

Sanchal Foundation

Annual Report

2013-2014

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 to give awards, scholarships, fellowships, and grants for eliminating poverty, developing education, improving working and living conditions, and promoting health, organise lectures, symposia, seminars, and publish periodicals, books, journals, and magazines. As in previous years, the Foundation did much of its activity through the Hazards Centre, specially set up to meet the needs of communities in distress. The Foundation also continued its work on governance, environment, and labour but, once again as in last year, this year the projects continued to converge into a concept of livelihood-centric development. Hence, this report is an account of the project-wise activities conducted by the Foundation in the financial year beginning on April 1, 2013 and ending on March 31, 2014.

Challenges of Urban Livelihoods and Governance

This project, supported by the Ford Foundation, came to an end this year with a nine-month extension. The activity spread even further to 40 cities and towns over this year, with requests for assistance coming in from many groups. 25 participatory research studies, 59 workshops, 47 seminars, 12 Right to Information trainings, 200 applications and 45 public hearings, as well as 51 public meetings on the 74th Constitutional Amendment with 2 conferences on the subject, and 3 exposure visits far exceeded all the targets that had been originally set. They resulted in additional reports, booklets, pamphlets, books, and posters being published with more visual exhibits so as to reach out to a wider audience than anticipated on multiple urban issues including those of railway children, food security, space for vendors, community managed sanitation, water privatisation, contract labour, sustainable economic activities, and self-built housing. The unique thing about all this activity this year was that many of the community groups contributed a lot from their own resources.

There was also significant mobilisation in this period around the idea of participation in development planning, with the 74th Constitutional Amendment at its centre and several groups began to realise the potential of this form of democratisation, demanding that policy makers meet and directly negotiate with them. Trainings in the Right to Information Act also took a new and unexpected turn in this period as community groups began asking for information on how to analyse and use the data they were accessing under the Act, as well as how to counter the official data with data generated from participatory surveys of their own. As a result, many more research studies were generated in Delhi as well as several other towns and cities, and many more internal training workshops had to be organised, especially with the Community Researchers who were grappling with new situations in their communities with respect to

demands for appropriate shelter, drainage, sanitation, water supply, food rations, electricity charges, eviction, and livelihoods.

In Delhi, a new aspect of the debate on livelihoods being at the centre of the planning process emerged with the demand for writing a history of the city from the point of view of workers. Another challenge has emerged out of the discussion on climate change leading to an exploration of how certain livelihood practices are superior to others in the context of lower carbon footprints. And the effort to bring together a coalition of labour groups has finally borne fruit with the emergence of at least two large networks debating on a universal Right to Work and demanding entitlements of living. The alliance in Delhi and other alliances in the dozen other cities with which Sanchal researchers are in regular contact have become stronger, and a national alliance on urban governance is slowly emerging. It is still weak in terms of details but the debate is lively and as more and more urban groups join there should be considerable work expected in the future for both clarifying ideas and coming to a common consensus at the grass roots level, as well as bringing policy-makers and elected representatives to the table for negotiations and interventions.

Some setbacks also have been identified. For instance, the States still show little inclination to implement the 74th Constitutional Amendment and elected representatives continue to remain unaware of its provisions. The Right to Information Act continues to be undermined by sections of the administration and by appellate authorities, although the National Campaign is once again active to protect it. Sustainable livelihood as the focal point of urban planning has not yet been welcomed by policy makers, who remain committed to the idea of making cities investment destinations for increased economic growth. So the Foundation will carry these lessons and setbacks in the future to define how to design communication tools and methodologies that will accelerate the dissemination of ideas and experiences in participatory urban planning in a much wider social and geographical arena. Also much more needs to be done to collectively analyse and learn from the past experiences of failure and the emergence of a general atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion.

The Foundation also has to rethink the size of its team and scope of its work. Firstly, a dozen researchers spread across 16 States is just too unmanageable. We have tried to address this by supporting local Community Researchers but they still require information, research and training support from a central node. Secondly, if these researchers are externally supported then it increases feelings of resentment and inequality amongst the other members of the community. Hence, it may be necessary to experiment with collective activities that both generate incomes as well as serve social purposes (such as the community kitchens described later). Thirdly, the demand for appropriate knowledge creation and dissemination is huge but the methods for both have become more complex with the advent of a host of electronic media. Thus, systematic research is necessary to see what is most effective for different audiences. And fourthly, the weakening welfare functions cannot be tackled by local “best practices” alone but will require larger networks to articulate a different vision of “development”.

Sustainable Livelihood Practices, Urban Transport and Climate Change in India

As reported last year, this project is supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and part of our attempt to bring together several themes under the umbrella of ‘best practices’ for countering

climate change coming from those groups who are already living within a sustainable level. The project was designed on the basis of an earlier pilot that yielded four valuable lessons: (a) the urban poor are living within sustainable limits; (b) they are under severe stress because of immediate needs; (c) the research has to match their organic learning pace; and (d) linkages are better made when issues are quantified. While the Foundation tried to reach out to over 30 cities in this year and trainings were held within 22 cities, while there were 10 workshops, research studies were actually undertaken in only 4 cities (Delhi, Visakhapatnam, Kolkata, and Jaipur,) in collaboration with local community groups. These have been converted into pamphlets, posters, and booklets that are being disseminated to assess how much they are used by the local groups. In the coming year the process will be extended to Meerut, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmadabad, Bhubaneswar, and other cities where initial consultations have already taken place.

In these cities we are trying to deepen an understanding how livelihoods, transport, and climate change are linked. Thus, in Delhi, Kolkata, Jaipur, and Visakhapatnam the issues of mass transport and space for non-motorised modes are very much live concerns and are linked to displacement and loss of livelihoods. The Delhi groups are intervening to protect the single Bus Rapid Transport corridor from demolition through studies that show that the corridor has both made travel easier for bus commuters, cyclists, and pedestrians, as well as reduced congestion and pollution. In addition, the demand for space for non-motorised transport and service providers is also emerging in charters presented to political parties. Kolkata has a vibrant campaign to protest against the banning of non-motorised transport on the roads of the central city as it affects the livelihoods of a host of petty service providers in the informal sector. In Visakhapatnam, the organisation of slum-dwellers is contesting the Municipality's project of placing them in G+3 flats with its own plan for ground-level plots so that they can continue with their livelihoods.

An attempt was made through this project to bring together many of the interested groups at meeting held in Nagpur for exchange of experiences. At this meeting a common understanding emerged of how urban change was adversely impacting on livelihoods and resource access. It was decided that every group would contribute written notes and meet again after three months with many more groups for a larger experience-sharing event that would lead to strategies in common. Some public meetings and press conferences have also followed as these groups tried to share their understanding with a wider audience. And a perspective paper is under preparation that will develop a theoretical understanding of why climate change occurs, how it can be mitigated and adapted when lifestyles change to the level where they can be sustained, and why it is the lower classes who have this sustainable lifestyle. This will also be linked to the research studies that have been undertaken in the different cities. This project is supporting the work on urban governance and livelihoods from an ecological direction.

Reports on Five Cities

As part of a consultancy offered by Citizens Rights Collective (Action Aid), preliminary meetings were held in Jaipur, Lucknow, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Delhi with the local groups there which were already collaborating with each other. Sanchal researchers identified their specific and

collective concerns, which were around investments, services, housing, transport, and reforms. Our team then prepared docketts for each city containing media reports, the status of reforms, and the status of service and infrastructure projects taken up under city development plans. The status reports contained information on the nature and source of investments, funds released, performance of projects and reforms, state of completion, and reports in the media that commented on the usefulness or otherwise of these projects. These docketts were then given to each city group. Each group used the information contained in these docketts to conduct field studies on selected projects and how user groups are affected. The meeting of all the groups at Nagpur, referred to earlier, helped them to share their draft reports and experiences with each other. The four areas of common concern that emerged were housing, informal sector livelihoods, water and sanitation, and public transport. This is another step forward in building an alliance of groups to examine urban renewal from the perspective of livelihoods.

Community Kitchens

Six community kitchens were established in the last financial year with support from Jamsetji Tata Trust. The project was completed this year and the Foundation's researchers carried out a detailed study of all six to understand what were their strengths and weaknesses. Several interesting features came out of the study. For instance, it was found that the kitchens had become a place for people to not only eat food but also exchange experiences. They were providing employment but it was important that the kitchen staff should be local persons from the same background as the clients and paid at least the minimum wage. If grains and fuel gas could be purchased from subsidised sources it significantly brought down to costs. They should be near labour hubs, construction sites, rickshaw stands etc to attract a steady clientele and need a permanent place to run as rents are quite high. Cross-subsidising by providing meals at higher prices to those who can afford it and arrangements to transport food from the kitchens to locations where it is required also add to the viability of the kitchens. The main finding was that a wide margin separates the informal sector from the formal one and that the managerial techniques that are used in the formal structures are unable to deal very well with the flexibility of the informal. Some of these insights are being used to design several other community-based economic activities for which the Foundation is also searching for funding.

Lok Shakti Manch

This is the fourth year that the Foundation has been supporting the project in north-east Delhi in collaboration with Association for India's Development. The Manch has been formed by the women of the Bhalaswa resettlement colony and it has become proficient in gathering information through the Right to Information Act, conducting workshops and trainings, organising public meetings, performing street plays, approaching various service agencies, activating grievance redressal mechanisms, and conducting public hearings. It has been systematically taking up issues of rations, sanitation, drinking water, education, Thus, it has demanded and succeeded in stopping cash for food schemes, getting closed ration shops reopened, renewing APL ration cards, and obtaining new gas connections. By complaining to the Public Grievance Commissioner, the Manch has also challenged the irregular supply of water through tankers and the quality of water provided.

The sanitary conditions in the area are terrible so the Manch has been pressurising the line agencies to clean the drains, pick up the waste, pumping out the stagnant sullage, and maintaining the public toilets. The women of the Manch have also been questioning the education being offered to their children, demanding the setting up of a Senior Secondary School as per the norms, ensuring supply of desks to the Primary schools, keeping an eye on the provision of drinking water, toilets, sweepers, and guards in the schools, monitoring the mid-day meals, and simplifying the process of admitting students. They have been providing information on the resettlement and slum policies of the government, initiating surveys of households and their identity papers, and conducting a unique study of the history of slum resettlement which documents how much money families have to invest in both the slum as well as the resettlement colony in order to acquire a life with some dignity.

The Manch is now active not only in Bhalaswa but in other areas of Shakkarapur, Holambi Kalan, Jahangirpuri, Raghubir Nagar, Lal Kuan, Govindpuri, Sabda Ghevra, and Harsh Vihar, trying to share their experiences of using Right to Information, petitioning public authorities, and building up mass awareness. It has linked up with other networks in the city such as Sajha Manch, Right to Food Campaign, Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Adhikar Manch, and Khana Khazana. And it has been quite active learning from outside the city also, visiting groups in Udaipur, Hyderabad, Kotma, and Ballia. All this activity has been possible even though there has been a lack of resources and gives some idea of the dedication and commitment of the project team. They have already identified the issues of employment, livelihoods, and literacy to be taken up in the future. The Manch is also trying to become independent of the Foundation, by registering its society in this year.

Uttarakhand

The Foundation continued with the award of a research grant to K Ramnarayan for a second year with assistance from Association for India's Development. In this year, though, the unprecedented June 2013 floods in the State made the focus shift to relief and rehabilitation efforts. A detailed survey of the affected regions resulted in a before and after analysis of the cause of the floods. In addition, dry food aid was supplied to the most critically affected villages and some emergency shelters built and solar lights provided with assistance from other institutions. Long term rehabilitation was tried through training farmers in crop intensification techniques and construction of poly houses. Birding and nature tourism is also being promoted, while experiments with semi-permanent housing and land and energy conservation (mainly solar) are being experimented with. Thus, it was only towards the end of the year that activities turned back once again to the livelihood skill development and sustainable agriculture.

Investment Watch

In collaboration with Habitat Forum, researchers of the Foundation have initiated a study of the investments made in the city of Jaipur, and its potential impact on the urban poor. This is a pilot study which should point the way for how similar studies may be done in other cities. The study so far has revealed that Jaipur is shifting from organised manufacturing towards the informal service sector. It was major centre for gemstones, jewellery, footwear, carpets etc. but is now

steadily developing as an IT and ITES hub, as also a growing real estate industry. It is now considered as a favourite investment destination, partly because of a good law and order situation and orientation towards 'reforms' demanded by investors. The available literature shows that both the State and Central Governments have made several major investments in the region under various schemes and missions and in six major sectors: Industrial, Townships & Residential, Commercial, Transport, Heritage and Tourism, and Infrastructure. All these sectors have been documented in detail in this study. The pattern is clearly of jobless growth with a kind of development that excludes the working poor.

Field visits to selected areas have confirmed this process of exclusion. Provisions for affordable public transport and health, payment of minimum wages, regulated working conditions, protection of livelihoods, and participatory planning are all absent at these locations. Hence, the more vulnerable sections such as casual and contract labour, small vendors, petty traders, artisans, workers dependent upon non-motorised forms of transport, are clearly being excluded and marginalised and the benefits of the investment are going to the big players, the affluent, and the corporations. The vulnerable are being moved further and further away from central city locations, and the civic amenities as well as opportunities for livelihoods at the new locations are severely limited. These preliminary observations need to be refined further through detailed studies that have begun but their completion is held up since the collaborative arrangement with Habitat Forum has failed. If the study is revived then it should be able to identify an alternative, inclusive form of development to which this investment could and should be put to good use.

Other Studies

Three innovative studies have been completed this year independently of any specific project but at the request of community organisations. The first was a health survey carried out in Bhuj at the request of Khamir to observe the health of artisans involved in the craft of making metal bells who are exposed to lead in the brass powder with which the bell is coated. The results showed that the lung function of most of the artisans who were surveyed is severely compromised. Additionally, older artisans, who have been working for more than 20 years, have poorer lung function. The hand grip strength of the artisans also shows a similar trend wherein older artisans have poorer grip strength. Other parameters that were tested, such as tremors in the hand, occurrence of blue line on the gingival, as well as the functioning of the sensory organs of the respondents could not be seen in the sample, hence the relationship of exposure to lead and occupational effects could not be assessed more accurately. In addition, since a control sample was not taken to be surveyed, the significance of the results could not be assessed.

The second study emerged out of data collected by the Banwasi Sewa Ashram in Sonbhadra that was offered to the Foundation's researchers for analysis. The Singrauli region generates 10% of India's energy by burning coal and the BSA has data on physico-chemical parameters of pollution in the region for a period of about eight years and has also gathered data on health parameters in over 20 villages. In this study we tried to correlate the atmospheric pollution in the area to the health of people. The deterioration in health was clearly visible in the results for measurements of hand grip strength, peak expiratory flow rate, the rate of spontaneous

abortions, hand tremors, and blue lines on the gums. It was also seen from the results that the highest impacts are not in the immediate vicinity of the mines, thermal power plants, and industries, but at distances of 5 to 15 km from the sources of air pollution. Subsequently the pollution levels begin to taper off but the impacts could be seen as far away as 30 km from the stacks. Hence, these results suggest that plume behaviour needs to be studied much more rigorously in such sub-tropical zone climates.

The third study was done through the Industrial Design Centre, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay at the request of Majur Adhikar Manch and Prayas Centre for Labour Research and Action at a brick kiln near Ahmadabad. The IIT researchers studied the time-motion and energy expenditure for different operations in brick making. They first observed the entire process of brick manufacture in detail, categorised the 39 workers into different operations in the process, measured their physical characteristics, and then documented the time taken for each operation as well as the energy expended by the worker for that duration. The energy expenditure was computed from observations made of oxygen consumption and heart rates that were monitored through on-line apparatus. The results indicated that the most strenuous work was performed by the workers engaged in stacking the raw bricks in the kiln (*khadkan* - 4202 kcal). This was followed by the work of transferring the raw bricks to the kiln (*bharaai*). The least energy expenditure was by the specialist workers who maintained the kiln at a required temperature (*jalaai* - 2481 kcal). These figures immediately question the norm of 2100 kcal. Clearly many more such studies need to be done but are limited by the huge cost of the equipment.

All the three studies have three things in common. Firstly, there is the search for low-cost methods through which this kind of studies can be done by labour organisations and support groups for a much wider range of areas and working conditions. Secondly, there is the attempt to scientifically quantify health impacts of work and pollutants. And thirdly, there is the possibility of using these studies to negotiate better terms and conditions for workers. Given that many of the Foundation's activities are now converging on the idea of livelihood-centred development with a life of dignity for the working poor, which also points the way to carbon-free sustainability, these studies are becoming very important to provide the empirical data for fleshing out the theoretical arguments being offered by the Foundation's researchers working in cooperation with community groups and labour organisations.

Administration

There have been no changes in the Foundation's Board in the year under review, and no change in the research staff in the Hazards Centre either. Salary scales have been increased significantly, although they still do not correspond to what is available in the commercial or academic sector. More increases are required if the Foundation is to retain competent and committed researchers for a reasonable length of time. More personnel will also be required if the work continues to grow at the same pace. Further, as the process of decentralisation is taken up more flexible financing will be required to set up resource centres in different regions and locations that can function independently.

The accounts have been audited for the year. The Foundation had an opening balance of Rs 56.52 lakhs and received Rs 48.55 lakhs through the year, of which Rs 5.70 lakhs was from local sources, the rest being from foreign grants. The total expenditure was Rs 91.92 lakhs, of which Rs 11.38 lakhs was for administrative purposes. The main donors were Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (Rs 22.96 lakhs), Association for India's Development (Rs 7.50 lakhs), Jamsetji Tata Trust (Rs 5.70 lakhs), and All India Arts and Crafts Association (Rs 2.24 lakhs). The last actually constituted the balance payment that was made for work that was completed two years ago. The year closed with a balance amount of Rs 13.15 lakhs that is earmarked for specific projects to be completed next year.