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SPARC HOUSING EXHIBITIONS

Sundar Burra
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PROJECT PROFILE

Name	SPARC Housing Exhibitions
Location	Mumbai, Kanpur, Hyderabad and many cities in Asia and Africa
Start date	1986 onwards
Sectors involved	The community-based organisations Mahila Milan and the Nation Slum Dwellers' Federation, together with the non-government organisation, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres, first devised the idea of housing exhibitions and have since organised many. Also involved have been municipal, state and central government officials in India and other countries, and also NGO and other professionals from Asia and Africa.
The initiative	Housing Exhibitions are the name given to events organised for large numbers of people from poor communities, local NGOs and government bodies. At these 3 or 4 day events, plenary and group discussions and presentations take place around issues related to housing, land tenure and basic services. Much discussion centres round life-sized model houses that are made using innovative and cheap materials and designs, made by the poor for the poor.
CLIC processes	SPARC Housing Exhibitions act as forums for information exchange, lobbying and the dissemination of innovative ideas that can improve access to housing, secure land tenure, and essential services. They frequently act as a forum for negotiation within and between communities, and between communities and government officials. They also act as a means to exchange experiences and stories, often between countries, as well as communities. Finally, housing exhibitions act as a vehicle for the celebration of the achievements to date of community and NGO organisations and movements.
Lessons learned	Through the organisation of various housing exhibitions, community groups are shown that the technical aspects of house design, building and costing are not difficult to understand and master, and that with confidence, communities can find their own solutions to housing problems. The exhibitions have also serve to teach government officials that there is an alternative paradigm for solving the problems of the urban poor in which the state acts to facilitate access to land, infrastructure and housing finance.

SECTION I BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 The Actors

Most closely involved and associated with housing exhibitions in India are the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), the National Federation of Slum Dwellers (NSDF) and Mahila Milan. In addition, other CBOs, NGOs and government bodies local to the area where an exhibition is held will also become involved in the organisation of an exhibition, as well as participating in the event itself.

The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres

The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) is an NGO established in 1984 by a group of professionals who had previously worked with more traditional and welfare-oriented NGOs in the neighbourhood of Byculla in central Mumbai. Previous to forming SPARC, much of the work of the founder group was with the pavement dwellers of the Byculla area, and once established, the women pavement dwellers became SPARC's main constituency. These women had repeatedly born the brunt of demolition of their homes and loss of their meagre belongings, and observing the failure of welfare-oriented NGOs to deal with the demolitions, SPARC instead began to work with the women pavement dwellers to better understand the effects of the demolitions and how they could be countered. Training programmes were then established so that the women could learn how to survey their own settlements and start to use the data generated to campaign for land. From this work, the CBO Mahila Milan was formed and its alliance with SPARC was expanded through the addition of the National Federation of Slum Dwellers. Within this alliance, the role of SPARC is to design and develop strategies to enable its partners to meet with and make demands of government agencies. In addition, it also performs administrative tasks and raises funds needed for its work. Currently operating in over 20 cities throughout India, the SPARC, NSDF and Mahila Milan Alliance now works with similar NGOs and CBOs in Asia and Africa, helping to build up effective networks in Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, South Africa, Namibia, Kenya, Nepal, and Indonesia.

The National Slum Dwellers Federation

The National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) is a CBO whose membership is made up of slum dwellers. Established in 1974, NSDF has a history of organising the poor against demolitions, as well as attempting to secure the basic amenities of water, sanitation and such like for the urban poor. While the Federation was initially a male slum dwellers organisation, in 1987 it began working in partnership with Mahila Milan and SPARC, and since then the number of women members has grown, with around half of NSDF's community leaders now being women. Within its alliance with SPARC and Mahila Milan, NSDF is mainly responsible for the organisation, mobilisation and motivation of slum dwellers, as well as working abroad to strengthen similar federations of slum dwellers and homeless families in Africa and Asia. Membership of NSDF remains restricted to slum dwellers, and currently the Federation spans 21 cities in 5 states in India.

Mahila Milan

The third partner of SPARC/NSDF alliance is Mahila Milan (Women Together), a CBO made up of collectives of women pavement and slum dwellers whose central activity is the operation of savings and credit activities. Set up in 1986, as a result of SPARC's work with the Muslim pavement dwelling women of the Byculla area of Mumbai, the rationale behind the formation of Mahila Milan lay in the recognition of the central role of women in the family, as well as the enormous potential that women's groups have in transforming relations within society and in improving the lives of poor families. Mahila Milan now conducts informal training and support activities, as well as saving and credit groups, and aims to empower women to play a greater role in community management and to work with NSDF on broader policy issues at state and city levels. Mahila Milan thus represents both an opportunity to satisfy the credit needs of poor women and a strategy to mobilise them towards taking a more pro-active role in relation to their own poverty. The stress of the organisation lies not so much on concrete achievements and outputs, but instead on the learning process and the building of confidence among poor women. In the Byculla area, approximately 600 women are members of Mahila Milan, but together with NSDF, Mahila Milan now has a total of over 300 thousand households as members across the country.

1.2 Background to the Problem

In order to understand the development of housing exhibitions as tools of communication and learning in the work of the alliance between SPARC, NSDF and Mahila Milan, it is necessary to look at the background and context of the plight of the urban poor. When SPARC began its work with the women pavement-dwellers of Byculla, it organised a study[1] to better understand the needs and problems of the pavement communities. This study brought out the links between the places of residence of pavement dwellers and their places of work, findings that most pavement dwellers were too poor to afford the costs of public transportation and hence lived within walking distance of their work. In particular, the women of these pavement

[1] SPARC (1985), We the Invisible, First Edition, Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres, Mumbai.

families had to juggle their roles as mothers and as bread-earners, with most women pavement dwellers working in the informal sector in roles such as maids, vegetable vendors, recyclers of carpets, rag-pickers and so on.

Money was always short for them, especially in the event of illness or death of a working male in the household, which would cause a precipitate fall in income. It was found that money-lenders were always on hand, but even though they charged extortionate rates of interest, the seasonality and uncertainty of employment for the urban poor increased their dependence upon these informal sources of credit. Formal banking institutions had their doors closed to these illiterate people with virtually no assets or security of employment. Yet, there would frequently arise the need for lump-sum payments in response to illness, school expenses of children, the purchase of rations[2], or the need to repair their flimsy pavement houses at the onset of Mumbai's torrential monsoon. Yet in spite of these difficulties, the most potent and regular threat to pavement-dwellers was found to be the demolition squads of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai. Until 1996, pavement-dwellers had no rights at all with respect to their houses which were considered to be both illegal and an eyesore by civic authorities. The cycle of demolition and rebuilding would involve enormous expenditure that these families could ill afford. What is more, since the men in these families would usually be away at work during the day when municipal staff would visit, it was invariably the women who would have to bear the brunt and the trauma of demolitions.

The singular role that women play in families in raising children, managing family finances, running the house and performing arduous, time-consuming tasks as well as earning a living have been amply documented in the literature on the subject. Yet their place within the family is subordinate. For example, it is well-known that girl-children and their mothers normally consume less than a proportionate share of food cooked, and their literacy and educational levels are invariably less than that of males. Important decisions are most often taken by males and society discriminates against women in terms of property rights and other legal entitlements. A strong male orientation is evident in India and many other Asian countries. It is in this backdrop that the alliance of SPARC, NSDF and Mahila Milan sought to design a strategy to improve the lot of the urban poor with a specific focus upon women.

Savings and credit activities were seen as an entry point into the community, with women pavement dwellers organising themselves into groups under the umbrella of Mahila Milan, thus beginning the tasks of daily savings and collections. The importance of daily savings was two-fold: firstly, in the informal sector, earnings are on a daily basis and if money from the daily income is not saved, it is usually spent; and secondly, repeated and daily interaction among these women around the issue of saving strengthened the bonds between them. As these groups increased in number and as their bonds deepened, the issues of urban poverty came to the forefront. The absence of land tenure made pavement-families perpetually insecure as their homes were liable to be demolished at any time. While firm figures are not available, it is estimated that there are about 28,000 families living on pavements in Mumbai, and living on the pavement means that there is little access to basic amenities like water, sanitation or electricity. In most of India, there is a policy to provide these amenities only to 'regularised' slums where limited rights have been accorded by the state or municipal corporation. In other words, there was an inextricable link between proper housing and the availability of infrastructure. Since pavement-dwellers were wholly unauthorised, the question of affording them these conveniences simply did not arise, and instead they would have to pay for water, the use of public toilets, or for the purchase of electricity from middle-men.

The urban poor in India and other developing countries cannot get proper housing through market mechanisms because they simply cannot afford to pay market prices. In Mumbai, it is estimated that nearly 60 per cent of the population of 10 million people - including large sections of the lower and middle classes - lives in slums. According to one source[3], there are 550 slums with 192,498 huts on State Government land, 388 slums with 149,498 huts on Municipal Corporation land and 168 slums with 48,801 huts on Central Government land in Mumbai alone. There is also evidence of links between land mafias and speculators, political parties and government officials which conspire to keep land prices high and out of reach for the poor. While the poor cannot afford land, it is not true to say that no land is available in the cities and towns of India where para-statals and government bodies usually own vast tracts. The Indian Railways, the Airport Authority of India, the Port Trusts and the Cantonement Boards - all controlled by the central government - own large areas of land in many urban centres, while Revenue Departments, Development Authorities, Improvement Trusts, Municipal Corporations and Housing Boards are other examples of public agencies which own land. Moreover, governments and public agencies in India have extensive powers over land - for its acquisition through the use of the Land Acquisition Act and for its development through Master Plans

[2] Essential commodities like food grains offered at prices subsidised by the state.

[3] Report of the Study Group appointed by the Government of Maharashtra for the rehabilitation of slum and hutment dwellers through reconstruction (1995), Government of Maharashtra.

and development control regulations. There are extensive powers - both legislative and administrative - which can be used to acquire, develop, determine the user of and allot land for public purposes

Thus, it was apparent to the leadership of NSDF and Mahila Milan that while savings and credit for crises and income-generation were good in themselves, as well as being a stimulus to community mobilisation, the primary objective of their work should be to secure housing of an adequate standard to meet the needs of the poor. With such housing would come water, sanitation, electricity and other components of infrastructure, and these, in turn, would improve health and have the potential of increasing educational attainment as well. Thus, pavement-dwellers would not be satisfied even if demolitions were to stop because pavement homes are small and without basic amenities. Moreover, living on the pavement is also dangerous because of injuries and fatal accidents caused by traffic. Therefore, the aspirations of NSDF and Mahila Milan members were very clear, aiming to secure land, houses and facilities for pavement dwellers.

The developmental paradigm in India has for many years treated people in poverty as beneficiaries of government-sponsored interventions. In the field of housing, for example, State Housing Corporations and State Housing Boards have established norms and standards for houses meant for economically weaker sections of the population in terms of size, design, building materials, technologies, costs and affordability. Under this approach, people's participation is not even envisaged, and even where these programmes target the poor, success in reaching them is extremely rare, with complicated bureaucratic procedures and documentation, lack of affordability and a corrupt administrative apparatus being among the reasons for this state of affairs. Again, in later years, sites and services schemes were introduced in some states, yet even here, the sizes of plots and type designs did not permit creative participation by the beneficiaries themselves. In addition, the physical locations of the housing programmes were determined by the para-statal concerned, without consultations with the people being resettled. Even now, although the housing policies of the central and many state governments assign government the role of enabler of the initiatives of the poor, in fact most states continue this conventional approach of building and distributing finished or semi-finished units to the poor.

The alliance of SPARC, NSDF and Mahila Milan sought to challenge this approach on the basis of their experiences in working with the poor and their organisations. NSDF and Mahila Milan members visited a number of places in India to study existing government programmes and innovative approaches, and they interacted with a whole range of institutions and individuals to understand and analyse the developments on the ground. Over time, they began to understand the strengths and weakness of many on-going programmes, and the alliance established the principle that the state should not do what communities of the poor can do and should restrict itself to what communities cannot organise for themselves. In practical terms, this meant that the state should provide land for the poor and off-site infrastructure like water, sewerage and electricity. Also housing finance would have to be provided through formal institutions at affordable rates, but crucially the alliance realised that organisations of the poor, with a focus upon women, must be centrally involved in any developmental intervention. In relation to housing, this meant that they should be involved in locational decisions and be able to design and build their own houses, and for this to be possible, communities of the poor would have to be trained in house design, have to be exposed to building technologies and materials, and would have to learn how to interact with housing professionals like architects and engineers. To this end, the idea of the housing exhibition was devised.

SECTION 2 THE PROJECT

2.1 Project Objectives

a) To provide a forum for the exchange of experiences and information between poor communities from different cities and countries, strengthening their networks

b) To display model houses designed by the residents of poor communities to demonstrate to others (poor communities, NGOs, and government agencies) their capacity for organisation to solve their own needs

c) To strengthen the links between poor communities and government agencies and change the way their view each other and communicate with each other

d) To draw public attention to the efforts being made by poor communities to improve their access to housing, secure land tenure and basic infrastructure and services.

2.2 Historical Development

In Mumbai, the urge to build multi-storeyed buildings characterises almost every group connected with the housing industry, from government officials, engineers, and contractors, to architects and town planners. Pleading a shortage of land, it is argued that multi-storeyed buildings make a more efficient use of space and more families can be accommodated for the same unit area. Community-designed housing, on the other hand, stresses ground-level and low-rise

structures, catering to the life-styles of the urban poor. For example, many informal sector occupations require ground space, such as places to store carts used for selling vegetables or other goods. High-rise building do not accommodate this need and in addition, increased height leads to increased construction costs as lifts or elevators become mandatory and pile foundations necessary. As costs rise, they cross the limits of affordability for the urban poor, further exacerbated by high maintenance costs. Such costs can mean the difference between the poor staying in their new homes or selling out to higher income groups, an act which often leads the poor to be portrayed as ungrateful or untrustworthy.

The preference of the urban poor for low-rise structures soon became apparent when the members of Mahila Milan and NSDF began the process of assessing house designs and structures that would be appropriate for their needs, should they achieve their aim of gaining access to secure land and services. During this process the Mahila Milan members in the Byculla neighbourhood of Mumbai began to design their own ideal home, and from this emerged the idea of holding a housing exhibition at which the model home could be built on a life-sized scale. Thus, the first SPARC housing exhibition was held in Mumbai in 1986, with the women pavement-dwellers of Byculla being the main participants. Though illiterate, they had acquired a mature understanding of matters relating to housing, such as the costs of building materials, the technologies available, the processes of construction and the variety of design options suited to their needs, aspirations and capacity to pay. For example, the women developed the technique of using their sarees to measure distances and heights for they could not use conventional tools like tape measures.

One of the central features of the model house designed by Mahila Milan was a loft measuring 100 square feet, with the area of the main structure being 180 square feet. Space being at a premium, the idea behind the loft - which could be reached by a ladder - was to permit privacy when more than one generation lived together. Both economics and the joint family system in India dictate that parents and married sons live together with their families, and thus having a loft allows the younger couple to be together above, with the older couple and any children below. This was a remarkable innovation both because it addressed a felt need of the family and its cost could well be absorbed into the limits of affordability. In contrast, public agency-sponsored housing had a single room of 225 square feet without any provision for the younger married couple to have some degree of privacy.

Another important contribution of community-designed housing was the community toilet. In government housing, the room of 225 square feet also includes a toilet, pushing up the price of the house. In contrast, by having community toilets for four or six families, costs were significantly reduced and more living space made available. Also of importance is the tradition in India - with its roots in the notions of purity and pollution that are a defining characteristic of Hindu society - of keeping toilets well away from spaces used for cooking, eating and sleeping. In rural India, for example, wherever toilets are built, they are traditionally outside the main habitation. The persistence of this tradition amongst those who have migrated to towns and cities made some of the inhabitants of government-designed housing use the toilet areas only as storage space, thus having common toilets for a few families together took care of such reservations and brought costs down.

The first housing exhibition was held in the premises of the Byculla Area Resource Centre in Mumbai and several senior government officials, journalists, professionals and NGOs concerned with housing were invited. The exhibition drew several hundred slum-dwellers and pavement-dwellers of Mumbai who saw, for the first time, life-size models of houses designed and built by those amongst them who had undergone a prolonged period of training and exposure visits. Since then, exhibitions have been held all over India and in other countries in Africa and Asia where community groups design their own model houses and build replicas from wood, cardboard and cloth, or from bricks and mortar, or other innovative technologies. Thousands of pavement-dwellers and slum-dwellers from different cities in India and abroad visit these exhibitions and the atmosphere is one of festivity and community celebrations.

Housing exhibitions have thus become means through which the SPARC, NSDF and Mahila Milan alliance reveal to the public announcement the attempts that are being made to find a solution to the housing problems of poor people. They aim to build a consensus in a city as to what the design, the size, the construction materials and the costs of a house for the poor should be. The proposed optimal solution is strategically presented in the form of life-size houses which embody the community's consensus before it is presented to the outside world. Poor people, accustomed to live in structures of 50 or 60 square feet, cannot relate to drawings but do so enthusiastically to house models that you can touch and see and discuss. When these exhibitions are held, they are events that belong to the communities that organise them, and by inviting municipal and government officials, a gradual change in the unequal relationship between slum-dwellers and officialdom takes place. The terms of engagement between these groups undergo a shift and later interaction with civic authorities becomes easier.

Experience has shown that local groups become ready for such exhibitions when large enough numbers of people express collective dissatisfaction with their circumstances and come

together to find a way out. Such dissatisfaction becomes productive when it is accompanied by confidence and belief that community action can change existing arrangements. It is this confidence that spreads amongst the poor when they interact at housing exhibitions. Their capacity is built as newer groups start learning about savings and credit, the role of women, house design and construction. The alliance has found that exhibitions bolster the belief of slum and pavement dwellers that it is possible to get land, to get loans, to work through the rules and regulations and demand a positive response from state agencies. The training and capacity-building of community organisations is thus an important feature of these exhibitions. Those who host the event find their skills being honed in different areas: in handling the logistics of hosting an event for several thousand people who have to be fed and housed; in sharing their understanding of their local context and solutions with visitors; in dealing with local bureaucracies; and above all, in coming together to design solutions. What makes these strategies robust and transferable is that they begin with what women in communities want; they focus upon what is affordable to the poorest of the poor and they demonstrate the power and strength of collective action as against individual effort. Moreover, they are not restricted to rigid formulae but can be adapted to national and local settings and the pace of local processes.

Since Mahila Milan put up four house models in 1986 at the Byculla Area Resource Centre compound, there have been over 50 such exhibitions not only in India but in many parts of the world. The housing exhibition has been replicated and refined as a tool of education, exposure and change within India. In 1993, the exhibitions achieved even wider significance when the Training and Advisory programme (TAP) of the Asian Council of Housing Rights (ACHR) took up the idea, funding exchanges between NSDF and Mahila Milan and the Homeless People's Federation of South Africa. Thus the concept began to be shared with a wider international community, and now housing exhibitions are part of the learning process and used not only in Asian countries but also in South Africa. In 1994, as part of the India-South Africa exchange, the first housing exhibition was held in Capetown, and since then it has become part of the strategy of the South Africa Federation to achieve a dialogue in different provinces of South Africa to obtain tenure of land for informal settlements.

In 1996, a similar exhibition was held at Pnomh Penh in Cambodia and government officials, representatives of donor agencies and the residents of informal settlements in the city all visited the exhibition. The Slum and Urban Poor Federation of Pnomh Penh was energised in its quest for land tenure and basic amenities, and the Pnomh Penh Municipality declared that thenceforth, there would be no demolitions without resettlement. A year later, a group of people living on rubbish-heaps in Manila visited India, attended a housing exhibition in Mumbai in September 1997, and went on to organise an exhibition in the Philippines in 1998. They invited communities from settlements all over the Philippines, marking milestone on the path to getting resources, permission and land for the urban poor.

Since government officials are always invited to housing exhibitions, these events become occasions for them to interact with poor communities outside the straitjacket of their normal relations with the poor. Many officials who sincerely wish to work for the interests of the poor find it difficult to do so within existing government programmes and schemes, and housing exhibitions offer an alternative approach to the problems of poor communities where the initiative is taken by people and state agencies are encouraged to respond. A housing exhibition in Hyderabad in July 1999 was attended by officials of the Slum Board in Bangalore and they were so enthused that they offered the Bangalore Slum Dwellers Federation a key role in their housing programmes. Also an earlier housing exhibition in Pune was the spur for a pilot project of slum rehabilitation, proving the impact that exhibitions can have and the potential for that impact to be replicated both in India and abroad. Box 1 presents a more detailed study of a housing exhibition held in Kanpur, an industrial city in the northern Indian State of Uttar Pradesh in November 1998.

Box 1 The Kanpur Housing Exhibition

The idea of holding a housing exhibition in Kanpur arose when Kanpur NSDF and Mahila Milan members visited Mumbai. NSDF in Kanpur had been focusing on issues of community sanitation for over 6 years, and strong savings and credit groups of Mahila Milan had developed, but little attention had been paid to housing. When slum demolitions suddenly began in Kanpur, and the local alliance had to think of housing and land security in a manner they had never done before. Rather than appealing to the state to stop the demolitions, the alliance instead decided to demonstrate to the government what it was capable of doing through the organisation of a housing exhibition.

The federations in Kanpur and Mahila Milan had already been exposed to many national and international exchanges and had developed the capacity to manage large events. It was decided therefore, that the

exhibition would be organised on a large scale, and 43 slum settlements of Kanpur played host. Posters and banners were put up inviting people to attend and indeed well over 7,000 visitors came. NSDF representatives came from the cities of Mumbai, Pune, Pimpri Chinchwad, Panvel and Sholapur in Maharashtra, Bangalore, Kolar Gold Fields and Whitefield in Karnataka, Chennai, Tirunalveli, Madurai, Teni and Tirupattur in Tamil Nadu, Hyderabad, Secundarabad and Raipol in Andhra Pradesh, Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Pondicherry. The largest group of visitors was made up of slum-dwellers from Kanpur itself, and in addition, there were small groups of slum dwellers, NGOs and government officials from cities in South Africa, Nambia, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Nepal and Indonesia. Amongst the Indian officials who visited were the Secretary of the Housing Department of the State of Uttar Pradesh, the Divisional Commissioner from Kanpur, Mr. Durga Shankar Mishra, Vice-Chairman of the Kanpur Development Authority (KDA), the Chief Officer of the Kanpur Municipality, the Duty Project Manager of the Gomti Pollution Project in Lucknow, the Chief Executive Officer of the Slum Rehabilitation Authority of Mumbai, and a senior official from HUDCO, New Delhi,
Mr. V. Swarup, was also present.

The reactions of all to the exhibition were positive. For example, the Divisional Commissioner, Ajay Shankar, declared that the "exhibition was interesting because I learnt something from it about housing for the poor. I understand that slum development programmes depend upon the awareness of women. I will be happy to meet with the local persons in Kanpur and see what I can do about their difficulties.“ Also Atul Gupta, the State Housing Secretary said that he had come to the exhibition to learn about housing for the poor and offered to link up some of the Building Centres run by the State Government with the work of NSDF and Mahila Milan. Most significantly, however, Mr D. S. Mishra, Vice- Chairman of the KDA asked NSDF and Mahila Milan leaders to build 50 houses for the KDA and said that if the experiment was successful, he would try to use the model for the 4,500 houses to be built for slum-dwellers by the KDA. Also, the exhibition in Kanpur also had a significant impact on NSDF and Mahila Milan, with many more people wishing to join local savings groups. In fact, the response from the poor of Kanpur was impressive and by early morning on the first day, there were at least 2,000 adults and children from Kanpur slums at the exhibition. Each of the settlements in the city sent groups of women and children, holding banners with the names of their slums and chanting slogans. This was the first time that an event of such magnitude took place in Kanpur involving organisations of the poor and focusing on their housing needs.

Photographs 1 to 3 show the model houses, the crowds gathered at the exhibition and the Chief Executive Officer of the Mumbai Slum Rehabilitation Authority addressing the participants.

2.3 Current Project Status and Future Prospects

Housing exhibitions now constitute part of the community organisation and dissemination strategy of the SPARC, NSDF and Mahila Milan alliance, as well as that of their partner organisations abroad. Exhibitions are organised, and will continue to be organised, on a regular basis, and often two or three are held each year in different parts of India, Africa and in other Asian countries.

2.4 Project Finances

The financing of housing exhibitions varies from event to event, with the event organisers being given support by SPARC staff to acquire support from sources such as international NGOs, government agencies, and the private sector. Some of that support may be in kind, for example the venue, food or lodging, but considerable cash resources are also needed, especially for travel to the event.

SECTION 3 THE COMMUNICATION, LEARNING AND INFORMATION PROCESS

3.1 Knowledge and Information

The variety of information and skills that are disseminated and transferred through housing exhibitions is immense. Firstly are the technical details of how to construct houses according to

community needs, including appropriate materials, techniques, construction methods, and costing techniques. Secondly, they act as a means to demonstrate the power of poor people's organisations, not only to design and build model houses, but also to organise huge events that attract large numbers of poor people along with government officials and NGO staff. Such events also reveal the strategic role that poor women can play in community organisation and mobilisation. Thirdly, housing exhibitions bring to the fore the main issues that affect the urban poor, such as the absence of secure land tenure, the problems of accessing basic amenities in slums, the ineffectiveness of governmental programmes in dealing with poor people's problems. Thus housing exhibitions offer an alternative paradigm where communities are centre-stage and practical solutions are devised and shared.

Housing exhibitions are important elements in the training and capacity building that take place in community exchanges. Groups of poor people from different cities and countries are at different stages of the learning curve; those with problems come and meet those in the process of finding a solution and are energised by the encounter. Most people feel that only the state can bring real change but when they experience otherwise, their view of themselves as being helpless undergoes change and they develop confidence in their capabilities. Obviously, the model houses of Kanpur may not be appropriate for Pune or Hyderabad, and much less for Pnomh Penh or Bangkok, but people understand the context in which they were designed and built, and apply these lessons to their own situations. Even if there is no magic formula that works everywhere, the solutions that people devise depend upon their resources and constraints and are ultimately, variations of the same theme. During these exhibitions, people are free to take what they wish from what is being offered. In some cases, that may be a new understanding of sanitation or in others it may be an aspect of house design or information on construction materials. There is no pre-packaged answer being disseminated to all but an experience of many strands with freedom to pick and choose.

3.2 Transfer and Dissemination

In some countries, the social and economic distance between officials and the urban poor and NGOs is so great that the poor and their representatives find it almost impossible to get an audience or a hearing. However, when people leave their traditional environment it is easier to achieve interaction in an atmosphere free of the restraints that bind them at home. Barriers become less rigid, access becomes easier and new relationships develop when groups and individuals return home. On a general level, housing exhibitions thus offer a space or channel through which there is freedom to change traditional attitudes between communities and state officials.

Within the exhibitions themselves, various channels of communication are opened. The model houses that are erected allow people to walk in and assess the designs, the construction techniques and costings, providing a talking point for informal conversation. In addition, exhibitions involve speeches by community organisers, NGO activists, and government officials to the plenary audience, and meetings occur between individuals and groups to discuss a wide range of topics that can vary from the planning practical strategies and steps forward, to exchanges of experience and stories. Such meeting can be between residents of the same community taking advantage of the event to meet and discuss what they have seen, they can be between communities from different parts of the same city, from different cities or indeed, different countries, and they can also be between communities, NGOs and government officials. In addition, housing exhibitions produce a range of outputs such as photographs that can be displayed in future exhibitions, reports and articles. In the case of the 1998 exhibition in Kanpur, there was also extensive media coverage by the local press.

Housing exhibitions are thus important occasions in long-term processes of change, with their colour, noise and drama differing from the norm. Held in open spaces, they are conducted in a festive atmosphere with large numbers of women and children streaming in throughout the day. In many ways they resemble an Indian *mela* or fair. The structure provided to facilitate communication and learning is not rigid like a classroom but loose and flexible. As and when the senior government officials arrive, they are taken around the model house, introduced to different local and international groups and invited to share their thoughts with the audience. They are treated with respect but not with the stultifying protocol that is a common feature of public functions in India.

3.3 Learning

The housing exhibitions that have been held in India, other Asian countries and in Africa have revealed that when government officials, NGOs and slum-dwellers from a number of cities and countries attend such events, the learning curve rises sharply. The very fact that so many government officials visit and exhibition and usually offer concrete expressions of support drives home the point that the most effective way of dealing with poverty is by forging partnerships amongst the state, NGOs and people's organisations. For example the HUDCO official in charge of their NGO scheme to provide housing finance to poor groups, commented that the Kanpur exhibition was a nice way of focusing upon issues that affect the poor, saying "We all keep talking about the poor but it requires an event like this to attract the attention of the bureaucracy and it becomes an opportunity to extract commitments from them".

For slum groups from countries where

interaction with state officials is absent or limited, it comes as a revelation to see such partnerships on the ground and the benefits they yield. For example, Laurentius Edhi from the Urban Poverty Consortium, an NGO in Jakarta, Indonesia, commented that during the Kanpur housing exhibitions, “It was an eye-opener to see the NSDF, Mahila Milan, SPARC representatives and government officials all sitting together to deal with issues of slum development. This is the first time we have seen such an alliance”. Thus, new perspectives are developed that determine future courses of action. For example, in apartheid South Africa, state officials were remote and inaccessible but in the newly independent country, the Homeless People’s Federation has developed confidence to lobby the state and its representatives in the quest for equity and justice, using housing exhibitions as an opportunity to do so. Thus, according to Rose Makalone, President of the Homeless People's Federation of South Africa, "These exchanges with Mahila Milan have taught us a lot. This idea of savings and its link with shelter was given to us by Mahila Milan. We have started learning to do things for ourselves and we have realised the strength that unity brings after observing Mahila Milan. Today, we are able to talk to government officials though we are semi-literate. This [Kanpur] exhibition has brought together a large number of poor and homeless people."

House model exhibitions also involve extensive preparations. A suitable site has to be identified and permission from the land-owner sought for the staging of the event. Publicity in the slums of the city has to be given several weeks in advance for people to become aware of the impending event. A consensus has to be forged about the type of houses and the models built. Detailed arrangements for food and boarding for guests and visitors have to be made. Temporary water supply on site has to be organised. The media, government officials and others in the city have to be notified and invited, as do federations of slum-dwellers from other cities, whose travel arrangements also have to be planned. Then the exhibition ground has to be prepared, marquis erected, and light and sound arrangements made. All these logistics challenge the capacities of host communities, but in the process of organising housing exhibitions, communities not only acquire new skills, but also confidence.

3.4 Use and Impact

Housing exhibitions frequently have the immediate impact of stimulating government officials to support the efforts of poor communities to build their own housing. For example, when government officials visited the exhibition in Kanpur it led to the offer for NSDF and Mahila Milan to use the Building Centres of the state government and to the offer by the Kanpur Development Authority of building 50 houses based on the model design. Indeed, the engineers of KDA, though accustomed to standard government buildings, expressed their appreciation of the model house for their innovative design and low cost, and if the first set of model houses to be built for KDA meets their expectations, it is anticipated that this micro-initiative will be mainstreamed into the city’s policies and practices.

An additional and widespread impact of housing exhibitions is the increase in the confidence of poor people’s organisations as they enter into dialogue, and ultimately partnerships, that did not previously exist. In turn the officials, who are exposed to these international gatherings, become more open-minded and sensitive to the plight of those who are poor. For example, as a result of housing exhibitions, a strong rapport has developed between Khan chiefs and the Chief Executive of the Pnomh Penh Municipality with the Slum and Urban Poor Federation. Thus, according to Magar, a veteran federation leader from Mumbai, "When people visit a housing exhibition, they become enthused and start thinking about the possibilities in their own towns and cities. In Pune, after the housing exhibition there was a sharp increase in savings groups in new areas and even the people who came from Ahmedanagar were enthused. Now, we will have to hold meetings in different cities to follow up."

Another impact of model house design and its dissemination through housing exhibitions has been a shift in building regulations in the state of Maharashtra. With the introduction of a loft in the model house, ceiling height rose to at least 14 feet, yet existing development control regulations in Mumbai did not permit rooms with a height greater than 9 feet. Thus the community design challenged the existing standards of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), but in time, the MCGM permitted relaxation of the rule and the Markandeya Housing Co-operative Society (supported by the alliance) in the large Mumbai slum of Dharavi, designed their houses with lofts and rooms of 14 feet height. The creativity of the poor received an official stamp of recognition when the regulations were amended. As a consequence, this policy change was to be of benefit to all others who wished to take advantage of such amendment.

Reflecting on the impact of the Kanpur exhibition, Celine D'Cruz, Associate Director of SPARC, commented that she regarded it "as an evolution in house model exhibitions over the last ten years. If you look at the first house model exhibition in 1986 when Mahila Milan put [houses] up for the first time and to see the same women on the site after ten years was very heartening because the rituals of what you actually have to do be ready for when you are explaining your house design to an outsider is something that Mahila Milan has mastered and I could see them transfer that to Kanpur Mahila Milan women. Things like how to explain the area of your house, the cost of

your house, the design, why full-mala[4], why half-mala, why they need those choices. I saw this as the beginning of training for Mahila Milan in Kanpur". Celine also added that "In Kanpur, the exhibition is like a milestone to boost up the mobilising process for the federation which is still very loose and doesn't have a very clear identity in the city vis-a-vis the government also. For the first time the government was hearing that something like this existed. That there was a forum they could engage with, I think that was a big achievement of this exhibition".

3.5 Replication

The success of housing exhibitions held in India led directly to their being replicated in other Asian countries and in Africa. According to Joel Bolnick of People's Dialogue in South Africa, an NGO that supports the South African Homeless People's Federation in much the same way that SPARC supports NSDF and Mahila Milan, housing exhibitions have an international significance, broadening the rituals and practices that have been at country level to the international level. Commenting on the Kanpur exhibition, Bolnick observed that "Different groups are at different points in their evolution, so what struck me as being interesting in this event was how other federations besides the Indians became interlocutors for the younger groups and this speeds up the process by which they learn the value of the rituals that they were witnessing.... All left there maybe not with a complete understanding of all the dynamics and all the behind-the-scenes activity that the house exhibition involves, or what goals and objectives it achieves, necessarily in terms of the community linking with government. and so on, but they just walked away saying this works, we should carry it out ourselves".

With respect to Namibia, he went on to say, "I think for the Namibians it was a first-time exposure here and ... suddenly they understood the difference between the kind of credit union micro-enterprise approach and savings and credit as a method of mobilising a people's movement. And in that sense it was extremely valuable. The timing was very good because the South Africans themselves had pushed the Namibians in the last year to move away from a kind of traditional NGO driven to a federation model. And immediately after they agreed to stay in the federation, they came here and were given an image of what their relations can actually be. I think that was very effective". Similarly, commenting on the Kanpur exhibition the Associate Director of SPARC said, "I think the other cities when they looked at the scale of what was happening developed a confidence that they could manage the same thing in their own cities. So, of course, Hyderabad immediately said that they want the next exhibition there, Thailand has said they want to have the next exhibition or maybe it could be in Namibia".

SECTION 4 LESSONS LEARNED

4.1 The power of seeing and doing

The housing exhibitions illustrate that while conventional training techniques based on books and manuals and held in classrooms, may have a role to play in community learning, of immense value is the opportunity of the poor to actually see other poor people implementing and devising solutions to their problems, giving them the opportunity to discuss these and learn from each other in a dynamic and informal environment. Thus housing exhibitions provide a powerful confidence-building opportunity for the poor.

4.2 The importance of letting people decide what is relevant to them

One of the reasons why housing exhibitions are effective is because their is no pre-set agenda of what should be discussed and how. They do not specify what is to be learnt or how people should participate. Exhibitions thus give people the space to simply see what others are doing, to take in what is useful to them and to discard what is not.

4.3 The importance of patience

Learning does not happen instantly immediately and the process by which it comes about is complex. New ideas and skills have to be thought through, mulled over, and tried out. Only later do all the problems emerge, thus the most important thing for communities to learn is how to deal with problems.

4.4 The importance of community networks and bonds

Exchanges build powerful bonds between poor communities which are direct, bypass professional control, and develop a life of their own beyond schedules and project parameters. Participation thus leads to control and constitutes a significant step away from external control of community development.

4.5 The need for professionals to relinquish control

Many professionals, be they from government or non-government bodies, are uncomfortable with forms of community learning in which the outcomes are open-ended, and in which their role becomes secondary. Nevertheless, in order that community learning have maximum impact, professionals should not assume control of learning, communication and dissemination processes.

[4] A mala in Hindi means a loft.