

Enumeration as a tool for Mobilisation

The community census of structures in Dharavi

In 1998-99, we will try and further develop the internally developed monitoring and evaluation strategy further. In the first report, we concentrated on the structure and design of the report. A very major factor in that pre occupation of design was to make sure that the communities and the alliance partners also enjoyed and participated in the report process. Due to the fact that testing it and exploring its usage takes some time, the report had many design inputs but has much to be improved upon in the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the reporting.

This year's report will try and explore that aspect of reporting. We will try and enrich this report in both qualitative and quantitative terms, and keep deepening the capacity of the leadership within the alliance to use this same information for their own on going work. That in many ways remains the main challenge to our ingenuity... to be able to fulfill the twin goals of external accountability while making the same activity the basis for internal growth analysis and training.

We are aware increasingly that what we write is often the only testimony of the transformation that is going on within communities. Most of it is very quiet, only a very small part of it filters to the press, visitors and to those who support us. This is often because most processes are long winded, and often the breakthrough comes long after everyone is giving up waiting for anything to happen.

This time we will try and include all our other financial supporters projects also into this framework. Last year we focused only on the contract made with Bilance. How we will do it will emerge from the process. But the goal is to use this to reflect all the work we do rather than focus on a project alone.

We have many expectations for the readers of this material. It is as much for financial supporters as it is for peers and for those interested in development. Please read it, share it with others and send us your comments ideas and suggestions. Another exploration we seek to do is to try and examine how reports written for statutory purposes of reporting on usage of funds can be further utilised for maintaining a record of evolution, for sharing information for campaigns and for fund raising.

Introduction

In 1985, SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centers) undertook an enumeration of over 6,000 households of pavement dwellers in the Island city of Bombay (See WE THE INVISIBLE, BOMBAY: SPARC, 1985). That census was the formal expression of a participatory exercise undertaken by SPARC to help isolated groups of pavement dwellers develop insights about their own situation and that of others like themselves. Because the census employed formal data collection methods and reporting style, it became a means to communicate with policy makers at various levels in Government.

This helped develop insights into the potential of such a large scale enumeration. It also clarified the necessity for network of strong grass root organizations with different capabilities. Field and research objectives were seen as have to be oriented, not to static single dimensional data gathering, but instead, as linked to a process which sparks off a series of distinct responses for the variety of people who participate.

This note is an ambitious attempt to describe the richness of participatory enumeration. It is especially ambitious because given our involvement in the process, it is not easy to be objective. SPARC was working at the time with only pavement dwellers, and attempting to develop women's participation in community decision making. In fact, much of the preliminary gathering of information about pavement dwellings was carried out in a manner that gave women the confidence to utilize this knowledge.

At that point, representatives of the NSDF (National Slum Dwellers Federation) approached SPARC to inquire into the methodology of the enumeration. Soon some very interesting points emerged in the course of discussion. For one, while slum dwellers constantly fight for better basic amenities and land use. Yet these are allocated are made on the basis of official enumeration which are unreliable because they are highly selective, and often tend to ignore the existence of most poor urban groups.

It also became clear that slum dwellers and their organizations are very ill informed about urban programs. It is as if a desert dweller arrived at the oasis but was denied water because he did not know the protocol. Ignorance denies access: even the NSDF, confident of their organizational capabilities, had much to learn from this enumeration.

SPARC and NSDF in their working relationship focused on the question of how this Dharavi census could be harnessed to the cause of the urban poor. Initially we had stimulating discussion of techniques, of existing lacunae in research; we pooled information about rules and regulations governing amenities meant for the poor - further highlighting present ignorance. The general state of misinformation amongst the poor and the misdirection of organizational and activist energies was brought home forcefully.

For instance, every slum group in Bombay is fighting for amenities. Yet little is known of the overall context which creates this present low allocation, nor are means available to the poor to demand a better allocation of basic services.

THE ENUMERATION AS A PATH TO A BETTER ALLOCATION :

Few enumerations accurately represent people. There is an interesting pattern: a Government department, needing statistics carries out a survey. Later, the slum people find that through a law ONLY those who were listed in that particular head-count have certain rights whether to a new land lease, to inclusion in the general upgradation of that slum...

Such back dated Government censuses act as gates which restricts entry and participation. They cannot be challenged by slum dwellers - it is too late. Unaware of the significance of statistics, their unfamiliarity robs them of access to census-dependent services. Yet, the paradox lies in the fact that in a country like India which seeks to allocate state resources for the alleviation of poverty, these very same statistics are again the basis for allocation of funds etc. for the poor. Thus the very same exercise of enumeration by government first acknowledged the existence of some groups only, and gave them some resources, later lower level of allocations were also made on the same basis.

Past enumerations of slums included Dharavi.

As a result of several such government surveys, the estimated population in Dharavi as per government records was 55,000 families. Later, it was seen that the population as per the peoples census was 1,23,000 families. Further, the government also decided that since in their records, only 35,000 people had records, only that number was to be the "recipients" of the proposed schemes for Dharavi.

ENUMERATION AS A TOOL FOR ORGANIZATION BUILDING:

Most urban centers in India witness the paradox, on the one hand 30 to 50 per cent of the urban population can fall into the category of "urban poor" by most accepted indexes of income, housing, nutrition and so on. However, there is no organized strength to seek resources for themselves. Instead the majority allows itself to be seen as isolated pockets of poor. Discussions with the NSDF and other poverty groups had indicated that while everyone was now ready to acknowledge that the urban poor are the major segment of the city population, no one... neither the city fathers nor the poor seemed to accept this information. The exercise of a census in which all groups participate to collate statistics which they then all learn to understand, and learn to interpret can help build coherent federations.

There is a magical quality to CREATING KNOWLEDGE of our seemingly individual information: Instead of being the mere object of research, people pool what they know to gain knowledge of their community, and the excitement of using statistics spreads by word of mouth and creates a growing motivation: the mobilization of groups snowballs.

The value of participatory surveys has to be seen in yet another context. Especially in cities, INFORMATION is the basis of presently established hierarchy. If leadership at local community or city level is analyzed, we see that it is the information these individuals have which is the basis of their strength; and not the traditional virtues of charisma or age. Why do "dadas" and "goondas" (touts) hold sway in the local community? Not because they are "popular", but only they know how city systems work for the poor. They know how to get ration cards or release without bail from the police station; People's isolation, and powerlessness accompanied by threats of violence, are the basis of their control. Most rural migrants into the city, despite living in the city for several years are unable to grasp the very BASIC differences which exist between URBAN & RURAL systems. Though services such as education and health are available the poor rarely make use of them.

In this situation the participatory census can become the basis of transformation. It begins with a set of questions which accompany the "head count". Each group of people collects this information about itself, then passes it to the collation point. The numbers in front of them represent their own experiences. A familiar frame of reference to view statistics is now established. This organizational work, can have a structure, process and content which emerges from WITHIN. On this foundation, other processes can be built.

Instead of working on a 'pilot' basis, in only one large slum we sounded out all the slum leadership associated with the NSDF. There were groups from Govandi, Cheeta Camp, Dharavi and Wadala from Bombay, other groups from Hyderabad, Madras, Madurai, Bangalore and Coimbatore. As enthusiasm grew, they began the mechanics of setting up the actual activity. To start with, they decided that each group of slum dwellers would undertake an enumeration of households in their slum. Results would be collated at the level of the city. The second phase was to survey the families within each slum on the basis of questions considered useful by the group ?

While all slums should undergo Phase I and Phase II, Phase III - specific details of individuals would only be undertaken should circumstances require it. As the demand of accuracy became clear and acceptable to the leadership, they began to discuss means of counter checking the data.

The general slum survey began in several slums in Bombay and other cities in July 1986. The Dharavi family enumeration began followed the discussions when data was collated. NSDF representatives were concerned about the PMGP grant (Prime Minister's Grant Project). (See Pamphlet). This was made by the Prime Minister during the Congress Centenary (1985), when 100 crore was pledged by him for the city's housing problem, of which 35 crores were earmarked for Dharavi. The discussion included questions such as "who will decide how this money is to be used"? "What will be the basis of this decision making"? Who will determine "betterment"? The leadership at Dharavi involved in this process was a very small minority. It was evident that while the "outside" treats Dharavi as one large slum, and several studies from various points of view have been conducted on Dharavi, the residents do not see themselves as being ONE settlement. They are also unaware of the research studies, the general plans that the city, the state or the PM has for them.

It now became apparent to everyone involved NSDF, SPARC, the BSDF and some of the local leadership at Dharavi-that the strategic choice would be an intensive survey in Dharavi. NSDF and SPARC could

now test their hypothesis about enumeration and its multiple usage.

Any action which helped Dharavi to become united was vital. Particularly because the PMGP organization was being set up with was no clear action plan. This provided an opportunity for people to develop their own choices.

An eight person team of members of NSDF and SPARC was fully involved in this work. Three NSDF members lived in Dharavi in this period. The process was as follows.

1. Discussion with people at large to discover how communities identify themselves.
2. Locate the locally acknowledged leadership of the area.
3. Meet the leadership to discuss planned possibilities and suggest partnership.

There were certain groups which accepted the proposal for enumeration immediately others hesitated very some refused.

(a) Acceptable

(b) Refusal

- (i) Local leaders had to make choices. Many refused initially but facilitate the enumeration were invited to observe, and inform the team if they wished
- (ii) the counting of all huts to participate. They were in each slums also encouraged to attend daily and weekly evening. Number of family units meetings when data gathered was collated roughly on a chart

(iv) Individuals.

2. 5-10 persons were trained to fill forms for family enumeration.

Each evening the NSDF/SPARC team would collate data and show its possible uses to the group to ensure they understood and participated. As more and more groups began undergoing this process, fortnightly or weekly meetings took place. As a larger cross-section more "representative" of the slum at tended, and head counts, teams of people visited ration shops (where cards listed in Dharavi were carefully counted to cross check figures), the election officer of parties to see voter registration, and slum sections where of the Ward office and Collectorate rent lists were maintained. People also developed their own map of Dharavi, demarcating settlements, then going onto examine land ownership and other related matters.

An especially fruitful technique was the "historical trace". Locating the original residents of Dharavi, we were able to put together its growth and development.

4. Our data collection, completed in November 1986, coincided with the Government data collection drive in Dharavi (see news paper cutting). Over 5,000 Government officials were harnessed for this process. To observe it, the participants of the people's census fanned out into all parts of Dharavi.

5. Finally a series of day long workshops was held to discuss the information gathered with the people of Dharavi, and the need to form an united organisation, representative of all segments.

Participants, from organizations already working in Dharavi, several issues clarified. A recurrent concern was the possibility of the duplication of responsibilities. Much time was spent in setting this. Neither SPARC nor NSDF aspire to compete with local NGO's and CBOs in working on a daily basis.

Dharavi's strategic identify "representation of the slum" in the eyes of the outside world. Much of what Government does in Dharavi will be precedent for other slum settlements. Here, NSDF and SPARC played the part of agents strengthening people's representatives. The purpose is to gain control over development planned for them - to make their own choices.

Thus the AKHIL DHARAVI VIKAS SAMITI (all Dharavi Development Committee), was established. A 200 odd representative leadership group was invited for a workshop to get oriented to Government procedures and development planning.

From this time (March 1987), has begun a series of multi- pronged actions. Their uniqueness lies in the federating they make possible. All groups participate in meetings and future actions are listed. Each group identifies what it would like to undertake. Some of these are :

- (a) Technical training in house upgradation.
- (b) General housing training.
- (c) Co-op society formation.
- (d) Household data collection.
- (e) Housing Assistance.
- (f) Ration cards.
- (g) Civic amenities demands.
- (h) Land tenure.

Since then, the data gathered has been put to many uses. Other groups intending to carry out undertaking such surveys enumeration's have a "zinda misal" (live example) of the process. Those who participated at different stages have been encouraged to travel around the country and share their experience of the process.

The results have also been given to the Prime Minister's Grant Project cell, and to the Maharashtra Housing and Development Authority (MHADA). Their first reaction of disbelief changed gradually to a non-committal acceptance. In a series of discussions the general superiority of the data, supplied by the people's enumeration was acknowledged.

As qualitative inputs grow around the enumeration, it becomes evident that future options can be posed and their impact assessed. One possibility is high rise construction. Certainly upto 25 per cent of slum dwellers can afford to receive and repay loans of 40,000 plus. Since many of these groups are the local and visible leadership, it is a distinct possibility that they will skew development towards high rise. In earlier meetings when the high rise option was discussed, it aroused anger and non-cooperation.

However, when property value its escalation and the gradual attainment of valuable property by the upper classes was understood, perceptions changed. Two factors helped this.

Firstly, many women had begun to participate in these meetings. Their priorities were very clear. They wanted a secure and functional home. When it was explained how

strategically Dharavi was located in the new redevelopment of Bombay, it became clear that any middle class family and commercial interest would pay substantial amounts to live in a place so well connected to various parts of the city as Dharavi. Such displacement would earn the family sums of money they never had before. But that money would not suffice for an equally convenient place any where in the city.

Women found it made sense not to sell. Why build only to sell and go further away? "Yes our men would not; be able to resist such efforts".

Secondly, such offers began to be made. Several families were going to sell out. This was the concrete demonstration of the general phenomenon.

Discussions continue as such situation continue to arise. They are dealt with this now highly involved group of residents.

ENUMERATION AS A TOOL FOR PLANNING AND EVALUATION:

Collated, the data is the basis of analysis. Especially for community organization, the process of planning and evaluation must go together. All of us gauge our control over our own situations by the strength of the connection between planning and evaluation.

After all, when can you Plan ? When the planners know first, why they plan, what is the goal: then are clearly aware of the necessary INGREDIENTS to initiate the process, and finally gain confidence at the degree of control they have over the process. Only after this can the basis of evaluation be set up. The evaluation can itself lead to the next phase of planning.

A good preliminary enumeration and its evaluation provide a realistic assessment of the capabilities and weaknesses present, and reduce the danger of taking on unattainable goals. And certain small changes not at first significant can make all the difference to replicability. Most organizations are made stronger or weaker by their ability to retain a certain MOMENTUM OF ACTIVITY. As information, and the knowledge of its significance, is widely disseminated, people rely less on their leaders.

DHARAVI : Must the Government subsidize gentrification?

Dharavi, in the last few decades has become very well known as Asia's largest slum. From the time of its inception about five decades ago to very recently it has evoked varied responses and reaction amongst people who have entered Dharavi, or read about it, studied it, writ ten about it or worked with a segment of its population.

Since 1985, when amidst the Congress centenary celebrations, the Prime Minister declared a gift of 100 crores for the city's development of which thirty five crores was allotted for redevelopment of Dharavi. This brought the sprawling slums of Dharavi in the heart of Bombay into focus of architects city planners, social workers builders and several other professionals who sought to participate in the creation of a new face for Dharavi.

A PMGP cell was set up at MHADA as 'one window' to solve shelter and environment problems and work out the blue print of the changes foreseen. There are plans to relocate industries, to relocate people to construct buildings. Markets, commercial zones to make parks, play grounds, in short to create a Dharavi plan which will look beautiful if the planners have their way.

Very concerned, somewhat puzzled and generally excluded from this process of planning are the residents of Dharavi. Rigid well formulated procedures and processes are the only means by which residents or their representative can interact with the PMGP cell.

Each nagar or area is to be formed into a cooperative. It has to have a promoter and an architect who will set the plans to PMGP for approval. Thus while plans are being made frantically, and 4-5 storey structures are being designed, and talk is on about wide roads, schools, parks and gardens, it is time to stand back and ponder into the

implications of such as process of development on the present residents and situation of Dharavi.

Generally the residents of Dharavi comprise of :

a) originally settled migrants who since 1930s had settled on marshy land beyond outer city limits in the is land city.

b) Pavement and slum dwellers from the Island city of Bombay who were moved ;out in the 50s, 60s, and 70s in a series of attempts to beautify the inner city.

c) Later day migrants who came and settled in Dharavi as it was ideal for several business/trade activities and to commute to jobs in the city.

Location:

Dharavi, which was once a marsh ridden squatter settlement gradually became integrated into the city as it expanded. As today, Dharavi lies in the city centre, uniquely linked to both central and western suburbs, and is a area surrounded by very highly priced real estate.

Present situation in Dharavi :

Dharavi comprises of 55,000 households according to the last Government census and 1,25,000 by the survey conducted by NSDF in 1986-87. It is a dynamic township today; with flourishing commercial units, factories roads shops, and all ingredients which people have built up.

Our concern:

While there is no question that the present conditions in Dharavi have worsened - inadequate water, toilets, rough paths etc; congested houses - the fact remains that those who live there are at least presently able to continue to live there despite the upper and middle class residential areas surround Dharavi.

Over the years many myths surround the sprawling long conglomeration of about 6 lacs families that is Dharavi today. Its size and 'reputation' deter many outsiders while well established internal norms and agreements made by leaders and ethnic groups have resulted in a low turnover of residents in the recent years. Nevertheless the pressure on already inadequate amenities grows everyday 200 persons use one toilet wherever it exists, water for drinking is from often extremely unsafe while no drains pathways or roads exists where they are needed.

As plans and projections of the PMGP were announced there has been a growing interest shown by actors from the housing, construction in Dharavi's redevelopment land marked Bombay. It is said that residents plots along the proposed roads are fetching 10 times the price they did three years ago for commercial use. At this juncture it is crucial that we examine the projections based on the present redevelopment plans of the PMGP and anticipating the possible outcomes. Only one word comes to mind GENTRIFICATION. Very briefly this is a process by which a poor neighborhood in the city due to varied reasons be comes attractive enough for the gentry/middle class to live in, and as land and dwelling prices soar, the poor encash their assets and move further to build on another unused Plot of land or cheaper housing.

The gentrification of Dharavi seems inevitable in the near future. The squatter, in sanitary conditions over crowding were deterrents to upper class residents who wished to in vest in low cost housing in Dharavi, despite its convenient location. In short Dharavi and its residents were protected due to its dysfunctional labeling as a slum.

Close scrutiny of each of the proposed changes under the World Bank slum upgradation and redevelopment scheme will open opportunities for middle class residents :

- more open ;spaces, gardens, large access roads
- Multistorey buildings
- reduced density
- commercial zones

Two processes of refined evictions will begin to occur. Firstly, based on norms which people have no to redefine, a substantial part of Dharavi's residents will be dislocated.

Secondly, if all newly planned structures are shooting upwards-four to five storeys high, at an average cost of Rs.40,000 to Rs.70,000 per unit then it is definite that they would be out of reach for at least thirty per cent of the population at the bottom of the ring. These latter groups cannot afford the costs involved in loan and interest rate repayment. Additionally each family has to bear the life long burden of maintenance and service costs for individual civic amenities provided. Those who survive face tremendous pressure from the middle class residents desirous of housing investments in the city centre. To illustrate - any middle class parent who is planning for the future would easily redesign the flats to add two or three rooms for his son/daughter to live in. Even in today's acute housing crisis, escalating land and housing costs Dharavi offers housing at half the cost of middle class housing in the suburbs.

The purpose of this description is that generally gentrification occurs in inner city areas gradually with expansion of cities. In the case of Dharavi, we predict this would take place in the immediate future. Urgent questions pose themselves.

(1) Are city planners envisaging this projection for Dharavi ?

(2) Should the PMGP expand public resources with 35 crores to facilitate gentrification when its sole object is to improve the quality of life for residents of Dharavi?

(3) Do people who reside in Dharavi, the NGO's associated with redevelopment processes and city planners understand the implications of the grand design the redevelopment of Dharavi for its original residents ?

(4) Finally, how can this process be reversed < How can the peoples right to life and livelihood in Dharavi be ensured ?

There is an urgent need to create public opinion about the future plan for redevelopment of Dharavi.

The question begs itself - Development for whom ? and towards whose vision of Dharavi < It is time that public opinion is created on the crucial issues related to peoples development in Dharavi. Essentially this must centrally involve communities of Dharavi. This would be the first step in initiating change processes with regard to shelter and environment in the lives of the people of Dharavi.

ENUMERATION AS A TOOL FOR LOBBYING:

Since statistics form the basis of resource allocation, then the poor must ensure that the figures are accurate and representative. Analysis should be directed to ensure an equitable distribution. People ought to have access to past surveys; and they should participate in all future decisions which will affect the course of their lives.

Apart from taking part in the enumeration done by Government, the people can agitate for specific services and facilities using that census as their basis of information and rights. This is an important balance to their participation in Government enumeration, to encounter possible co-option.

THIS EXERCISE IS TO BE REPEATED BY OTHERS:

Other organizations have asked us how to set up teams which undertake such enumeration. It seems the vital ingredients are :

(a) A strong community based organizations or a sufficient network to set up such an organization.

(b) A back up organization with research capabilities, and a good understanding of the larger urban realities to make the enumeration viable in the larger context. Yet critical in this process is the priority set to local empowerment over paper writing. The local population which creates the information must grow with the knowledge of it. If the process grows before the people, then it swamps their capabilities. It will reinforce the inferiority the uneducated feel in the face of alien facts and figures.

(c) Forward planning to ensure a great deal of lead time is very important. Empowerment is not a mechanical process; and it cannot be hastened beyond a point.

(d) Creating space for the people to dialogue - using this knowledge and information for their own representation is as vital as creating the information. This includes meeting officials, and non-government organizations.

(e) A vital ingredient in such an exercise is the presence of persons to extrapolate and synthesize and produce reports. Our experience is that the getting together of useful data is something any field organization can do, as it develops the appropriate collection tools. Manpower and motivation they generally have.

However, most groups, once they themselves have understood the phenomenon give up the further pursuit of knowledge. So a result, the larger use of information is not possible.

And if statistics have to challenge the state then the wolf has to wear sheep's clothing. Such report writing requires objective analysis, again, hard to find.

People's participation in Government or voluntary agency activity is often talked about. We have in the past seen several such claims. First contributory participation: people work on a project, and their labour is evaluated as 5,000 rupees ;toward the cost of the project: Or local landowners provide sand or tiles.

Second beneficiary participation: where the mere fact of people using a service such as a health care centre, is deemed 'participation'. And representative participation, where certain articulate members of a community are selected for a role. This is the basis of Panchayati raj and all subsequent state action. bureaucrats do not acknowledge that ordinary people can understand and plan on the basis of empirical data.

This is why we feel the Dharavi census is something new and significant.

Finally a word of caution. The state, appreciating the usefulness of such groups, can easily co-opt them to do much more of their work. Where should we draw the line ? Let us decide this: before a powerful tool that can develop knowledge and organization is put to the serviced of superficial "community participation".