

IV. A Local Client and Partner Response

Ms. Mirai Chatterjee responds to the Slum Upgrading Action Plan for the Self employed Women's Association (SEWA) of Ahmedabad, India in a letter to the World Bank's Urban Leader for East Asia and Pacific Region. SEWA is a well known local union and now NGO which runs an all-woman bank, the SEWA Bank. SEWA is currently playing a significant role in "scaling up" upgrading of slum communities in the City of Ahmedabad through an on-going program, Slum Networking Project, which is jointly financed by the City of Ahmedabad, slum community residents, the World Bank and UNDP. The success of the program known locally as **Parivartan** (which means 'transformation,') in five slums and its rapid spread to other slum communities illustrates the affordable and doable nature of slum upgrading on a progressive city-wide scale. (See Annex: Ahmedabad Parivartan)

Date: August 30, 1999

It was a pleasure to meet you in Ahmedabad recently and learn of your ideas and approach to housing and slum upgradation for poor families. As you are aware, this is also a matter of deep concern for us at SEWA, as is the general issue of growing urban poverty. We are also already working actively on slum upgradation with Mahila Housing Trust implementing the 'Parivartan' programme and SEWA Bank co-financing it.

With regard to our recent discussions in Ahmedabad, we would like to raise some issues for your kind consideration:

1) Slum upgradation is poverty alleviation. For a poor family in a slum, their home is a productive asset – it is their workplace. Hence if their home and its environs are upgraded and secured, it is a major contribution to their employment. The latter is because, as you are aware, large members of the urban poor are self employed like vendors or home-based workers. Their homes are also their workplaces and warehouses. Any effort like slum upgradation, which enhances their productivity, strengthens their employment and hence helps them come out of poverty. Therefore, we would strongly argue that slum upgradation is poverty alleviation.

2) Slum upgradation should result in provision of basic amenities and services including water supply, sanitation, toilets, garbage collection, paving of all side and main streets, flood proofing, lighting, landscaping including tree-planting where possible and local services like health care, child care and communication like telephones.

3) At our meeting, you had suggested certain essential components of an urban poverty strategy, including: sectoral reforms, finance, jobs, governance, social capital and other targeted activities. We have a few suggestions regarding these:

- *Sectoral reforms:* while changing regulation and policies for housing, land and infrastructure markets, measures should be included which ensure that land is earmarked for the poor, as they can not afford to buy land at market rates. This land should be made available to them through special schemes and in women's names or at least joint titles.
- *Finance:* finance for infrastructure development should be made available to micro-finance institutions.

- *Jobs*: as the vast majority of slum residents are self-employed, strategies should be undertaken which enhance, protect and promote their work and income security and increase their productivity. These should include security of tenure, and space for vending in the case of street vendors.
- *Governance*: decentralization of all programmes and delegation of these to slum residents and their own local organizations must be undertaken, It has been widely experienced that slum upgradation and local governance programmes are successful only when they are owned, managed, controlled and used by local people - the poor slum residents themselves. With appropriate and adequate capacity building efforts, local people's, especially women's, leadership develops often rapidly. Further, the poor and their own membership-based organizations should have representation on boards, committees for planning implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- *Social Capital*: as mentioned above, intensive capacity-building programmes based on local people's needs should be undertaken so as to build the leadership of local people (slum residents) and help them develop their own viable organizations.
- *Other targeted activities*: we would stress the need for social security, namely at least health care, child care, insurance and housing services as part of an urban anti-poverty strategy.

4) When we discussed the Action Plan for Slum Upgradation, you had mentioned six key actions, namely, strengthening in-country capacity, preparing national city upgrading programmes, supporting regional and global knowledge and learning, investing in slums, strengthening World Bank and partner capacity and leadership and political buy-in.

We would like to add a few more to your list of key actions:

- Representation of the poor and their organizations in slum planning boards and urban planning;
- Capacity building of local people and promoting their leadership so that they can run their own local organizations;
- Decentralization and delegation of slum upgradation and community development programmes with resources and decision-making powers to local slum dwellers and other people's organizations;
- Infrastructure-related finance should be made available to micro-finance institutions.

We would be glad to remain in touch with you and exchange ideas and experiences on slum upgradation.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Mirai Chatterjee
SEWA