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COMMUNITY LEARNING AND INFORMATION CENTRES AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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PREFACE

Community Learning, Information and Communication (CLIC)
Joint Working Paper Series

This working paper is part of a series documenting communication, learning and information exchange between poor communities, municipal and state governments, and non governmental organisations in India. The series itself is one of the outputs of a two-year action research project funded by the British Government Department for International Development (DFID), Infrastructure and Urban Development Department under its Knowledge and Research (KAR) programme.

The central focus of the research is the community learning, information and communication (CLIC) processes that surround access to, and the delivery of, urban infrastructure and services by low-income communities and public sector bodies in India. Information, communication and learning are the basis upon which change takes place in people's attitudes and actions. Understanding how this process works, examining the types of information to which different stakeholders in the urban environment have access, how they use information to influence others, and how they learn and acquire new knowledge and skills, is thus central to understanding how change can occur for the benefit of the urban poor. This is the objective of the CLIC project, aiming to identify and analyse the problems and successes in communicating and learning during projects and initiatives for urban service provision, drawing out lessons, and proposing and testing ways of strengthening communication and learning.

The CLIC project, which started in 1998, is managed by the Development Planning Unit in partnership with GHK Research and Training, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) in Mumbai, the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (CHEC), Environ and a number of independent consultants from India.

The CLIC Joint Working Paper series documents conceptual context of the study as a whole and individual case studies that constituted its first phase. These fall into two broad categories: those initiated by communities and those initiated by government programmes.

Concept and context
    I. Community Learning and Information Centres: A Tool for Sustainable Development

Case studies of community CLIC initiatives
    I.   Electricity for Pavement Dwellers in Mumbai
    II.   The Byculla Area Resource Centre in Central Mumbai
    III.   SPARC Housing Exhibitions
    IV.   Co-operative Housing in Pune
    V.   Kanjur Marg Railway Resettlement Housing in Mumbai
    VI.   Jagjeeva Ram Nagar Reconstruction in Hyderabad
    VII.   Report Card Monitoring of Infrastructure Delivery Performance in Ahmedabad

Case studies of Government CLIC initiatives
    I.   Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) Line of Credit to NGOs
    II.   HUDCO Building Centres
    III.   The Community Development Society System in Kerala
    IV.   Kerala Peoples Planning Campaigni, Travendrum
    V.   Slum Networking Initiative in Ahmedabad

Copies of the Working Papers are available on request from the DPU and further information about the CLIC project can be obtained from the CLIC website: **www.clicc.com**

COMMUNITY LEARNING AND INFORMATION CENTRES AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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COMMUNITY LEARNING AND INFORMATION CENTRES AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

> "… creative human beings are much more likely to achieve their objectives if they are well informed – if they have reliable information on current circumstances and trends to use in assessing the likely outcomes of different courses of actions" (Gorham and Kingley, 1997, p. 364).

Information dissemination, learning and training have long been a central tool used to improve quality of life in poor communities. Although development communication and information dissemination processes have been the focus of debate and research in the past, once again the attention is turning to how information is communicated and used, and to how it can be used more effectively to promote sustainable urban development. Technologies for global communication are developing rapidly, access to mass media among the poor is increasing, and there is now a greater understanding of the workings of traditional channels for communication and learning. The need for training and access to more and better information for use in development initiatives is increasing, not only because of the huge scale of poverty to be addressed, but also because ways of managing the urban environment are constantly changing.

This paper sets out to consider some of the key issues in the dissemination of knowledge and information in poor urban communities, looking especially at the role of 'place' as a tool for enhancing community learning processes and for promoting sustainability. Firstly, a brief review of the history of community development and learning serves to set the context, charting the emergence of concepts such as community development, empowerment, participation and capacity building, and assessing their implications for learning. The community learning process itself is then explored, examining the types of information and knowledge used in community learning processes, who the users and disseminators of that information are, and how the dissemination process works. The core concern of the paper is then examined, looking at the role of place in the learning process. Questions as to the ways in which communities currently access information and the meanings they attach to place lead to an exploration of the concept of community learning and information centres. Examination of experience with training,

education and information exchange in the promotion of sustainable development and eradication of poverty suggests that success depends not just on one element of the learning process, but on the functioning of the process as a whole. With this in mind, this paper aims to address and suggest tentative answers to two key questions:

- what are the most appropriate locations and management arrangements for community learning and information centres?; and
- how can such centres be integrated into an overall approach to community learning?

2. COMMUNITY LEARNING IN CONTEXT

Urban management for sustainable human settlements development hinges on balancing and managing resources, and on making choices to influence patterns of production and consumption. Clearly the imbalances that hamper sustainable development are great in the cities of developing countries and easily illustrated by the huge numbers of people living in acute poverty. As consumers the poor are marginalised from services such as housing, health and education; as producers they have little access to safe and well-paid employment, instead driving an informal sector that contributes substantially to the urban economy but that gives little reward and security in return; as citizens their decision making powers are limited and their rights are undermined; and as people the poor display a wide array of problems and needs, with women and children especially vulnerable to exploitation and violence. To eradicate poverty and work toward the sustainable development of human settlements, partnerships between urban stakeholders are necessary to maximise resources and the impact of their application. Central government is no longer the main force in controlling the city, and all levels of government have shifted from primary actors to facilitators of urban development. Non-government sectors and private sectors are seen as key players in the mobilisation and management of resources, and the poor themselves are no longer seen as passive beneficiaries but active participants in the development process. Entering into this participatory framework has exposed the need for appropriate and accessible information, and the need for understanding to support decision-making and co-operation. Through learning and information dissemination the skills

and knowledge base of all stakeholders can be improved, enabling them to work more effectively toward the goals of sustainable human development.

Enhanced understanding and improvement of communication and learning processes is urgent, yet the use of learning and information dissemination as a means to combat poverty is not new. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries community workers placed in poor working class neighbourhoods in the US and UK sought to improve individual well-being through education and information dissemination (Abbott, 1996). In the 1880s, for example, settlement centres were set up in poor areas of cities, enabling the middle classes to use their knowledge to educate the poor and to better understand their circumstances and needs (Brookfield, 1983). Although criticised for their paternalism and social control, such early initiatives were alternatively praised for liberating the poor, not only through the provision of skills and knowledge for economic survival, but also through an attempt to foster community spirit, to bolster democracy and strengthen national identity. The pursuit of such values emerged in developing countries in the 1950s and 1960s in the context of the Cold War and growing demands for independence among the former European colonies. Huge amounts of aid were poured into large projects in developing countries, yet this aid appeared to be largely ineffective in reducing poverty. Analysis of the problem pointed to the need to foster cultural values and social organisations conducive to rapid economic development and modernisation, and academics such as Daniel Lerner (1958) and Wilbur Schramm (1963) highlighted the importance of communication and mass media to foster national identity and planning, to teach the necessary skills, to extend markets, and to prepare communities for their new roles in newly prosperous nations (Chu, 1994).

In response to the growing recognition of the importance of communication for behaviour change, the 1950s and early 1960s saw the advent of community development projects, aiming to foster cultural and political values conducive to economic development and democracy. This approach, however, failed to address the skills and information needed and wanted by communities, and also ignored existing power structures, institutions and traditional channels for communication and organisation. As a result, early community development initiatives were top-down in the information they disseminated, and the structures they imposed upon communities fostered political manipulation. In Tanzania, for example, under the governments of Nyerere and the Chama cha Mapinduzi party, party and government officials passed on ideologically oriented development messages to rural and suburban populations through village meetings and rural training centres. Cells of ten households were also set up to channel community problems to the attention of the party, to communicate the government's plans to the people, and to mobilise people for the implementation of development projects (Moemeka, 1994). In a more subtle attempt to control and co-opt, the 1970 Organic Law in Mexico City ordered the setting up of community organisations to represent local residents and give them a say in local planning initiatives, yet according to Aguilar (1988), these channels were often directly and indirectly manipulated and influenced by local party officials for political ends.

By the mid-1960s and 1970s, opposition to such top-down approaches to community development began to grow, especially in Latin America where the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire espoused the importance of creating awareness among the urban poor as a means to their empowerment. For the first time, Freire drew attention to the importance of learners participating and taking an active role in the learning process, to the need for learning to bring about community and political action, and to the right and capacity of the poor to organise and act to fight their exploitation (Eade, 1997). At the same time, the messages of Liberation Theology also grew in popularity, and the number of Christian Base Communities, peasants' organisations, residents' association and unions escalated. Marking the start of the community participation debate, these trends had a profound impact on shifting attitudes away from paternalistic and top-down approaches with pre-set agendas. Organisations like the ILO, UNCHS, UNICEF, and UNRISD began to explore concepts such as empowerment to bring about social change and the satisfaction of basic needs (Abbott, 1996). Early concepts of community participation and empowerment, founded in an era of authoritarian government, rapid urbanisation and growing poverty, stressed the need for communities to act independently of the State, which was conceived as an oppressive force. This focus upon the independent action of the poor led to greater awareness and understanding of the organisational capacity of the poor to help themselves, an awareness most notably enhanced by the work of John Turner and other academics working primarily in Latin America. In the 1970s the World Bank incorporated these ideas of self-help and community participation, but through using community participation as a vehicle to enhance project efficiency and reduce costs, the concept of participation as empowerment did not gain institutional acceptance.

In the 1980s, in response to debt and social crises, the development agencies and indebted governments shifted their focus yet further from participatory community level initiatives, and on to the reform of financial systems and urban sectors in the drive for structural adjustment. Poverty

eradication took a back seat to the reform of economies, and only toward the end of the decade in response to growing urban poverty and the adverse impacts of structural adjustment, did emphasis once more return to development at the community level. Disquiet among the UN agencies led to calls for people-centred development, taking into account of the needs of different community members. Analysis of the circumstances of poor women drew attention to the unequal distribution of resources in families and communities, and the unequal impact of development projects by gender. Following on from the focus on the reform of government institutions and the development of an enabling framework for urban management, the late 1990s sees the participation of CBOs, NGOs, the private sector, and local government as central to urban management. Now "Governance extends beyond governments" (UNCHS, 1996, p. 426). The new roles of stakeholders are founded on the principles of co-operation and partnership, and development itself is no longer conceived as the objective of finite projects, but as a process that should be ongoing, flexible and sustainable. As such, the need is for ongoing capacity building, involving not just human resource development, but also institutional and organisational development, and targeted not only at municipal government, but also NGOs, the private sector and communities (Wakely, 1996).

In response to these shifts toward participatory and co-operative approaches to the development process, training and needs assessment techniques have developed to ascertain the skills and information needed by urban stakeholders. Using the techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), most successful in assessing the needs of small-scale farmers, NGOs have expanded the application of PRA techniques to health and childcare (Abbott, 1996), and they have been adapted for use in urban environments.

Practices such as stakeholder analysis, social audit, social relations analysis, appreciative inquiry, and historic analysis have been developed (Eade, 1997), but at the foundation of participatory approaches to development is the goal of poverty alleviation and sustainable development. As such, much attention ha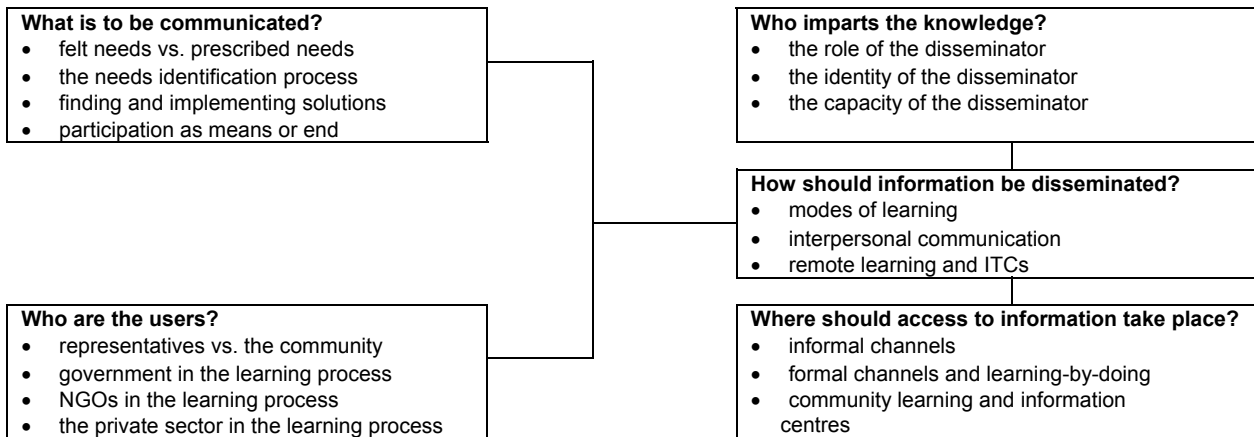s been paid to understanding the needs and wants of poor communities as identified by communities themselves, and techniques such as PALM have been devised as a means not just for outside agencies to assess the needs of households, groups and communities, but also as tool to empower communities to formulate solutions and implement action strategies. Access to credit, legal land tenure, housing, income generation initiatives, sanitation infrastructure, literacy, childcare – the needs and wants of communities are wide ranging and differ not just between communities but within them. This greater awareness of the skills and information needed by the poor reflects a return to the goal of community empowerment first seen in the 1970s, but this time it is set within a participatory cross-sector approach that reveals the need for greater understanding by other stakeholders of how community learning processes can best be used to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development.

3. COMMUNITY LEARNING PROCESSES

Through the historical development of practices and concepts such as community development, empowerment, participation and capacity building outlined above, the complexities of community learning processes have emerged through trial and error. The role of place in community learning is key, for be they purpose built centres, private homes or empty plots of land, places provide focal points through which information and knowledge can be accessed. The role of place cannot, however, be analysed in isolation from other elements in the community learning process such as the type of information to be disseminated, its users and disseminators, and the organisation of the dissemination process. It is only through understanding the process as a whole that an assessment can be made of the importance and role of place in community learning. With this in mind, the elements of the community learning process, as exhibited in Figure 1, are briefly examined before returning to explore the issue of place and concept of community learning and information centres.

FIGURE 1

The Community Learning Process

What is to be communicated? • felt needs vs. prescribed needs • the needs identification process • finding and implementing solutions • participation as means or end	**Who imparts the knowledge?** • the role of the disseminator • the identity of the disseminator • the capacity of the disseminator
	How should information be disseminated? • modes of learning • interpersonal communication • remote learning and ITCs
Who are the users? • representatives vs. the community • government in the learning process • NGOs in the learning process • the private sector in the learning process	**Where should access to information take place?** • informal channels • formal channels and learning-by-doing • community learning and information centres

3.1 What is to be communicated?

<u>Felt needs vs. prescribed needs</u>

The type of information, skills and knowledge disseminated through community learning will, in large measure, determine the extent to which it has the desired effect of improving the quality of life of the poor. Throughout the debate on community participation and empowerment, a distinction has been made between the top-down and the bottom-up, in other words the dissemination of information and skills as determined by outside bodies such as governments or NGOs, versus the dissemination of information needed, wanted and voiced by communities themselves. Brookfield (1983) makes a similar distinction between 'felt needs' (as learner expressed) and 'prescribed needs' (as educator expressed), but he also recognises that to some extent the community learning process inevitably involves the suppliers of information making some prescription of needs:

> "To argue that all education should be self-education in that it is determined solely by learner desires is to deny the validity and importance of accumulated knowledge and experience contained within human (teachers) and material (libraries, data banks etc.) resources" (*ibid*., p. 129-130).

The role played by poor communities in development projects has shifted radically away that of passive beneficiary to active participator in the defining and solving of priority problems. Correspondingly, outside agents have moved away from dictating what resources communities receive and how they should receive and use them, to facilitating the needs definition process in the community itself, and to assisting communities in finding solutions. The drawing up of detailed action plans for meeting community needs, while frequently requiring the technical expertise of

outside professionals, increasingly involves inputs from the community side. Communities know best what already exists, what is needed and what will work. Specialists and professionals have much needed skills and access to information, and their intervention in poor communities can also generate awareness of the benefits of change as well as strategic approaches to bringing it about.

<u>The needs identification process</u>

While the importance of letting communities set their own agendas is widely recognised (though not widely practised), it should also be remembered that the identification and expression of community needs involves conflict, competition and negotiation within communities. Like other social structures and organisations, they are characterised by power structures, sectional interests and shifting alliances. Communities rarely unite as one, and generally only do so in response to an external threat (*ibid*.), yet in order for community learning processes to have a positive impact on behaviour and quality of life, it is the different sectional interests in a community that must be identified and listened to. These may include the traditional elderly population, youths and children, single mothers, women in general, religious groups, homeowners, tenants, the owners and workers of home-based and micro enterprises, new residents and original settlers. The needs identification process can be facilitated by NGOs and CBO leaders using workshops, focus groups, participatory techniques such as PALM, and discussions with government authorities and other stakeholders. In this way, not

only can priority needs be identified, but existing knowledge and resources can also be identified. What is to be disseminated to a community should not just be predicated on what is missing, but also on what already exists, not just in terms of power structures and inequalities, but also in terms of existing skills, technologies, channels of communication and ways of learning. Local knowledge can be used as a basis upon which to build, and thus the people who hold that knowledge should achieve recognition. On the steep slopes of squatter settlements in Rio de Janeiro, for example, homes must frequently be built on bare rock and unstable topsoil. The skills to do so are passed on from community builder to neighbour and from that neighbour to another; the activities of the best builders are carefully watched and replicated. Such informal learning mechanisms, based on observation and word-of-mouth, can be built upon as a basis for effective community learning.

In addition, the needs identification process should assess the impact of meeting needs. Information that has a positive impact on lives of one section of the community may have a detrimental impact on another. In urban India, for example, this is particularly noticeable in slums accommodating both tenants and slumdweller landlords. Efforts to regularise land and housing through the facilitation of housing loans and the provision of land tenure to established slumsdwellers frequently result in the marginalisation of tenants who bear the brunt of the financial burden of the regularisation process without any of its benefits. Landlords not only increase rents to cover their increased outgoings, but frequently make the most of the comparative insecurity of tenants by forcing short leases on them. Thus, while it is now widely recognised that the development process in not gender-neutral, when assessing the information, skill or technology gaps of a community, the

cultural, political and social structures and values that surround a broad cross section of vulnerable groups should also be assessed. "As with other resources, if activities intended to build capacities are introduced into a skewed environment of access to skills or opportunities, they may *de facto* reinforce existing forms of power and exclusion" (Eade, 1997, p. 26).

Finding and implementing solutions

Increasingly it is recognised that the involvement of poor communities in development projects should go beyond the needs identification stage to embrace the formulation of the information, skills, training and other resources needed, and to devise how the learning and development processes should progress. The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) in Bombay illustrates this approach. It is founded upon the principle of empowering the poor through building upon the knowledge and skills the poor already have and upon the needs that they express themselves. Set up in 1984, SPARC is an NGO that works in partnership with the National Slum Dwellers' Federation and the CBO Mahila Milan or 'Women Together'. Starting off working with the women pavement dwellers of Bombay, the SPARC alliance encouraged the pavement dwellers to undertake activities such as surveys to gather statistical information on land and houses, analyse the causes of housing problems, design and exhibit alternative model homes, and draw up plans to counter the demolition of their homes. With SPARC facilitating the negotiation process between communities and the city authorities, land has been reallocated to the poor, and over time, the need for SPARC to intervene and train has diminished as the power and skills of the communities have grown. From this example, the role of the community in defining and finding both

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Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), Bombay, India

The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) is an NGO set up in 1984, initially focusing on improving the lot of the pavement dwellers of Bombay. From 1986 to 1987, SPARC held public meetings with women pavement dwellers to discuss impending demolitions and evictions and to work out strategies to avert or deal with them. This first stage of training involved 600 women, and was followed by the development of alternative shelter strategies, founded on information collected by the women on visits to other parts of Bombay looking for land suitable for settlement. The collection and discussion of information was undertaken by Area Committees of 15 houses, each with one representative communicating with other Committees and SPARC. The development of alternative shelter strategies involved the design of alternative model houses in consultation with professional architects and engineers, and discussions of housing problems with the city housing authority. The role of SPARC was to organise and facilitate such meetings. Arising out of the work with the pavement dwellers, the CBO Mahila Milan or Women Together was founded, that entered into alliance with SPARC and also the National Slum Dwellers' Federation in providing training to pavement and slum dwellers. Currently training covers issues such as sanitation and housing construction, community management, mapping and land surveys, co-operative formation, and community project management. In addition, the SPARC alliance runs a low-cost savings and credit scheme. The work of the alliance now embraces 20 cities in India, and international exchanges have been conducted with South Africa, Cambodia and the Philippines.

Source: The Best Practices Database; Peltenburg et al. (1996). Building Capacity for Better Cities, HIS/DPU.

problems and solutions is illustrated, but also the role of the outside agent in bringing the necessary facilitation and technical skills and information to the process is also evident.

Where the needs identification process highlights needs such as sanitation infrastructure or water supply, the tendency is for outside agents to be more prescriptive in approach, addressing the needs of a community through finding low-cost technologies, and planning for their installation with community involvement in laying the infrastructure but not in choosing it or designing it. While it is recognised that the outside agents hold the skills and information needed for the task, considerable community input can occur however. In the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in Karachi, community members identified sanitation and drainage as priority problems and suggested the construction of a sewerage network, despite the fact that outside experts forwarded alternative solutions. The development of appropriate standards, details and implementation procedures was led by OPP, though again with opportunities for the community to feedback on these plans, as well as involve themselves in the construction and maintenance phases. Later, with the identification of better housing as a need, OPP built upon the existing construction skill base in the community by providing training to local masons and by involving local suppliers of building materials or 'thallas' in the development and dissemination of new and improved building products and techniques. Thus, both SPARC and OPP

demonstrate the value outside agents can bring to community learning and development projects, as well as the capacity of communities to participate in defining their needs and how they can be met, taking into account the skills, knowledge and information learning processes that already exist.

Participation as a means or end

"The educator has a role to play not only in transmitting skills and knowledge as a necessary prerequisite for action, but also in assisting adults to derive the maximum educational value for community learning, which occurs in the course of community action" (Brookfield, 1983, p. 105). Thus, in addition to focusing on programme designs and procedural aspects, the individual benefits to be derived from participation need recognition. According to Coggins, such potential benefits include: improved sense of self-worth; improved understanding of others' strengths and weaknesses; development of a sense of commitment; and awareness and appreciation of problem-solving processes (1980, cited in *ibid*., p. 104). In terms of collective rather than individual empowerment, however, the argument seems less clear cut. Abbott (1996) questions whether projects that have clearly defined end points, such as the provision of houses, can be used as long-term vehicles for community empowerment, for when the end point is achieved, participation and empowerment can wane rapidly. Alternatively, community empowerment itself can be the central focus of the learning process, with infrastructure or

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The Orangi Pilot Project and Orangi Pilot Project Research and Training Institute, Karachi, Pakistan

The Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) was established in 1980 by Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan with the objective of improving living conditions in the squatter settlement of Orangi, the largest in Karachi with over one million residents. Focusing on the complete lack of sanitation infrastructure in the area, OPP began to work with the community to identify the priority sanitation needs of the settlement. The need urgent for inside toilets, underground sewers with household connections, secondary collector drains, and primary drains with a treatment plant were identified, and the population declared itself to be ready to assume construction and maintenance tasks for most of the project, leaving government authorities to provide primary drains and the treatment plant. Cost reductions in the sanitation infrastructure were achieved through the simplifying of designs and construction methods and by elimination the need for contractors and middlemen. For the construction phase, each lane of about 20 to 40 houses acted as the basis for organisation, and each had a lane manager to act as a key activist for organising residents, collecting funds, settling disputes, managing the construction and maintenance processes, and keeping accounts of the costs. The lanes were surveyed and construction plans made by OPP technicians, who also trained small-scale building contractors to provide technical help.

OPP later began to focus on other problems in Orangi such as health and family planning, house construction techniques, credit for home-based enterprises, school education, and training for women garment makers in management and organisational skills. OPP has also extended its work outside of Orangi to other parts of Karachi and to other towns and cities in Pakistan. In 1988 it established the OPP Research and Training Institute (OPP-RTI) as a vehicle for its expansion, working in the areas of sanitation, housing, community organisation, social forestry, health education and family planning, micro-enterprise and credit, rural development, and research, extension, monitoring and documentation. OPP-RTI offers training to international agencies, local NGOS and CBOs, but the majority (70%) of its 6 to 21 day training programmes cater to NGOs, with 17.5% of other users being from government agencies and the remainder from international agencies. Training occurs at the OPP-RTI centre in Orangi, but some courses are held in other centres, often using the premises of associated NGOs. A total of 473 groups with 4027 members have been trained by OPP since 1992. Funding for OPP-RTI is from local and international sources, and it does not receive any direct government contribution. Those receiving training who represent well-funded bodies are charged for the courses they attend.

Source: The Best Practices Database; GHK R&T.

income projects being an outcome of empowerment rather that a primary objective. For example, the coalition of women's groups, Mahila Milan, was founded as a direct result of SPARC's work with Bombay pavement dwellers, and it now participates on an equal footing with SPARC in the empowerment of other communities, training them to identify and find solutions to their own needs. However, while the mobilisation of certain sectors of a community around the ideal of empowerment is feasible, it seems more difficult to unite and involve whole communities unless empowerment is linked with the attainment of some short-term goals. A community's identification and pursuit of specific objectives may lead to individuals accruing personal benefits such as confidence and commitment, but collectively empowerment may embrace just certain sections of a community who can identify with this objective.

3.2 Who needs to learn?

The shift toward a partnership approach to urban management has implications for who needs to learn and to build up knowledge and skills. Although the alleviation of urban poverty may be the goal, new stakeholders and those whose roles have changed will need to develop the necessary skills to enable them to work effectively for and with communities. "Capacity building is the business of equipping all actors to perform effectively both in doing their own thing in their own field and level of operation, and in working in collaboration or partnership with others operating in other fields and at other levels" (Wakely, 1996, p. 2). These is an urgent need to build not just the capacity of CBOs and community residents themselves, but also the capacities of local government, NGO and private sectors to work with communities.

Representatives vs. the community

Where a community is the participant in the learning process, this raises questions as to who within the community has access to the information and knowledge disseminated. Emile Durkheim conceived of community as a single, unified organism with a collective consciousness, and subsequent definitions of the term have been no less problematic. Whether based on place (neighbourhood, workplace, school), or on shared interests or identity, it is accepted that communities are by no means homogenous. As seen in the previous section, the heterogeneity of a poor community will ensure that the problems and needs of some will not be shared by others. In turn, not everyone will benefit or benefit equally, yet most development projects will necessitate the selection of key activists and representatives through which to work. According to Brookfield,

"… only if educators are aware of the hidden agendas of individuals and groups at different levels in the community, and only if such groups are convinced educators can be trusted, will information be offered that is accurate and revealing" (1983, p. 133). One CBO will rarely represent the interests of all community members, and usually women's groups, residents' associations, church and social groups, and a host of other formal and informal structures and groupings can be found. Such groups will represent the interests of their members to varying degrees, and the selection of who acts as an activist and intermediary in a community project will be key to its success.

The choice of group and individual with whom to work may cultivate the trust or alienation of the wider community. Desai (1996), for example, reports that in the slums of Bombay, the better off dwellers monopolise community organisations as part of their strategy for economic gain. In the Orangi Pilot Project where infrastructure is laid down by lanes with 20-40 houses, and from each lane a manger is identified and used as a local activist. Other projects involve the establishment of committees, each representing (or claiming to represent) certain constituents. While such community leaders and activists are obviously motivated and interested, and therefore may be more effective than those who do not come forward voluntarily, they are also likely to represent those sections of the community that already have the most power and confidence, most obviously men. In the Nasriya upgrading project in Aswan, Egypt, for example, a community development association was set up to represent the entire area, but on its 15 strong committee, just two places are reserved for women. In response, the women of the community started their own organisation, and also involved in the project are over 30 local 'gamayas' or neighbourhood associations. This is in sharp contrast to the Community Development Society in Kerala, India that is entirely represented by women. Formal hierarchical structures in communities will frequently be dominated by men, and projects that work with a range of groups may be better able to ensure wider access to information and greater support for a project. It should be recognised however, that some groups may be judged to be undesirable on the grounds of their politics or purpose, but by excluding them, an intervening NGO, government or donor should be aware that their power may extend beyond their immediate membership and result in the exclusion of other individuals from the learning process, as is the case with resident's associations controlled by local drug mafias. Wherever possible, all groups in a community should be given access to community learning opportunities.

Government in the community learning process

The erosion of central government power in the 1990s has far reaching consequences for urban management. While in Africa many governments can only focus on the maintenance of political and social order (Villalón, 1998), elsewhere the reform and decentralisation of government has been rapid, even if incomplete. Increasingly local government is responsible for the management and delivery of land and services, yet in most cities of developing countries service provision is at best inadequate and often absent in the communities where the poor live on squatted and sub-divided land. 'Reinventing government'[2] is a term that has been applied to capture the range of reforms needed by local government, and these include the need for greater entrepreneurship, efficiency, performance and accountability (Gorham and Kingley, 1997). Local government needs to renegotiate its status, powers and finance with central government, but also increasingly to enter into partnerships with private enterprises, NGOs and communities. In order to rise to their newly delegated responsibilities (and to meet the conditions of donor agencies) many local governments in South Asia particularly, are attempting to embrace the concept of community participation. Yet local government rarely has the legislative, administrative and political support or the systems, structure and skills to take on participation as part of the process of infrastructure delivery (Plummer, 1998). In a number of Indian cities beset by poor finances, unsuitable departmental structures and sceptical staff, key figures in municipalities have identified the importance of enhancing skills, employing professional staff, and developing appropriate systems and structures conducive to community participation. The research currently being carried out by GHK Research and Training provides a spectrum of examples of direct, indirect, contextual and co-ordinating mechanisms which municipalities can adopt to promote and respond to community participation. Central to these efforts is the role of training of managers and technical staff (*ibid*.). In Egypt, Madbouly (1998) identifies the need for improved career structures, training and motivation of local government workers, and of the need for greater independence to plan and allocate resources, determine priorities and budget for them, and delegate service provision to semi- or non-government organisations.

This delegation of responsibility for the provision, management and maintenance of utility services and infrastructure to NGOs and CBOs is increasingly common in developing countries, and is predicated on the assumption these organisations have the capacity to undertake the complex technical and managerial tasks involved even though many local governments have failed dismally at providing adequate services to low-income communities. In the squatter settlements of Rio de Janeiro, for example, public utility companies increasingly delegate maintenance responsibilities to CBOs with mixed results. While the municipal rubbish company COMLURB provides the necessary resources and checks on performance, the state water company CEDAE fails to provide technical support or even basic tools. This points to the need for the training of local governments to enable them to evaluate the services they devolve, ensuring accountability as well as the provision of the necessary training and resources communities and NGOs need to manage sanitation and water systems. More fundamentally, however, local government should not assume that NGOs and communities wish to assume responsibility for service management.

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[2] See: Osborne, D. and T. Gaebler (1992), **Reinventing Government**, Plume, New York.

This point is stressed by Zaidi (1997) who, based on the experience of devolution of responsibility for rural water supplies to community level in Pakistan, criticises the uniform policy of the Social Action Programme for dumping these responsibilities on communities whether they want them or not.

NGOs in the community learning process

The changing role of NGOs and their need for improved skills, training and access to information is also well documented. Over the previous two decades the size of the NGO sector has grown rapidly, and they are increasingly becoming channels for official donor funds. According to Eade, donors often believe that NGOs perform better than governments "… in terms of reaching 'the poor', or in their accountability, cost-effectiveness, efficiency, or ability to innovate" (1997, p. 17). Yet this is not the case when NGOs represent just a small constituency, or when they do not possess the necessary human and organisational resources to carry out tasks for which they were not set up. For example, the Dutch funded Bangalore Urban Poverty Project, involving a wide range of sectors had only mixed success and project managers found that only 50 per cent of the NGOs involved were effective as conduits to the poor. Others were found to be corrupt, promoting a different agenda, or lacking in the capacity to carry out their managerial and financial roles. In a recent review of trends in civil society in Asia, Win (1998) identifies three constraints suffered by the Asian NGO. Firstly, the attitude of governments in the region is described as intolerant, for example, in Japan NGOs have no legal status or funding, and in Malaysia and

China government exercises strict controls over the NGO sector. Secondly, the lack of professional staff is identified as problematic, with voluntary staff needing to "… develop stronger inter-personal and professional skills in order to carry out their various tasks with competence as well as enthusiasm" (p. 105). And finally, the lack of financial resources available to Asian NGOs is identified as a constraint upon their development, with many NGOs relying upon just one or two projects and unable to employ staff with greater expertise in areas such as advocacy, policy reform and coalition building. Capacity building is needed by NGOs not just for the better delivery of services to communities, but also to enhance their capacity to negotiate with donors and government, and protect their non-government status and independence as they come under increasing pressures.

Alternatively, it also has to be recognised that NGOs in some countries and sectors have a wealth of experience of working with communities at the grassroots level and have substantially improved or facilitated the capacity of communities to participate in productive partnerships. This experience needs to be built upon, relating the training needs of NGOs to the identified needs of poor communities with whom they work, to the role that NGOs play in a particular development and institutional context, to their financial status, and to the gaps that they fill and can potentially fill. Capacity building within the NGO sector can be targeted and may include a spectrum of issues ranging from negotiation skills and financial management to improving technical understanding of primary and secondary level infrastructure.

Favela Bairro Programme, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The Municipal Secretariat of Housing (SMH) of Rio de Janeiro was set up in 1993, with programmes to: legalise and upgrade sub-divisions; issue land titles to residents of illegal settlements; encourage the development of empty plots for low-income housing; resettle households living in areas at risk from landslides or floods; stimulate the middle-income housing market through changes to legislation; and completely upgrade the city's squatter settlements of 'favelas'. In its quest to finally eradicate self-help settlements through their integration into the 'formal' city, rather than their demolition, the SMH aims to upgrade nearly all of the city's favelas and many of its illegal sub-divisions by the year 2004. A central means to meet this objective is the Favela Bairro (Squatter Settlement Neighbourhood) programme, aiming to transform favelas into neighbourhoods by installing infrastructure, building access ways, nursery schools, leisure and community centres, creating income earning ventures, and building housing to resettle those households that have to be moved. The programme's endorsement of the non-conventional approach to low-income housing is both an acknowledgement of the failure of previous conventional policies, and of the need to keep the cost of housing programmes low. Indeed, the cost of upgrading per family is one fifth that of building new housing in suburban estates. In total, the programme is expected to cost around US$ 1 billion to the benefit of 1 million people. The four-year first round of the Favela Bairro programme is currently underway, embracing 90 of the city's squatter settlements and their 50,000 residents. Finances are in part provided by a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank, and an average of US$ 2,500 is spent per family. Private architectural firms design each project, with residents' approval of the plans required before work can begin. NGOs and surrounding middle-class communities are also consulted, and the construction work itself is undertaken by private firms contracted for each favela. In addition, a wide array of municipal and state government agencies are also involved in the planning and implementation phases. As such, the Programme appears to take into account the problems of using community self-help labour experienced under previous initiatives, and also demonstrates a cross-sectoral participatory approach to upgrading not previously seen in Rio.

Source: The Municipal Secretariat of Housing, Rio de Janeiro.

The private sector in the community learning process

Although motivated by profit, the involvement of the private sector in partnerships for urban management is also increasing. While on the whole the demands of private enterprise for capacity building are small compared to othersectors, and their access to information and resources is easier, the privatisation of public enterprises and contracting out of service and infrastructure provision to private companies also creates demand for training and information exchanges. In the Favela Bairro project in Rio de Janeiro, private firms of architects bid for contracts to upgrade each of the cities squatter settlements. Detailed plans must be formulated as the basis for their bid to the municipal authorities, and these must have been developed with inputs from the population of their chosen settlement, detailing not just plans for installing infrastructure and services, but also for the development of community spaces and facilities, and provisions for the involvement of CBOs and the population at large in the further and thereby improve the health of their workers and their productivity. In the pilot project, however, many blockages occurred as a result of a lack of understanding of the poor and their circumstances on the part of the private sector, as well as the sector's poor comprehension of the procedures and systems of the Municipal Corporation.

3.3 Who imparts the knowledge?

The role of the disseminator

A pre-supposition of community learning is the need for specialists to transfer knowledge to others. Who conducts the transfer will depend in large part on what information is to be disseminated and who constitutes the target participants. The project Regeneration Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community

development and implementation of their project should they win a contract. In addition, community-based income generation initiatives and informal sector micro-enterprises delivering services such as rubbish collection, small-scale energy production and water supplies are an obvious target for capacity building initiatives (Barry and Kawas, 1997). In the Resource Recovery Programme in Metro Manila, for example, waste materials are bought from households and schools and taken to privately owned junkshops or sorting depots, before being sold on to factories for recycling. The owners of the junkshops are encouraged by the city authorities to form co-operatives, and they now employ over 1,500 collectors or eco-aids who are given green carts, T-shirts, ID cards and literature to disseminate to households and schools. Less successful is the example of Ahmedabad in India where a partnership between communities, NGOs, industry and the Municipal Corporation encouraged industries employing poor people to take some responsibility for the living conditions of their staff,

Techniques (REFLECT), implemented in over 100 villages in Uganda, El Salvador and Bangladesh and involving over 1,500 women and 400 men, operates through the formation of literacy circles by village members. Without the intervention of outsiders in the actual learning process, it is the villagers themselves who develop their own educational materials, for example maps, matrices, calendars and diagrams, thereby systematising existing knowledge and promoting the analysis of local situations. Similarly, the organisation Health Education Adult Literacy (HEAL) in Lahore, Pakistan, places emphasis on village women developing their own messages, resources and structures for sharing health information (Knight and Knight, 1994). Nevertheless, both of these experiences reveal the role of outsiders in providing a framework within which local people formulate and disseminate information. In most cases, however, it is possible

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Resource Recovery Programme, Metro Manila, Philippines

Started by the authorities of the cities and town that make up Metro Manila, the Resource Recovery Programme aimed to reduce the huge amount of solid waste that was polluting the water and air. The Programme started with the setting up of co-operatives of privately owned junkshops or rubbish sorting depots, with one co-operative for each city and town in Metro Manila and each of the 17 co-operatives registered with the Co-operative Development Authority. In total, 890 junkshops are involved in the programme, employing over 1,500 rubbish collectors or eco-aids. These eco-aids are provided with pushcarts, T-shirts and ID cards, and each operates a weekly round on a set route collecting paper, plastics, bottles, cans and car batteries from households and schools. The eco-aids are given seed money from the junkshop owners to buy waste products on their rounds, and when the rubbish is delivered to the junkshops, the owner makes supplementary payments according to the quantity and type of waste handed in. In this way, the eco-aids earn between US$5 and US$15 per day. The waste materials are then sold on to factories for recycling. Public support for the programme was generated through the distribution of flyers printed by the Department of Environment's River Rehabilitation Secretariat, and distributed by the eco-aids, neighbourhood councils and NGOs. These flyers provide information on how to separate waste, what is bought by the eco-aids and for how much. In addition, seminars are organised at strategic schools, with principals and supervisors attending to learn how their schools can participate in the programme, with some schools establishing recycling systems.

Source: The Best Practices Database.

to identify an outside agent who plays a more central role in the provision of the training and information needed, facilitating the needs identification process, and the formulation and implementation of strategies to meet those needs. These agents may be from NGOs, donors, government authorities, the private sector or CBOs, and they will often have been the subject of training themselves to teach the skills necessary for working with poor communities and other stakeholders.

The identity of the disseminator

In working directly with low-income communities, a relationship of trust is required between the learner and the educator in order to achieve effective communication and learning. How learners perceive the information being disseminated in terms of its suitability and its source will be important in determining this trust, but in addition, the status of the relationship between educator and learner will also be key. Where, for example, a community perceives that it has responsibility for requesting or employing the educator, the community will exercise notional control over him or her, a relationship that is different (though not necessarily better), than where the educator is seen as accountable to an outside agency rather than to the community. In addition, the identity of the individual educator will effect the balance of trust. While the training of community activists and their subsequent employment in the training of other community members may facilitate the establishment of trust, in other cases, a community member may be perceived as lacking the necessary experience and credibility, and an outside expert may more effective. In Sri Lanka, to overcome its shortage of extension and field workers, the National Housing and Development Authority (NHDA) began to contract women from low-income settlements to act as assistants in the distribution of cheap credit. At first the employment of these women proved to be effective for they had a better relationship with community members than had NHDA staff, but as official employees of the NHDA, in time the women found their role to be constrained. As a result, some of them formed the Praja Sahayaka NGO in 1990, which played a major role in the establishment of the Women's Bank in Sri Lanka.

The capacity of the disseminator

Not only is the identity of the disseminator key to the learning process, but their capacity to facilitate, negotiate, innovate, manage and administer is also crucial. Again, building upon existing resources is crucial in deciding who assumes the role of trainer and disseminator. For example, in the Cochin Urban Poverty Reduction Project (CUPRP) in India, one initiative involved the construction of

seven twin pit latrines in a slum area. Training was provided by a local building contractor, who oversaw the building of the first two latrines by local residents, teaching them necessary skills such as casting concrete. The remaining five were then built by the residents. The use of NGO personnel in community training and learning is more common, but this raises issues as to the capacity of an NGO to access the required information and to disseminate it effectively. Skills in participatory learning techniques may be lacking, and instead teaching may be overly formal, too abstract or perhaps not comprehensive enough. In the FUNDASAL community housing project in San Salvador in the 1980s, the social workers of the operating NGO did not fully comprehend the objectives or techniques needed by the comprehensive learning process. While some workers concentrated on transferring technical information, others put undue emphasis on political processes and broad socio-economic goals. Similarly, many local governments fail to display the necessary skills to enable them to act as disseminators of information to communities using participatory techniques. In South Africa, for example, the Development Facilitation Act of 1995 calls for municipalities to enter into partnerships with communities to resolve issues surrounding land, housing, service delivery and the environment, but municipalities will need to undertake extensive reform before they are able to carry out the task. In the Cochin Urban Poverty Reduction Project, it is intended that training and capacity building focus not just on communities, but also NGOs and the municipal authorities. Training is to be carried out by a range of local consultants, NGOs and training organisations, each identified for their expertise. Within the municipal authorities, it is intended that senior managers and policy makers are given the opportunity to develop skills and expand their understanding of the poor through exchange trips and formal training, while technical staff will learn skills such as community management participation techniques, facilitation, information exchange, financial planning, contracting, and evaluation and reporting techniques.

From these examples, it appears that the identity of the information disseminator can be important in the establishment of trust necessary for effective learning, though of perhaps greater importance is the ability of the educator to present appropriate information in a suitable format using relevant methods of communication. In most cases, this will necessitate human resource development involving the prior training of CBOs, NGOs, municipal staff and other stakeholders, enabling them to determine how to participate, facilitate, and disseminate, as well as what to disseminate. Perhaps one of the most impressive examples of human resource training is provided by the

Brazilian Institute of Municipal Administration (IBAM), an NGO set up in 1952 to promote the role and cause of municipal government. Currently, through its National School of Urban Services, it provides training to municipal governments in areas such as the formulation and implementation of legislation, design of master plans, upgrading of squatter settlements, public finance, project planning and evaluation, health and education provision, and gender-sensitive approaches to planning. Besides having established networks and training programmes with most of Brazil's 5,000 municipalities, IBAM also works with federal and state governments and other NGOs, both in Brazil and abroad.

3.4 How should information be disseminated?

Modes of learning

According to Eric Dudley (1993), there are three modes of learning: search, discovery and instruction. Search occurs where the learner identifies a problem and seeks out relevant information to solve it. Discovery occurs when information is happened upon by chance, while instruction involves some formal teaching. Although at first glance, learning by search and instruction may appear more powerful, learning by discovery may be incidental but it is not accidental (Brookfield, 1983). In other words, although information is acquired by chance, its subsequent application will be purposeful. It cannot be said that one mode of learning is better than another, for the circumstances of what is to be learned, who is to educate, who is to learn and where will dictate the appropriate method. In the community learning process, however, once again informal and pre-existing ways of learning should be evaluated and built upon. Such opportunities for learning may occur through family interaction, recreational pursuits, and occupational life, as well as through traditional institutional forums that may be used for learning, such as churches or CBOs. Where formal teaching or training occurs, specialist knowledge on technical issues or community organisation and development is disseminated. According to Brookfield (*ibid*., p. 13), "The formal instructional setting comprises situations where an educational agent assumes responsibility for planning and managing instruction so that the learner achieves previously specified objectives … in a systematic ordered milieu". While motivation is often a problem in formal learning situations, the use of concepts, theories, and abstract ideas can enable learners to generalise and apply their knowledge to other situations. However, such formal instruction tends toward the didactic and does not encourage participatory learning,

whereas training procedures based on experiential learning or learning-by-doing may be more suited to learning where practical skills such as latrine or house construction are needed by the poor. Experiential learning has the advantage of producing immediate results that serve to motivate the learner, but it does not impart generally applicable principles. Thus a mixture of both learning-by-doing and formal learning methods may be desirable, but ultimately the needs and wants of the poor should dictate both what is to be learnt and how it is communicated.

Interpersonal communication

When working directly with poor communities the use of interpersonal face-to face interaction for information dissemination is the most common approach to communication, be in a classroom like environment, through learning-by-doing training, or through informal conversation. According to Moemeka (1994), interpersonal communication with communities works best when external actors do not impose solutions on local populations, when development communicators are as closely identified with the local community as possible, and when the communicator is non-directive in approach. During the process of Community Action Planning and Management (CAP) in Sri Lanka, workshops are used as a tool to mobilise and educate low-income communities and to improve the efficiency of housing processes. Trainers from the National Housing Development Authority, from a local authority, or NGO, facilitate groups of residents to identify and prioritise their problems, formulate solutions and drawn up action plans to discussion with the community at large. It is only then that more formal training is provided to meet the identified needs, such as CBO development, land tenure, house building, services and infrastructure development, evaluation techniques, credit, and support for women's organisations. The highly interactive method of learning employed by CAP sees trainers working for the most part as facilitators to the community's own learning process, building on some of the techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), that aim to uncover the views and opinions of people that could not be reliably gathered through formal questionnaires or interviews. Techniques employed in undertaking training needs assessments can include workshops, Listening Theatre, role-play, drawing and video (Eade, 1997), and in addition, peer group exchanges, such as visits and inter-community placements, organised by CBO or NGO networks or other stakeholders can be a means to disseminate information on real and recent experiences, building upon the pre-existing knowledge of communities.

Remote learning and ITCs

Mass media and information technology are also tools for information dissemination and community learning. While centrally controlled mass media can have wide reach, the uptake of their message is limited by the necessarily generalised nature of the information disseminated. In addition, despite the rapid development of mass media under the increasing involvement of the private sector, access to such media is also highly variable in developing countries, and the attractiveness of broadcasting programmes geared to education and learning is also problematic. In India, for example, about 150 minutes worth of educational programmes are broadcast per day (considered to be high), accounting for 12 per cent of total supply time but only 4 per cent of total consumption, and in addition, while 45 per cent of Indians have access to a TV (Mansell and Wehn, 1998), electricity supply can be erratic. Locally controlled and developed media lay stronger emphasis on interaction with audiences, and provide "… direct access and opportunities for target audience participation in the planning, production, and presentation of development messages" (Moemeka, 1994, p. 61), but the resources required for their development prohibit their widespread use in developing countries. Mansell and Wehn (1998) give numerous examples of the increasing use of information and communication technologies (ITCs) to establish interactive networks in developing countries, such as the Link Project (Proyecto Enlaces) in Chile that uses ITCs to connect the teachers of basic and secondary education to improve teaching methods and collaboration between schools. However, the use of ITCs in developing countries is confined mainly to establishing networks of professionals, businesses and governments, with little direct application to low-income communities (with the exception of community radio). In South Africa, just 2.4 per cent of households have a PC, compared to 35 per cent in the US, and among the least developed countries there were just 0.93 telephone lines per 100 people in 1995 (*ibid*.). In addition, sole use of ITCs in the learning process bypasses existing traditional channels for communication, risking the alienation of some of the target audience (for example the elderly).

Whether the learning process is conducted through formal teaching methods, learning-by-doing training, or the use of ITCs, the two-way flow of information appears to be central to effective learning. Local people have better knowledge than outsiders of the context within which new approaches, technologies and skills will be introduced, while outsiders have the expertise and access to resources that enable them to fill the learning gap. In the CAP programme in Sri Lanka, this two-way exchange between locals and outside specialists is illustrated, and it is also shared by a similar project in Indonesia. The Community-Based Housing Development Programme (CBHD) in Indonesia involves the training and use of development consultants to work with CBOs on issues such as community organisation, land development, project management, and financial management and planning. In the community of Penjaringan in Jakarta, for example, the local CBO Kopersup joined CBHD in 1990, and with technical assistance from an NGO and university, it made plans and proposals for a housing project that received funding from the Triguna loan scheme. By 1993, 152 houses had been built under the management of Kopersup, and income generation activities were underway. These examples from Sri Lanka and Indonesia demonstrate that even where the information to be disseminated is technical in nature, interactive learning processes result not just in community empowerment and the learning of non-technical skills, but also ensure that the technical skills and resources given are suited to the community's needs and build upon their existing skills and knowledge.

Community Action Planning, Sri Lanka

During the process of Community Action Planning and Management (CAP) in Sri Lanka, workshops are used as a tool to mobilise and educate low-income communities and to improve the efficiency of housing processes. Trainers from the National Housing Development Authority, from a local authority, or NGO, and initially a two-day workshop is held with thirty to forty community members (of whom 50 per cent will be women) chosen by the participating CBO. Workshops begin with participants walking around their settlement and noting down all the physical and socio-economic problems they observe. These problems are then discussed in small groups and in the plenary, followed by the drawing up of a common list of problems and its prioritisation. Actions and solutions for each of the problems are then discussed and prioritised, with community members having to negotiate and compromise, and finally an action plan is devised, with (individual and collective) responsibilities assigned to the various stakeholders and the costs of the actions calculated. This Community Action Plan is then presented to the all the members of the community for further feedback, and any short-term action that can be undertaken by the community alone will be sanctioned. Finally, those issues requiring further discussion, planning and training will be the subject of half- or one-day workshops, commonly covering topics such as CBO development, land tenure, house building, services and infrastructure development, evaluation techniques, credit, and support for women's organisations. The highly interactive method of learning employed by CAP sees trainers working for the most part as facilitators to the community's own learning process, providing the technical skills they need only during the final stages of the planning process when the knowledge gap is clearly identified.

Source: The Best Practices Database.

4. THE ROLE OF PLACE AND THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY LEARNING AND INFORMATION CENTRES

This section addresses the final element in the community learning process, namely where access to information and training takes place. Reports, impact assessments and research on development projects rarely draw attention to the role of place in either the organisation of a project, or in the meeting of its objectives, however, it is apparent that the use of place within the development process is diverse. Access to information and learning is available in health clinics, community centres, libraries, NGO or government premises, schools, public spaces and private houses. Any attempt to define one type of place (for example community centres set up for formal training activities) as more suitable and valid for learning than another, would ignore the multiple meanings associated with place and the range of uses to which it can be put. Not only can place be used flexibly in the development process, but the examination of community learning initiatives often reveals the use of many places within the same project. The location and type of places used as focal points for information access will depend in large measure on the other elements of the community learning process, namely who the users and disseminators are, and what is to be learnt and how.

Where communities access information

Outside of development projects, informal channels for communication and learning are the means by which the poor access information, as well as through mass media, especially radio and TV. Word-of-mouth communication between neighbours, members of churches, CBOs and parents, can be a powerful means to pass on information on new construction or health practices, for example, or on political or community movements and self-help activities, on sources of credit or goods and services needed for daily survival. Mass media can disseminate development messages on health education for example, or can broadcast special educational programmes, perhaps teaching basic literacy skills. Everyday access to these sources of information appears to assign place and location a small role in the dissemination process, but in many cases, word-of-mouth communication is directly stimulated by membership of place-based groups, such as churches or religious societies, CBOs, schools that act as stimulants for parents to meet, communal TV viewing areas, home-based enterprises, or community shops, eating places and bars. Little is known about the role of place in informal communication channels, but just as pre-existing skills and knowledge should be assessed and built upon by development projects, these channels should also serve as a basis upon which to start and extend the dissemination of information when projects are launched in poor communities.

Most development projects display the use of a variety of places for information dissemination and training, both within and outside of communities. Training forms a key aspect of DFID funded Slum Improvement Projects in India, with a wide range of training at community level of community organisers and municipal staff taking place in a number of locations, each appropriate to the training being delivered. Typically, community halls and balwadis are made available for formal classroom training and workshops, the Development Authority hosts CO workshops, colleges provide vocational training, and neighbourhood level clinics carry out health promotion. Other examples of how place is used in the learning process include the setting up of area resource centres by SPARC in Bombay. Although these may initially be a room in a house or an open public space, where resources are available, premises are specially constructed. Owned and run by community members, they constitute neutral territory for community negotiations, but in order to foster the confidence of CBO leaders, SPARC and its partners also encourage negotiations on government premises. In Colombia, Fedevivienda is a federation of shelter-related NGOs and CBOs, using electronic media for information exchange with urban low-income communities in Colombia, as well as with similar organisations throughout Latin America. Established in 1982, by 1990 Fedevivienda had made communication one of its central strategies, developing bulletins, videos, a radio programme, and an access point or node for e-mail and Internet use. It also provides training in the use of electronic hardware and software, as well as the necessary equipment to its member NGOs and CBOs. While e-mail and Internet access may be set up on existing community premises, the minimal space need to set up a computer terminal has also allowed residents of Bogotá's shanty towns to learn basic computing skills in their homes. Community learning initiatives frequently demonstrate a pattern of making use of existing places, as well as adapting them and producing new premises for learning. In the Favela Bairro Programme in Rio de Janeiro, all the squatter settlements of the city are to be targeted for upgrading over a period of ten years, not just providing services and infrastructure, but also health clinics, nursery schools and income generation projects. In the implementation of the programme, existing premises of residents' associations are used to discuss upgrading plans with residents, works units are set up as bases for project operations, and the reform or construction of public squares and community buildings is

usually one outcome of upgrading. In addition, community buildings in surrounding middle-class neighbourhoods are used to convene meetings to inform neighbouring communities and gain their support.

Community learning and information centres

In contrast to some of the diverse uses of both formal and informal place illustrated above, the concept of community learning and information centres (CLICs) implies the use of formal focal points where low-income community members can access learning resources and information, be they purpose built or adapted from existing premises. The concept also implies the development of centres that can provide access to information on more than one topic, thereby acting as one-stop-shops offering a range of services such as health education, construction, community organisation, and credit information and training. Examples of the CLIC concept in operation included the community development association (CDA) of the Nasriya Project in Aswan, Egypt. The CDA has its own purpose built premises in the centre of Nasriya, and a similar centre is being built for the women's organisation. The CDA building is used for training in health education and computer skills, and is also the location for a clinic, children's and literature clubs, and various cultural activities, as well as being used as a base for several government programmes, such as land and loans programmes and the office of the Aswan East District Social Affairs department. In addition, a number of shop units are also included in the complex and are rented out to bring some income to the CDA, as well as providing services complimentary to CDA activities, such as a pharmacy. In the local community centres or 'gamayas' in Nasriya, the CDA also organises literacy classes in co-operation with the central government General Organisation for Adult up in

Literacy. In Pakistan, the Orangi Pilot Project Research and Training Institute (OPP-RTI) was set 1988 and offers training courses to international agencies, NGOs and CBOs on topics such as community organisation, low-cost sanitation and housing, health education, forestry, credit and micro-enterprise development, rural development, and research and monitoring techniques. To date, over 470 groups with over 4,000 members have been trained at the OPP-RTI, with 70 per cent of these from the NGO sector.

Issues surrounding the use of CLICS in the development process are not, however, straightforward. The relationship between place and function is complex and involves not only practical but cultural and political issues. The use of a particular type of place that may work well in one community may not even be appropriate in the neighbouring settlement, let alone one in a different city or country. This issue of transferability is particularly problematic with CLICs, for while a one-stop-shop offering a wide range of information and resources may prove popular, it may also end in considerable wastage of resources. HUDCO Building Centres in India offer another example of the CLIC concept in operation, set up with the aim of disseminating innovative construction practices to communities, improving the skills of local artisans, creating employment, and providing low-cost materials and guidance on housing construction. Started in 1988, to date over 550 Centres have been constructed in both rural and urban locations throughout India, with over 300 up and running. The establishment and running of the Building Centres has not, however, been without problems. These relate to getting necessary permits, land and contracts, in finding buildings linked to water and electricity supplies, in finding enthusiastic and skilled project managers and technical staff, and in identifying alternative technologies that are suited to the

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HUDCO Building Centres, India

The National Building Centres Movement was launched in India in 1988 by the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO). Based on the success of a centre set up in Quilon, Kerala in 1986, the aim of the movement is to establish a nation-wide network of centres for the dissemination innovative low-cost building methods. The Building Centres Movement essentially facilitates the transfer of technology from "lab to land". It promotes and adapts low energy consuming and low cost local materials and resources in construction. Training is provided for local artisans, enabling them to disseminate the innovative construction techniques and materials to the wider community, and housing guidance and information is also provided direct to the population. By May of 1998, 552 Building Centres in 529 districts had been sanctioned, with 303 fully operational. The centres have been particularly successful in the southern states of India and in Rajasthan, but given the varied cultural and climatic conditions in India, the centres need to make considerable adaptations in construction materials, practices and dissemination methods from place to place. Building Centres can be set up by district, city and state authorities, NGOs and CBOs, as well as construction workers' co-operatives and builders' associations, educational institutions, and professionals and entrepreneurs. Start up funding from HUDCO enables the purchase of premises, equipment, machinery and tools, and also training costs, and various other sources of funding are also available. From assessments of about 80% of Building Centres, commonly shared problems were the considerable time needed to set to management committees and get the centres registered, get possession of land for centres and permission to use it, find premises with utility services or get them installed, and find appropriate staff for management, running and training activities. In addition, it was found that in some locations it was difficult to identify suitable alternative technologies.

Source: The Best Practices Database; HSMI – HUDCO.

needs and location of each site. This example points to the need to ground the establishment of CLICs on detailed assessments of the contexts of individual locations, focusing especially on the needs expressed by communities and the skills and channels for communication and learning that already exist. Where centres are established without taking these factors into consideration, their chance of failure will increase and a disused CLIC can act as a lasting and visible legacy of failure that sends out a clear and negative message to the community and other stakeholders.

Where CLICs are set up, it appears that their location is critical to their success. The OPP-RTI succeeds in training large numbers of people, but it is located is too far from the cities in Punjab and North-West Frontier where OPP is trying to expand its activities. Even the need to travel to another neighbourhood within the same city can prove problematic, for it requires community members to pay for transport, and also may have the effect of reducing confidence as residents enter unfamiliar areas. Travelling may also prohibit the involvement of some sectors of the community, such as children or the elderly. The use of mobile centres, such as HUDCO's Mobile Building Centres in isolated rural areas, may prove suitable for some learning initiatives, though local people need to be trained to provide ongoing support when the mobile centre is elsewhere. In addition, while location is important, access to a centre itself is also key, with opening hours needing to be set according to the needs of a broad range of groups within a community. The actual premises chosen for training and learning activities will also influence the learning outcome. Classrooms, for example, may be associated with learning for children and their design may be unsuitable for participatory activities. Familiar social contexts may prove conducive to learning, such as homes or public spaces, however, they can also prove to be a hindrance due to lack of space, or if the weather puts a stop to outdoor activities. In addition, the SPARC experience in Bombay also shows that the use of places in unfamiliar territory associated with government authorities can act not to intimidate but to instil confidence and empower. The choice of premises can act to prohibit access to some not just because location or the cultural or political associations attached to some places, but also because access may not be possible for the disabled or elderly.

Who actually operates and owns a centre or place will be key not only to its immediate success as a forum for learning, but also to its long-term sustainability. Sustainability of the learning process will be effected by the capacity of those running the centre to ensure that the information on offer changes in accordance with the changing needs of community members. If learning focuses upon just one area, such as sanitation infrastructure, operators must envisage and plan for the fulfilment of project objectives and the need to acquire new expertise to meet new aims. Operators must be both willing and able to seek out new sources of information and skills for its dissemination when needed. CLICs may not, however, be the best forum for disseminating information on all topics, with health clinics, people's homes, building sites or streets being more appropriate for some learning activities. As such, operators of CLICs may also have to switch to more informal learning environments rather than waste resources on centres with limited impact. How a CLIC is institutionalised will be crucial to determining its flexibility. Where they are government or donor operated, a rigid profile may be attached to a centre that prohibits changes to its use and purpose. Where communities or NGOs are responsible for the centre, support will be needed to evaluate its impact and ensure its financial sustainability. Who is responsible for the practical tasks involved in the operation of a place for learning will also effect its impact. If the keys to a community centre built by the municipal authorities remain in the hands of a government official, it is unlikely that a community will perceive the space to be theirs and use it according to their own needs. Responsibility extends beyond maintenance tasks, however, to also embrace the activities that occur within a place. According to Maser, "The success of a sustainable community as an intelligent organisation depends on its sense of and commitment to an ethical foundation for its day-to-day operations" (Maser, 1997, p. 224). Thus the owners and operators of a place used for community learning have a responsibility that extends beyond immediate participants to those who may wish to become involved at a later date.

Financial support is also crucial for sustainability. According to Moemeka, it is essential to "Know *what* to do, know *how* to do it, be *willing* to do it, and have the *resources* to do it" (1994, p. 15, emphasis original). The strengthening of the capacity of communities to negotiate with NGOs, government and donors may be crucial to obtaining human, material and financial resources, and the organisation of communities may serve as a basis upon which they may apply for credit. Where finance comes from finite sources, such as donors, contingency plans should also be made to find more sustainable sources of funding. Enabling a learning centre to become part of a network may be one option, with funding and other support coming from a central node. Alternatively, income generation initiatives conducted on the premises of a CLIC may assist in achieving financial sustainability. It is necessary for CBOs, NGOs, government and donor workers to recognise that the monitoring and management of financial

information is specialist, and training is needed in this area in order to diminish the chances of misuse of resources and maximise the sustainability of a CLIC.

Monitoring the impact and usage of the information disseminated is also important to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the learning process. "Perhaps one of the best measures of success for any programme of support for community organisations lies in the extent to which it leads to a strengthening of internal social relations – this being a means not only to achieve physical improvements but also of reducing the levels of psycho-social health problems suffered by the inhabitants, and achieving a greater social stability in a healthier environment" (Arrossi, *et al*., 1994, p. 72). Assessing how information is applied, the problems encountered, and how it is further disseminated through informal channels enables the communication process to remain dynamic. However, keeping track of what happens when people leave learning centres to apply their skills is difficult, especially in those projects that rely upon one focal point for the dissemination of information to a wide audience. More research is needed into how different types and formats of information are interpreted and used by the poor.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The development of CLICs needs to be set within the overall development of participatory community learning mechanisms. Determining the nature of a particular learning mechanism in a particular context will require identification of the information and skills in demand through participatory training needs assessments and the analysis of existing capacity to meet those needs. Participatory techniques will allow the poor to put forward their own diverse needs, to identify the skills and knowledge already available, to negotiate their priorities, and identify what they want from the learning process. Analysis of existing means of access to information and learning will enable the identification of disadvantaged groups, and an assessment of the unequal impacts of learning and training, as well as the selection of key community activists and groups with whom to work. Once learning and skills gaps are identified and agreed upon, participatory techniques can allow communities and other stakeholders to develop options for enhancing training and learning mechanisms, with the formulation of appropriate delivery mechanisms and plans for their implementation. Within this framework, the identification of existing locations for information dissemination will emerge, and plans can be made for their adaptation or the creation of new places where training and learning can take place in accordance with the overall needs and wants of

community members.

Strategies to design and establish CLICs may emerge from this process of developing participatory community learning mechanisms, and like the other elements of the community learning process, there are no hard and fast rules regarding the types of places used for learning or the best uses to which they can be put. For learning processes to produce the desired outcome of skill and knowledge development for poverty alleviation, learning must occur in places suited to the information being disseminated, catering to the circumstances of the users, the resources of the disseminators, and how the dissemination process is organised. These will vary from community to community, and as such the role of place and viability of community learning and information centres will differ widely. What is apparent, however, is that when places are chosen in inaccessible locations, when they are ill designed, poorly operated, restrictive, and unsustainable, efforts to enhance the community learning process will be not be successful. These considerations are crucial to the establishment of CLICs. The setting up of sustainable CLICs will demand the careful choice of appropriate and accessible locations and premises, designs that allow for participatory as well as formal learning activities, the ability of communities to identify with and assume responsibility for centres, management operations that allow for flexibility, access by a range of community groups, use of centres in an ethical manner, financial sustainability, and above all the meeting of the varied needs of communities for skills, training, education and information.

To ensure their successful operation, the establishment of CLICs should be part of an integrated approach to community learning to promote a variety of community learning mechanisms that cater to the needs of communities, disseminating information and providing training of both a technical and non-technical nature. Set within the overall context of the community learning process, places where information exchanges occur will to a large extent to dependent upon who is participating in the learning activities, what information is being disseminated, how participants learn and who from. In turn, these factors are also affected by each other and by the range of places available to serve as learning forums. Thus it becomes apparent that in researching or designing community learning projects, a holistic approach must be taken that encompasses all the elements of the learning process and the connections between them. Given the limited amount of research conducted into issues surrounding place in the learning process, a call is made for further examination of how place is currently used, and the feasibility of establishing community learning

and information centres to act as comprehensive learning facilities. In addition, in adherence to the principle that existing learning mechanisms and channels should be built upon and strengthened, further research is also needed into the role of place in informal communication processes.

It is only through integrating analysis of the role of place into the learning process as a whole that greater understanding of the skill and knowledge needs of communities and other stakeholders can be understood. The identification of what communities both need and want from learning processes may lead to the establishment of community learning and information centres to act as comprehensive forums for the development of skills and knowledge. Provided on a sustainable and appropriate basis, CLICs can contribute to learning strategies that aim to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable human development. They can provide a sustainable focal point of access to information that improves practical and technical skills of the urban poor, and act as a means to their individual and collective empowerment.

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