

Sanchal Foundation

Annual Report 2014-2015

The Foundation, as usual, had a busy year, although this year the financial constraints are beginning to tighten and the Foundation's activities may have to be curtailed in the coming years.

Sustainable Livelihood Practices, Urban Transport and Climate Change in India

The project on Livelihood Practices, Urban Transport and Climate Change entered its second year with a thirty-two-month grant from the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. The concept behind this project was to document the resource use of working people living along roads and avenues and show that they were based on highly energy efficient practices that were best suited to adapt to and mitigate climate change. In this manner the purpose was to try and challenge the 'vulnerable' image that is constructed of the urban working poor.

As in the previous year, the personnel of the Hazards Centre, who carried out this project, were able to meet and even exceed most targets set for the project. 33 public meetings were completed against the target of 3, as part of the overall strategy wherein the concerns of multiple groups were addressed so that the most active few could be selected and their issues linked to the theme of resource use and climate change. 12 group trainings were completed instead of 6; 13 community consultations conducted in place of 9 on issues of livelihoods, shelter, and services; 5 research reports completed instead of 4; and 2 booklets are ready this year waiting for funds to be printed.

Some changes have been brought about by the project so far. Using the data from participatory studies: people of Suryateja Nagar (Vishakhapatnam) have challenged the Corporation's plan to settle them in multi-storey flats with their own plan of low-rise houses; the Bhubaneswar vendors' association has influenced policy to provide vending zones on busy roads; the linkage between the issues of diverse groups from traditional artisans to construction workers in Jaipur has become clear; an alliance of community groups in Ahmadabad has united to resist slum evictions; and in Kolkata, cyclists and hawkers have mobilised against the ban on non-motorised vehicles on 174 thoroughfares.

Data from these studies have been woven together in a perspective paper titled "A Subaltern View of Climate Change" for wider debate. It argues that it took 400 million years for the earth to convert carbon into coal and oil, which are being burnt up in the short space of 400 years, returning the carbon back into the air. If global temperature rise is to be kept below 2°C then energy use will have to be reduced to limit annual per capita CO₂ emissions below 2.5t. It is the 'undeveloped' nations who display that ability, and our studies show that, in India, it is only those who earn less than Rs 8000 per month who consume energy below the limit. Hence, the energy use of the urban poor should be considered to be the 'best practice' rather than declaring them to be the most 'vulnerable'.

The next year of this project will be used in disseminating this argument amongst the associations of the urban working poor. The Foundation's earlier experience is that the discussion will have to begin with the immediate issues of concern to communities, such as livelihoods, shelter, and services, encouraging them to conduct participatory research that then begins to expose the linkage between resource needs, unequal access to resources, and the environment. Even increasing demand from communities for such research will be restricted because of lack of finances and the immediate pressures of sheer survival for the urban poor. Hence, there will be delays in and deviations from the outputs planned in project mode.

The lessons from this project are:

- (a) Working communities of the urban poor are under severe stress because of urban renewal projects that are taking away their homes and livelihoods.
- (b) The process of linking up their immediate issues with larger concepts of energy efficiency and sustainability has to compete with other urgent needs.
- (c) This process will, therefore, have to be at the pace with which communities feel comfortable and this pace cannot be forced beyond a point.

Problems, Linkages and Capacities of NGOs working with Railway Children

This project was taken up through the Hazards Centre, with financial assistance from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Its purpose is to strengthen the capacities of groups working with children in need of care and protection found at railway stations. This would assist the field workers to document their experiences, undertake creative data gathering, and create knowledge for building perspectives and intervening in policy. There are three partners at Jaipur, Bhopal, and Kolkata with whom this project is being carried out and with whom initial meetings have been conducted to identify a set of issues for which participatory research studies can be designed.

Taabar at Jaipur has a strong base and a considerable amount of information emerging from their work which remains unprocessed as they struggle with reporting formats that are tedious and fail to go beyond a standard narrative form. Praajak in Kolkata has been advocating for children's rights, well aware of the changing reality of children on the platform and want to work keeping this transition in mind. For NIWCYD in Bhopal it was important to get assistance in doing gap analysis as they had moved on from identify and rescue work to repatriation that would be safe and secure for the children. The Hazards Centre team conducted detailed interviews with field workers, visited the centres, and went through reports of each partner to understand the issues and challenges.

So far, the Hazards Centre team has learnt a great deal about the issues in this sector and met different organisations with some commonalities but also a diversity of experience which needs to be documented and shared. This experience will be sharpened in the coming year to comprehend what is the 'agency' of the child and how does it differ from the prevalent 'rescue and return' and 'restrict and reform' modes that are implicit in the Juvenile Justice Act that deals with children both "in need of care and protection" as well as "in conflict with law". Many of the children the team met during the visits said that they wanted the respect and dignity that children not on the stations get from the society. There are informal protection networks also which children access for their own care and protection and which need to be studied.

Rights to Equality and Poverty Reduction

This project was taken up to explore the denial of access to core basic rights that lead to poverty for particular individuals and groups, as a powerful argument to show that a state's failure to expend its resources constitutes a failure to treat all persons equally. Programmes targeted for the poor face problems simply because those who are 'Below the Poverty Line' (BPL) are not seen as part of general society. Instead of universal health, education and decent working conditions and wages, what the 'official poor' get are poor health, poor education and subsistence 'emergency' work. The project is being supported by the United Nations Development Programme.

In the first phase, a comprehensive literature review and analysis of existing work was taken up to establish the relationship between poverty and the principles of equality and non-discrimination with particular attention to the inclusion of the most vulnerable. The research team from South Asia for Human Rights also studied the current and emerging debates to ensure that the project does not revisit old

ground. Attention was given to the new forms of discrimination and the link with poverty, inequality and disempowerment as for instance in the context of feminisation of the informal sector, and predominance of contract labor and discriminatory practices. In addition, the Constitutional Rights were translated by the research team from Hazards Centre team into a set of actual entitlements of food, clothing, housing, wages, health and education that the most vulnerable sections of society would be entitled to by examining the legal provisions in this regard.

We further discovered that many of these universal entitlements have been diluted through targeted programmes and schemes. Thus the right to food was considerably reduced by the earlier provision of rations under the Public Distribution Scheme, and now through the Food Security Act. The right to clothing has disappeared along with the low price shops run by the Government. The right to housing on 40-80 sq.m plots (at 250 DUs/ha) for the built-up colonies of Delhi gave way to 25 sq.m plots in the earlier resettlement colonies, was further reduced to 18 sq.m and then 12½ sq.m plots in the later relocations, and is now 25 sq.m flats in multi-storey tenements. In the process the payments due have risen from Rs 16 per year for 99 year lease-holds to Rs 7,000 for 10 year licenses, and now Rs 150,000 for the tenement flat.

In the second phase of the study, to be carried out in the coming year, the partner teams will develop policy guidelines for strengthening protection from poverty and reducing inequality and discrimination and development of an integrated framework on equality. The focus will be on two selected case studies: in Jharkhand with adivasi and forest dwellers in the context of Forest Rights Act; and in Delhi with permanent and contract labour, migrant workers, and other service providers. It is expected that this will highlight how a rights' based perspective and the norm of equality can be used to identify the core basic rights denials that may lead to poverty and affect particular individuals and groups.

Community Empowerment

The Foundation's innovative project with the Lok Shakti Manch in the northern part of Delhi was continued this year with the assistance of a small grant from Association for India's Development. The objective of this project has been to spread awareness about government policies and schemes in poor communities in and near the Bhalaswa resettlement colony. Members of the project team are mainly women from the community and have taken up programmes on pressing issues of rations, water, electricity, sanitation, and education. They have used techniques of door-to-door visits, street corner meetings, distribution of pamphlets and posters, signature campaigns, and workshops to inform and mobilise the people.

In the process groups from the community have met with officials and sought information through the Right to Information Act from government agencies. They have leveraged the Department of Food Supplies to obtain ration cards on the basis of records in the National Population Register, and conduct card verification without the normal corruption that was involved earlier. As there is no facility for supply of potable water to the colony, the project team took up the matter with the Public Grievance Commission and managed to ensure that 18-22 tankers are supplied by the water utility at 150 points within the colony along with a directive that an underground reservoir be constructed for future piped supply. The residents have also rejected a scheme to dispense water through ATMs.

Similar popular pressure on the sanitation department through the Public Grievance Commission has ensured garbage is cleared regularly, the main drains are cleaned, and the Public Works Department has begun civil works. The municipality has taken over the public services, the Education Department has asked for land to build a secondary school, while parents have begun checking the mid-day meals at the primary schools. Last year the project team had conducted a survey in the colony and assessed that each

family had invested Rs 12 lakhs over a period of 20 years in homes and services. The results of the survey were shared with other community groups this year and some of them have begun to do similar studies so as to strengthen their claim to tenure on land.

A recent effort by the project team has been to organise five women Self Help Groups with bank accounts so that members can get loans and link up with formal government schemes for economic activities to supplement family income. The women are also playing a supportive role for each other as well as for other families through their collective strength. The project team has organised camps in the neighbouring areas to disseminate information about the Construction Workers Act and registered 58 workers, without paying bribes to middlemen, to apply for financial aid for children's education and marriages, pensions, and assistance for handicapped dependents. Several workshops and cultural programmes have been organised through the year to strengthen community solidarity.

An initiative taken by the Lok Shakti project team this year was to move beyond the boundaries of the city to one of the places of origin at Karan Chhapra in Uttar Pradesh, where they assisted residents to petition the District Magistrate to prosecute the Gram Pradhan who had siphoned off money sanctioned under the Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The Pradhan obtained a stay on the order and reduce the recovery amount so the villagers approached the High Court but the court rejected the petition on grounds of no locus standi. The team is planning to now petition the Supreme Court and the Foundation sees the work of this team as a learning example for the many communities with whom the Foundation is engaged.

Community Empowerment, Ecology and Conservation in Uttarakhand

The Foundation is sponsoring two initiatives in Uttarakhand. The first is in the Kumaon region where the project team is experimenting with different types of cook stoves to reduce women's drudgery, improve their health, and conserve forests. In addition, the team has begun field trials with solar driers; is also tracking proposed hydro-power projects and their implementation; analysing existing and proposed projects under the Clean Development Mechanism; and exploring the possibilities of crop intensification schemes, vermiculture, polyhouses, birding and butterfly conservation for nature-based livelihoods. This project is supported by way of a grant from the Association for India's Development.

The other initiative has been possible because of a small contribution by the People's Science Institute to conduct a study of the river basins in Uttarakhand to examine the 2013 flooding disaster in the context of excessive rainfall coupled with excessive loads of silt and boulders which had been loosened by various construction and development activities over the last two decades. The study was undertaken through a mapping of the damaged area using Google Earth and its history tool to identify all development activities that had taken place along the river valleys over the last 10 years and what were the observable impacts. The first part along the Alaknanda is complete and the next part along the other two river valleys will be done next year, as also an attempt to ground-truth if finances become available.

Sajha Manch Convention

The Sajha Manch is a project of the Foundation that has attempted to provide a platform for community groups in Delhi to assemble, freely debate, and carry out common activities in alliance with each other. By 2009 the Manch had grown into an alliance of over 90 organizations working together regularly on issues of shelter, relocation, water, electricity, sanitation, education, health, transportation, livelihoods, and environment that concern the urban poor. It became inactive after 2009 but was revived this year by some of the former members who felt the need for such a collective. The Foundation again hosted the

secretariat and one of the highlights of the year was the organisation of the 7th Annual Convention of the Manch in July 2014 to mark its revival.

The 7th Annual Convention was organised to once again extend contacts and solidarity to a wide range of organisations and institutions, many of whom were previously associated with the Manch. The two day event at Gandhi Darshan elicited participation from around 500 people representing a diverse set of 70 communities, unions, institutions, activists, and campaigns. It was structured around the seven issues of Employment & Identity, Housing, Basic Services, Unorganised sector, Safety, Transport, and People's participation in policies. These issues were extensively debated by the participants and experiences exchanged.

At the final session three strategic decisions were taken by all the participants: a) All the members will hold Mohalla Sabha in their areas to share information about the 74th Constitutional Amendment for decentralised governance; b) The working poor would conduct participatory research to calculate their investment in homes and services and their contribution to the city' economy; c) The Manch would issue identity cards to its members to assert people's identity and resolve for collective action. In conclusion the Manch thanked all contributors including Action Aid, Aid, Centre for Policy Research, Association for India's Development, and Partnering Hope into Action Foundation.

The Future

The Foundation also received two small grants this year: one from Habitat Forum for an Investment Watch project in Jaipur; and the other from Gansagar Ratandhan Trust to support community initiatives. The first grant was returned to Habitat Forum because the terms of the study could not be mutually agreed upon. The second was received late in the year and shall be used next year for appropriate projects. But keeping in mind the increasing demand for assistance from communities, the necessity to support alliance building and local initiatives, and the increasing pressure from donors to conform to specific formats which do not accommodate flexibility and demand-based activities, the Foundation will have to reflect on how to raise sufficient resources for the creative collection, dissemination, and use of scientific knowledge.