

Sanchal Foundation Annual Report 2010-2011

The Sanchal Foundation was set up to promote, foster, aid and assist research for the extension of knowledge in the fields of natural, social, and applied sciences and allied fields. It was mandated, amongst other things, to give awards, scholarships, fellowships, and grants for eliminating poverty, developing education, improving working and living conditions, and promoting health, as well as to organise lectures, symposia, seminars and publish periodicals, books, journals, and magazines for this purpose. As in previous years, the Foundation focused much of its activity through the agency of the Hazards Centre, which had been specially set up by the Foundation to cater to the professional and informational needs of communities in distress. In addition, the Foundation was also able to make some contribution on the issues of human rights, environmental degradation, mutual learning, and women's empowerment by offering small fellowships to individuals active in these fields. The following gives an account of the major activities conducted through the financial year beginning on April 1, 2010 and ending on March 31, 2011.

Summary of Outcomes

Previous years' research on the Delhi Commonwealth Games, the National Urban Renewal Mission, the Urban Right to Work, and the 74th Amendment have begun to bear fruit in this year, giving rise to the understanding that it takes time for events to unfold and for different stakeholders to realize the importance of the Foundation's work. In addition, activities have significantly spread out in a number of cities over a range of issues ranging from poverty alleviation to basic services, housing, planning, transport, food, identity, health, and safety. Thus, some novel ideas have emerged about how issues and places can be interlinked, and the focus has moved away from intensive work in Delhi. As a corollary to this, the community groups with whom the Hazards Centre has been engaged in the last few years appear to have acquired a confidence and assurance to handle their own issues and refer to the Foundation's researchers only when needed. A good potential is emerging for these Delhi groups to act as resource pools for assisting organizations in other cities.

There has been much greater engagement with government agencies of urban development, housing, poverty alleviation, labour, transport, social welfare, sports, water supply, sewerage, and planning, in different cities. The greater experience in preparation of pamphlets, posters, and presentations has also enabled the researchers to reach out and the documentation has been appreciated. It has not been possible to renew the Fellowship program in Delhi, which was so valuable last year, but there have been efforts to obtain independent funding for community initiatives and this has contributed to rebuilding networks, although the absence of the earlier federation, for which the Hazards Centre was acting as the secretariat, is still keenly felt. Concerns remain about the possible dependency impacts of this funding role though. The new challenges that are emerging are related to sustainable livelihoods and building alliances across issues and groups in various urban settlements as the key elements of participatory urban planning and governance

Governance

Research

Against the target of 9 studies for the year, the Foundation's researchers have completed 26 studies, mainly through community initiatives. The themes have covered planning models, the Commonwealth Games, resettlement policies, the impact of higher resource use on urban environment (including climate change), drinking water quality, sustainable transport modes, problems of para-transit workers, forms of organisation of the urban poor, performance of service providers and policy alternatives, urban renewal, occupational health and safety of unorganised sector workers, global legal provisions for the right to work, and urban livelihood generation. 35 student volunteers interned through the year and 19 institutional interactions took place to support the research activity. Of particular interest to the process of participatory research was the linkage that emerged between livelihoods, services, and shelter, as seen by the community groups themselves.

Documentation and Publication

While 24 reports were prepared in place of the 9 that were planned, these base studies and reports led to the publication of 9 booklets, as well as 22 pamphlets, and 6 books. These represented the documentation of community efforts and aspirations as well as how they were intervening in governance and obtaining their entitlements. These publications were widely disseminated in all the cities where the Hazards Centre was functioning and the participatory evaluation at Nagpur in 2011 indicated that they had been very effective in communicating ideas and experiences. Most of this has been placed on the website that was redesigned this year and the volume of electronic exchange of ideas is increasing, although, since the net is not available widely at the community level, the access by grass-roots groups is still limited through the net, and dependent much more on actual distribution, mainly by hand.

Capacity Building

The Foundation's staff participated in 154 seminars through the year, and 31 trainings with urban development groups and activists. Unlike previous years, there was significantly less activity in Delhi, where local groups seem to have now become quite competent to handle their own issues with limited assistance from the Foundation. The researchers also facilitated 521 applications under the Right to Information Act, mainly in Delhi, through 18 training workshops and 12 public hearings, resulting in 27 advocacy meetings with the concerned authorities. These advocacy meetings were mainly demanded and led by the community groups themselves, with the Foundation's researchers providing the necessary technical inputs as and when required. Hence, the capacity building work of previous years on the RTI is paying clear dividends now. In addition, there were 12 public meetings on the 74th Amendment, supplemented with 7 cultural events, and 7 conferences. The encouraging signal is these activities have spread beyond Delhi into the non-metro cities also.

Follow-up work continued on the previous years' initiatives on the National Urban Renewal Mission, with two consultations with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. The Ministry has promised to call a national meeting soon and this will further expand the opportunity to continue to reach out to the 32 other cities where work expanded during this period, mainly on issues of shelter, livelihoods, and services. However, it is apparent that it will not be possible for the Foundation's researchers to cover such a large territory out of Delhi, so a measure of decentralisation has to be planned for. One of the measures for decentralisation in Delhi experimented with last year was the support offered to 5 Community Fellows. However, this year the existing Fellows could not sustain the activity at an individual level and sought support for the groups with whom they were active. Hence, in the current year, the Foundation tried to facilitate the funding support to some of the groups. 12 such initiatives were identified, funding was successfully negotiated with agencies for 4, and work continues to find support for the remaining 8.

Media and Communications

The annual provision for 9 press releases was exceeded with 14 being put forward, and there were 7 media consultations. The effort in propagating alternative modes was also heartening with 5 audio-visuals, and 21 presentations and 7 cultural events on the changing nature of the city and what community organisations could do to assert their own vision of change. The preparation of visual display materials was satisfactory in respect of posters (34 against 7 planned); but only 3 newsletters were published (instead of 12) because the responsibility for the secretariat of the Delhi alliance of organisations, referred to earlier, was taken over by another institution during the early part of 2009 and the alliance itself has now become dysfunctional. This has been an impediment in the widespread dissemination of information, and is an area which needs to be further explored and analysed in future.

Environment

Occupational health

All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA) had approached Hazards Centre in mid-2009 to undertake a baseline study on the environmental and occupational health impacts in six different cottage industry clusters in Rajasthan, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. A follow-up study was

taken up to conduct detailed research in *Ikat* weaving in Andhra Pradesh. The project began with secondary research on the production process of *Ikat* manufacturing, various stages in tie-and-dye, and weaving, and their associated environmental and occupational hazards. This secondary research was followed by primary research through visiting the clusters, documentation of the processes involved, assessment of probable health hazards and environmental impacts. Various water and effluent samples were taken to check the level of contamination in the ground water. A total of 106 artisans were interviewed to get general information, health histories, prevailing illnesses and accidents. Various tests were carried out with simple low-cost equipment to check the occupational health status of the artisans.

The findings indicated that many of the artisans experienced deterioration in their health as they grew older in their occupations into the middle years. Very few of them had a lung function that would be considered to be normal for an adult. The longer the period of work the more was the impact on muscle tone. Many artisans working for 10-30 working years reported body pain. Other reported symptoms were eyesight strain, deafness, cough, respiratory distress, low appetite, and insomnia. There was also impact on the environment because of release of waste waters containing Cobalt, Nickel, Cadmium, Lead and Chromium. Hence, recommendations were made for use of non-toxic materials and processes, rotation of work patterns, periodic medical check-ups, separate places for dye mixing, colour boiling, degumming, etc., and the design of suitable tools. A report on occupational health hazards and environmental impact of the *Ikat* home based crafts in Andhra Pradesh has also emerged as part of this study.

Sustainable Transport

The Bus Rapid Transit System in Delhi is designed to provide separate spaces for pedestrians, cyclists, hawkers and vendors along with a separate bus lane. It, therefore, supports the modes that produce least per capita carbon emission, the usage of which leaves behind a lower carbon footprint as compared to private motorised vehicles. In this context the Foundation took up a project on sustainable transport to reflect the rights of commuters with respect of road space used and carbon emissions contributed by different sections of commuters. For this a study was conducted to estimate the carbon-footprint of different modes of transportation and it was computed that the difference in the carbon emissions of motorised and non-motorised means of transport was phenomenal. Various campaign materials were prepared in the form of posters, stickers, caps, and pamphlets and distributed widely along the length of the corridor. An audio-visual was also prepared as part of the campaign and a couple of cycle rallies and painting competitions were conducted along the corridor.

However, while discussing these materials with separate user groups, such as women, waste-pickers, pedestrians, cyclists, hawkers and vendors, and auto drivers, the research team also became aware of their perception of the road as a venue for livelihoods. Surveys were also conducted with the help of student interns to assess the user satisfaction and the recommendations that they gave for improvement of the corridor making it more inclusive. Later, mapping of the route was carried out to study the facilities and problems on the corridor. What came to light was the gap between what the planners thought of road design and what the actual needs of the people were. A national conference was then organized involving different cities where the BRTS is either operational or planned. The discussions clearly identified car-centric policies to be the root cause of marginalisation of public transport, non-motorised modes, negation of the needs of different road users, and the alternative uses of road space like livelihood, recreation, protest etc., and the need for a “car-free” city campaign.

Others

The Foundation was able to take up a few other activities as and when the demand arose. Thus, it completed a study of drinking water quality from different sources in Delhi. This study demonstrated that most of the water supplied in the city was not fit for drinking and the findings were widely disseminated through the media, leading to *suo moto* notice and strictures on the Delhi Government and the Delhi Jal Board by the National Human Rights Commission and the Central Information Commission. A further study on urban mobilisation by different networks in six cities was also completed providing insights into the nature of urban renewal and citizens’ responses to the impact of

such renewal. In addition, a monograph was completed on the impact of climate change in urban areas – a subject on which there has been little material available so far.

The civil strife in Sri Lanka had its repercussions in India with several journalists seeking refuge in India as they were persecuted by the authorities there and the environment was not conducive to the maintenance of free speech and liberties. Hence, the Foundation undertook to facilitate safe homes and a resource centre for these journalists in exile. The resource centre became a very useful facility for conducting research and documentation into the state of affairs in Sri Lanka and how it impacted on India. The exiled journalists made extensive use of the centre before they eventually returned to their native country. The Foundation was also able to contribute to the empowerment of a women's group in the resettlement colony of Bhalaswa, which took up issues of food security, water and sanitation, services such as education and health, working and living conditions, and made extensive and innovative use of the Right to Information Act to obtain as well as challenge government data on all these aspects.

Administration

Evaluation

In comparison with the performance in 2009, there has been a decline in 2010. This has partly been because in 2009 there was the excellent performance by the Community Fellows who creatively extended many activities in collaboration with the community groups in Delhi, and the Fellowship programme ceased in 2010. But, in addition, the Hazards Centre also ceased to play a pivotal role in Delhi in 2010 and extended its assistance to groups in other cities. At the same time, it could be recognised that the Delhi-based groups have now become capable enough to carry on their work without much assistance and, therefore, their independent activity will no longer reflect in the records of the Foundation.

The participatory evaluation in Nagpur, attended by 80 participants from different cities underscores the qualitative dimensions of this assessment, with a visible divide between the participants from Delhi and the others. The consensus was that the communities in Delhi had learnt to solve the problems they were seeking to address and were willing to share their experience with the others. Their perspective too had changed and they were able to see the linkages between different issues and the need to come together with other organisations. Where older organisations were unwilling or unable to take up issues, new organisations had developed – often from within the community itself. The ability to innovate with instruments like the Right to Information Act, the Right to Food, the proposed Right to Work, and the 74th Amendment were also explicitly mentioned. The overall assessment, therefore, is that the qualitative aspects of community mobilisation, capacity, innovation, and self-reliance have begun to emerge on fairly stable foundations.

Infrastructure

Sufficient office space was available with utilities, maintenance, and equipment for 3 programme managers, 7 researchers, and 2 administrative and support staff. This level of research staff is somewhat less than what was proposed and again, as in last year, the Hazards Centre needs strengthening in this respect. The earlier group of experienced researchers began leaving in 2008. Since then new researchers have been recruited and have gained experience through their work over the last two years. The critical challenge now is to retain these researchers who can guide and independently carry on the work, particularly in view of the dominant attraction of academic work and career paths. It continues to be difficult to find adequately competent and committed researchers even though the Board has again raised emoluments. 5 new researchers were recruited in the year, and there were 6 internal trainings and 4 exposure visits to quickly build up the skills of this relatively young and new team.

There have been no significant changes in the Board. The diversity of personnel has been maintained in the Board and the researchers, even with the induction of five new researchers. At the level of the community Fellows, the composition was even more diverse with a significant increase in the number

of people from socially and economically weak backgrounds and this is likely to continue as the Foundation is able to facilitate funding for them and their organisations.

Finances

In the year under review the Foundation raised grants and donations of roughly Rs 64 lakhs from foreign donors and under Rs 3 lakhs from local donors. Since there was an unspent balance of Rs 63 lakhs carried over from last year, the Foundation was able to spend over Rs 97 lakhs in the current year and carry forward an unspent balance of about Rs 31 lakhs. Expenditure on human resources was roughly half of the total while administrative expenses constituted only 6%. The major donors were Ford Foundation, South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Christian Aid, All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association, Climate Works Foundation, and Action for India's Development. In the year under review the Foundation has been able to generate almost 15% of its funds from the sale of publications and allied research work. It has also been able to retain a position of respect amongst donors because of the depth and range of its activities.

For sustainability and independent functioning of the Foundation, it was proposed to generate more funds from consultancies, assignments, sales of publications and audio-visual media, and donations from the general public and this year the Foundation was able to reach out to a wider audience through meetings, sales counters, and public appeals, as also through consultations. Much more work still needs to be done in these areas and it is also imperative that the activities of the Foundation be decentralised away from Delhi in order that its outreach increases. In addition, the desirability of formally associating with an academic institution of repute to improve the quality of research as well as be able to retain young and dynamic researchers who desire to improve their career paths through acquiring academic degrees, is being debated. These are new challenges which the Foundation will have to face in the coming years. Overall, these are welcome developments that will have significant impact on the future growth and work of the Foundation.

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