporation officials with

a great deal of suspicion or even fear. While rubbing shoulders with each other in the course of implementing the project, they developed a feeling of partnership to achieve a common purpose. As the residents were treated as partners, and not mere beneficiaries, they seem to have realised the value of investing to improve their material conditions and surroundings. In short the dependency syndrome which previously characterised their behaviour, seems to have been eroded, and this may have implications far beyond the immediate purposes of the project.

### 3.5 Replication

Regarding replication, the Sanjay Nagar experiment created a very informative experience for the later development of slum upgrading in other settlements in Ahmedabad. Even when the pilot was still underway, some NGOs showed a great deal of interest in the project with a view to replicating some aspects of it in other areas. Slum dwellers in other localities were also watching the progress of the project with great curiosity. As the project neared completion, the World Bank came forward with substantial financial commitment to enable the AMC to take up other settlements for upgrading, and the AMC selected fourteen settlements for the next phase. Even though the Corporation left the door open for Arvind Mills to join, the company refused the offer, and no other private sector firm came forward to take its place. The break down in private sector participation should not, however, be attributed solely to the conflicts between Arvind and AMC, for the Corporation's effort to enlist the co-operation of other firms started well before the Sanjay Nagar project began and with the exception of Arvind, none of the companies approached displayed any interest, failing to view schemes for urban improvement in the context of their business interests or ambitions. The Arvind-AMC estrangement might have reinforced their hesitation to join the Corporation in its slum upgrading programme, but it was not the primary reason for their unwillingness.

In its search for supporters, however, the Corporation did achieve some success. The State Bank of India Staff Association agreed to contribute a sum of Rs 200,000, while the Lions Club of Ahmedabad advanced Rs 1,000,000, though neither the State Bank of India nor the Lions Club have any role in project execution. After its experience with Arvind Mills, the Corporation does not want to entrust execution to any outside agency, and having developed its own in-house capacity for upgrading project design in the course of the Sanjay Nagar project, the Corporation has also dispensed with the services of Himanshu Parikh.

SAATH is the only one of the original alliance partners that has remained with the AMC in its current slum upgrading programme, and at present it is undertaking community development

activities in a large slum settlement comprising around 1,500 households, and has agreed to expand into another adjacent slum of about 500 households. SEWA Bank too has remained in the programme, advancing loans to the residents of the new slums being taken up for upgrading in the second phase. Additionally, SEWA's Mahila Housing Trust has become the main NGO responsible for community development in the programme, now working in twelve of the fourteen slums where upgrading is in progress. The approach of the Trust to community development differs from that of SAATH, for while the latter is proceeding on the same lines it followed in Sanjay Nagar, the Mahila Housing Trust is concentrating on training community leaders to deal with governmental and other agencies when putting forward the demands and needs of their communities. In addition, the leaders are being trained to manage the community associations which have been formed, or are in the process of being formed. Emphasis in these training programmes is on how to maintain accounts, conduct meetings, organise elections and such like, and the Housing Trust is also engaged in organising and facilitating the slum communities' financial participation in the programme.

The arrangement that is now emerging for the implementation of the slum programme in Ahmedabad is thus one of loose co-operation rather than the alliance that characterised Sanjay Nagar. Now the responsibility for the installation of infrastructure and services is exclusively that of the Municipal Corporation, and as such, progress has been much slower than in Sanjay Nagar. More than one year has elapsed since the second phase was launched, but to date upgrading in just one small settlement is complete. In the meantime, some uncertainty seems to have developed about the commitment of the Lions' Club and it is not clear at this stage whether the Club will continue to provide support or in what form. What seems to be certain, however, is that major responsibility for carry out future upgrading programmes will remain with the city government. The Corporation may look for financial contributors from the private sector, but it is unlikely to repeat the experiment of a multisectoral alliance. SHARDA Trust in the meantime has decided to concentrate on a training programme for skill development and income generation for the Sanjay Nagar residents, in the belief this approach will have enduring results. The Trust is also providing various kinds of help to residents in the area of health care and it plans to expand its activities in these spheres as it gains experience.

the value of effective communication if poor and excluded communities are to develop faith in the organisations that have traditionally been viewed as hostile or indifferent to their needs.

Communication is crucial to convince slum residents of the value and benefits that can be brought by upgrading, and in the case of Sanjay Nagar, residents developed sufficient trust in the project implementors to share the cost of the project.

#### **4.2 The importance of key individuals**

The experience of Sanjay Nagar also highlights the role of leadership in launching and implementing projects of this kind. But for the vision and imagination of persons like Himanshu Parikh, Sanjay Lalbhai and Keshav Verma, the project would have taken much longer to take shape. Indeed, much of the credit for the finishing of the pilot on time and within budget goes to the determination of Mote and Asnani who did not let the conflicts and bickering deflect their attention from the principal objective of the project. On many crucial occasions, the community leaders also helped settle sensitive issues and diffuse tension and conflict.

#### **4.3 The viability of multisectoral partnerships**

In terms of institutional arrangements to carry out the project, the experiment yielded mixed lessons. While the speedy execution of the pilot underlines the benefit of business-government partnership for such undertakings, continuing conflict among the alliance and its eventual collapse puts into question the viability of the private sector being responsible for implementing slum upgrading projects. Alternatively, it can also be speculated that an alliance formed in a hurry is bound to encounter problems and instead what is necessary is to build prior safeguards against the conflicts that multisectoral partnerships may produce. A shared goal alone may not be a sufficient guarantee against communication breakdowns and misunderstandings among organisations with different values, approaches and structures.

## **SECTION 4 LESSONS LEARNED**

### **4.1 The Importance of communication to build trust**

The pilot project in Sanjay Nagar clearly reveals

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