Coping with the Threat of Evictions: Commercialisation of Slum Development, Marginalisation of NGOs and Local Power Play in Ahmedabad

Yutaka Sato

CEPT
UNIVERSITY
CENTRE
FOR URBAN EQUITY

Coping with the Threat of Evictions: Commercialisation of Slum Development, Marginalisation of NGOs and Local Power Play in Ahmedabad

Yutaka Sato[1]

CUE Working Paper 33
January 2017

Centre for Urban Equity (CUE)

About Centre for Urban Equity (CUE)
CUE was established at CEPT University in 2009, evolving from the Urban Poverty Alleviation (UPA) Cell established in 2008. CUE advocates a human-centred and equitable urban development paradigm. CUE undertakes research and advocacy; conducts training and capacity-building; imparts education; and networks with stakeholders on various aspects of human settlements with a focus on urban equity.

Contact
Centre for Urban Equity (CUE)
CEPT University
Kasturbhai Lalbhai Campus
University Road, Navrangpura
Ahmedabad - 380009, India
Email: cue@cept.ac.in
Website: www.cept.ac.in/cue

Affiliations:
[1] Associate Professor of Global Sociology, Department of Comparative Study of Cultures, Tsuru University, Japan. Formerly Visiting Researcher at the Centre for Urban Equity, CEPT University. ysato@tsuru.ac.jp

Abstract

The 'slum-free India' slogan that came to the fore in urban policy discourses in the mid-2000s has marked the draconian shift from *in-situ* slum improvement to slum relocation. Accordingly, the burgeoning literature on urban governance in India has portrayed slum dwellers as victims of such neoliberal forms of development. Despite its unique focus on the socio-spatial configuration of poor people's exclusion, it has paid little attention to their resilience to such processes. Drawing on qualitative data obtained from two slums in Ahmedabad, this paper examines the manner in which some residents collectively negotiated with the local government either in defence of their right to housing or in pursuit of personal gains through manipulating the compensation for relocation. This paper has three objectives. Firstly, it gives an overview of the Slum Networking Prograsmme (SNP), which was implemented from 1996 to the late 2000s through a partnership between aid agencies, local government, non-government organizations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), as an example of *in-situ* slum improvement. Secondly, it portrays the process by which the SNP was replaced with some rehabilitation schemes as evident in the provision of dwelling units in multi-storied housing blocks, which are typically located in urban fringes. Thirdly, it presents the diverse strategies that slum dwellers took to claim their right to housing and livelihood. Some residents sought redress with an NGO and the opposition party. Some residents sought co-operation from their neighbours through coercive means and attempted to obtain more compensation than would be available to them by claiming inappropriate data on their households and neighbourhood. This paper concludes by stressing that the powerful in a slum can mobilise an 'illegitimate' means of survival when they are at risk of eviction and deprived of access to 'legitimate' channels of claim-making such as NGOs.

i

Acknowledgements

Contents

1. Introduction

Since the 2000s, metropolitan cities in India have witnessed massive slum evictions as part of the local government's effort to marketise the urban space. Ahmedabad, the sixth largest city of India with a population of 5,570,585 as of 2011, which this paper focuses on, is a case in point. Whereas the city's economy achieved a growth rate of 10.7 per cent during the years 2005/06–2008/09 (GOI 2012: A12), 1,888,300 people, comprising 33.8 per cent of the city's population, live in slums (Annez et al. 2012: 14).[1] The persistent poverty in the midst of Ahmedabad's impressive economic growth has attracted critiques by activists and scholars. They have documented the socio-economic marginalisation of slum dwellers (Mahadevia 2010, 2011), their spatial exclusion and deprivation as a result of evictions (Mathur 2012), and the political infrastructure that fuels Ahmedabad's neoliberal drive in urban planning (Desai 2012, 2014; Spodek 2011).

Their comprehensive documentation of slum dwellers' exclusion has, however, paid little attention to their resilience amidst adversity (Srivastava 2014; Weinstein 2014). To fill this lacuna, this paper focuses on the strategies that those who are facing threats of eviction adopted to minimise their potential loss of livelihood. The slum dwellers' action tends to be sporadic and does not evoke any collective consciousness that underlines their demand for a fair and equitable distribution of urban space (ibid: 15). Their survival strategies include some 'illegal' practices such as reporting fake figures on the number of households to the local government for greater compensation when their slum is likely to be relocated. Their practice has resonance to what political theorist Partha Chatterjee (2004) terms 'political society' where, in the context of slums and/ or squatter settlements, poor people seek to have their voices heard. It is a "site of negotiation and contestation opened up by the activities of governmental agencies aimed at population groups" (ibid: 74). Too often, the urban poor depend on the support of the state that seeks vested interests, while simultaneously they are subject to predatory practices of the state such as the eviction of slums. For Chatterjee, 'civil society' is not always accessible for the urban poor because it is a "closed association of modern elite groups, sequestered from the wider popular life of communities, walled up within enclaves of civic freedom and rational law" (ibid: 4).

In Third World democracies like India, urban slums are often considered as vote banks for political parties (de Wit and Berner 2009). Grassroots non-government organizations (NGOs) have made impressive achievements in the domain of poverty alleviation but their action tends to be confined to the *legal* means of action and organisational management (Desai 2008). Moreover, they are unable to tap into resources that may involve networking with petty bureaucrats and mafias who can

---

[1]   Slums include *chawls*, i.e. dilapidated settlements predominated by single-room tenements arranged in a row. *Chawls* came up as employer-provided housing for textile workers in Ahmedabad and Bombay during the Second World War.

directly give material benefit to the urban poor (Appadurai 2001). Unlike the heyday of import-substitute industrialisation when nationalised companies bestowed the working class with welfare, unionisation of the poor has increasingly become difficult. This is particularly the case in Ahmedabad and Mumbai where the closure of textile mills, which had led their growth, resulted in the joblessness of sacked workers or their casualisation of labour and the deterioration of their housing in the 1980s–90s (Breman 2004). It is against this background that political society in Ahmedabad has become an important site of marginalising the poor; while government agencies evict them on ground of their 'illegality', political parties and leaders competitively mobilise them through provision of welfare.

However, the question remains. The kind of political society that Chatterjee observed in the Communist Party of India-ruled Calcutta (Kolkata) is significantly eroded in the wake of the middle-class's influence over politics. The rise of what sociologist Amita Baviskar (2003: 90) calls 'bourgeois[2] environmentalism' is one such example. It pursues the creation of an ordered space that is beautiful and gracious, which fulfils the middle-class desire for a privileged lifestyle, where nature is controlled and made available for recreation. This is the background of today's slum evictions in urban India. *Our Inclusive Ahmedabad* (2010), a coalition of citizens' initiatives formed in 2009, maintains that eviction drives began in 2002 in the city. This is the period marked by the initiation of various infrastructural development schemes, which include road-widening, construction of Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) corridors and implementation of Sabarmati Riverfront Development (SRFD) Project and Kankaria Lakefront Development Project. As a result, over 28,000 houses were evicted or relocated from their original settlements by December 2009 (Mathur 2012: 65). Moreover, the rule over Ahmedabad by a Hindu-nationalist party has shrunken the space for NGOs to claim the right to housing for poor people, comprised mostly of Muslims and lower-caste and outcaste Hindus, through negotiation or direct confrontation with the government.

These trends raise several questions: in a situation where NGOs have become ineffective, can the urban poor organise themselves in defence of their residential rights and livelihoods in a series of evictions engineered by the growing coalition of the local government and the private sector? Who in those settlements would take the lead to organise their neighbours? Would they be genuinely interested in defending the rights and livelihoods of the entire slum? Would they be self-motivated to benefit from such events by exerting their authority in the slums? If so, how would they be linked up with established, powerful people and/ or organisations such as political parties?

---

[2] Baviskar (2003: 97) uses the term to refer to the group that is instantly recognisable by dress, deportment and language. They are typically the urban-educated, the propertied, white-collar professional, and those who are engaged in business.

In order to examine these questions, this paper first traces the process in which the slum policies in Ahmedabad shifted from *in-situ* upgradation through public-private partnerships to urban rejuvenation that mainly favour the middle-class. Second, it closely looks at the history of community organising and the role that NGOs played in the local government's slum upgradation project. Third, it portrays both the poverty and social fragmentation of the research areas. Fourth, it examines the agency of some slum dwellers in maximising their benefit out of the possible compensation after relocation. Last, it explores the process by which an opposition party consolidated its support base whereas the financial assistance of NGOs fell short of the expectation of the residents, who were victims of the communal riots that broke out in the city in 2002.

2. The research areas in the context of neoliberal exclusion

The river Sabarmati, which runs at the heart of Ahmedabad, divides the west and east of the city. The western part is an upper- and middle-class dominated suburb and the eastern part is an industrial zone where textile mills, many of which have closed down, are located. This spatial segregation is an expression of the class divide of Ahmedabad. The urban decay has driven the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) to implement infrastructural schemes. The first is the Slum Networking Programme (SNP), which was implemented from 1996 to 2009 with the aim to improve the living environment of slum dwellers in partnership with NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs). The second is a set of urban rejuvenation projects. They have affected the research areas in the following manners.

This research was carried out in two SNP-implemented slums of Ahmedabad, i.e. Colony A and Colony B, where the on-going urban rejuvenation resulted in a collective fear among the residents of an eviction of their houses. Before examining how the perceived threat of evictions drove the residents to defend their housing rights, it is necessary to give an overview of these slums in terms of their social composition and their local history of slum development.

Colony A had 12 hutments – all were grocery stores and warehouses – evicted by the construction of a flyover in 2008. This erstwhile industrial zone in the eastern part of Ahmedabad now enjoys improved access to a widened, renovated crossroad and a BRTS station. Colony B, because of its location along the river Sabarmati, was considered as a suitable site for the SRFD. Most of the other slums had been demolished by the time of fieldwork, driving the residents to suffer from the loss of their livelihood in dumping grounds (Mathur 2012; Our Inclusive Ahmedabad 2010), before they are provided with a dwelling unit at a rehabilitation site in the city's periphery.

What characterises the research areas is the heterogeneous social composition of the residents in terms of sub-caste, regional origin and language (Table 1). This has

encouraged political patronage to prevail in these areas. In terms of community development, Colony A has enjoyed no external intervention, Colony B has received support from the National Congress Party as well as the Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (MHT) and the SEWA Bank, both of which are sister organisations of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA).

Table 1: Profiles of studied areas and survey respondents

	Colony A *(n=51)*	Colony B *(n=38)*
Total no. of households	277 (officially registered figure)	110 (approx.)
No. of respondents	51 women	38 women
Castes *	SC: 56.1 (23), ST: 19.5 (8), OBC: 9.8 (4), Forward castes: 14.6 (6)	SC: 33.3 (5), ST: 20.0 (3), OBC: 46.7 (7)
Regional origins	Gujarat (50.0%), Maharashtra (19.2%), North Indian states (26.9%), South Indian states (3.8%)	Gujarat (64.1%), North Indian states (18.0%), Maharashtra (7.7%), South Indian states (10.3%)
Generations of domicile in Ahmedabad	First (51.0%), Second (25.5%), Third (23.5%)	First (71.8%), Second (20.5%), Third (7.7%)
Illiterate respondents	53.8%	48.7%
Status of ration card	BPL (7.8%), APL (68.6%), No (23.5%)	BPL (5.3%), APL (81.6%), No (13.2%)
Year of upgradation under SNP	2000	1997
No. of CBO members	6 (M) / 1 (F)	2 (M) / 9 (F)
Formal organisations	None	MHT, SEWA Bank, National Congress Party
Women's savings group	1 endogenous (closed)	1 established by MHT

Note: Scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and other backward classes (OBCs) are constitutional terms for those entitled to positive discrimination.
Abbreviations: APL: Above the poverty line (for provision of a ration card); BPL: Below the poverty line; MHT: Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust; SEWA: Self-Employed Women's Association; SNP: Slum Networking Programme (of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation).
Source: Author's fieldwork.

With regard to migration and labour, Colony A has attracted migrants from various states in India who are engaged in miscellaneous informal businesses serving both textile and non-textile factories. Some male residents in Colony A migrated mainly from Uttar Pradesh, leaving their families in their villages. Colony B is inhabited by some 200 Muslim households and some 20 Hindu households. It has residents from various regional and caste[3] backgrounds. Casual work in construction sites and street vending are their major occupations.

---

[3] The social organisation of Muslims in India reflects many characteristics of the Hindu caste system.

Almost half of the respondents are illiterate. The majority are ration card holders, although their acquisition is quite often contingent upon their connection with middlemen and local gangs.

As shown in Table 1, this study conducted household surveys, along with focus groups and individual interviews. The research process itself reveals the micro-politics in these slums that Ahmedabad's eviction drives have rendered.[4] For example, the author randomly sampled the respondents for my 2003 survey, whereas the author relied on purposive sampling for my 2012 survey. The author's choice for the latter is due to the non-existence of any reliable data on the number of households, which was enumerated for these slums to participate in the SNP. The reason behind this is slum dwellers' self-defence from potential evictions. Some residents in both areas reported inaccurate and highly inflated number of their colony's population to the local government so as to maximise the amount of compensation that they might possibly secure from them. This form of resistance indicates their agency, even if it is unevenly distributed among the residents, as will be analysed in subsequent sections.

3. The changing slum policies in Ahmedabad
3.1 Slum upgradation towards growth: Antecedents of the SNP
The SNP was launched by the AMC in August 1996. Funded by the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Housing and Urban Development Corporation of the central government, and private companies, it provided facilities to each slum, notably paved lanes, water supply and underground sewerage to individual households, streetlights, trees for landscaping and communal and individual latrines. It also emphasised people's participation and the role of NGOs; hence it had some pro-poor elements (Mahadevia 2010).

However, its rationale is not necessarily 'pro-poor' but rather reflects utilitarian ideas of economic growth. Moreover, the SNP was a response to the plague that in 1994 broke out in Surat, the second largest city of Gujarat. The filthy slum environment and lack of solid waste management were the principal cause of the plague outbreak. The plague ultimately reached Ahmedabad which is located about 220 km north of Surat. It forced the central and state governments to give priority to slum improvement.

"The slums continue to be a serious threat to the health and sanitation of the city besides the people living in the slums face serious health problems besides human

---

[4] The initial phase of the author's fieldwork in 2003–4 focused only on Hindu-dominated slums that included Colony A. Colony B, which is a Muslim-dominated slum, was added for fieldwork in 2010–12. The data presented in this paper draw on focus groups, individual interviews and household surveys that the author conducted in Colony A (2003–4 and 2011–12) and Colony B (2010–12). The author thanks the NGO, Foundation for Public Interest (FPI) and the team of researchers from the Centre for Urban Equity (CUE), CEPT University for supporting my fieldwork during 2003–5 and 2010–13, respectively. In particular, the author would thank Ms. Tejal Patel for assisting in organising the fieldwork. All the names mentioned in the case study have been changed to protect the confidentiality of these informants.

degradation. The environment in and around the slums is far from satisfactory and needs urgent attention". (AMC nd)

It was not only the AMC that promulgated the need for urban sanitation. Middle-class citizens were altogether wary of such threat. The former Commissioner of the AMC, Keshav Varma, noted that "[w]hen plague broke out in the city, the people were so angry that it was impossible for the Chief Minister to even enter the city without being threatened ..." (Hamid and Martin 1999: 9; Shah 1997: 239).

Varma, later the Manager of the Urban Development Sector Unit, East Asia and Pacific Region at the World Bank, was appointed to the AMC in 1994. He introduced the SNP in the belief that cities are the engine of growth, for which good governance in urban management must be ensured and was concerned that Ahmedabad had 'almost lost the race' with the economic liberalisation of India (Hamid and Martin 1999: 8–9). In particular, the slums were considered as a bottleneck to attract both foreign and domestic capital. Varma oversaw a one-billion-rupee bond issued in 1997 to help raise the necessary financial investment for slum improvement, attempting to transform the AMC into a solvent corporation with surplus funds (Spodek 2011: 240).

In this vein, the AMC and its industrial partners considered the SNP to have the potential to promote economic development at the city level. On the other hand, NGOs advocated the establishment of collective initiatives of the people towards improved access to public service. It was Himansh H. Parikh, a structural engineer who developed the concept of 'slum networking' in order to achieve these twin aims. He had previously designed similar projects in other cities in India. Parikh's approach was based on the belief that 'slums are not the causes of urban degradation but the consequences of distorted development'. He rejected the popular notion that simply providing better quality housing to the dwellers could eliminate slums. Instead he sought to integrate the slums into the urban infrastructure of the city (Tripathi and Jumani 2001: 1). The SNP thus applied a 'networking strategy' that would establish close links with public agencies, involve slums by forming CBOs, and create medical, educational and recreational facilities (Tripathi 1998: 22).

3.2 Roles of NGOs and CBOs
By 2009, around 60 slums were upgraded, benefitting about 130,000 households under the SNP (Mahadevia et al. 2014: 25). For the SNP to be implemented, each slum must meet the following requirements. First, every household must show its willingness to make a financial contribution, which amounts to INR 2,100[5] out of every INR 10,000 spent per household. Second, the socio-economic conditions of the slum should be 'significantly poor'. This would include, for example, where the slum is densely populated and there is total dearth of basic services or limited availability of services. Third, the land is owned by the AMC. If the land is not owned by the

---

[5]   As of December 2015, the Indian currency rupee (INR) is 66.24 against US$1.

AMC, the slum must liaise with the government or the semi-governmental authorities to obtain a no-objection certificate. The land occupancy would then be guaranteed for 10 years. The AMC reserves the right to relocate the dwellers to another site if the area is found to be useful for commercial purposes after this period.[6] Fourth, the slum must have established a CBO with several elected leaders by the residents – who are then to be registered with the AMC – before the installation of basic amenities comes into effect. A CBO is deemed necessary to manage the maintenance of the installed infrastructure and the collection of financial contributions from each household, which is to be transacted at the SEWA Bank.

SEWA is a membership-based organisation that was established in 1972. Its goal is to organise women in the informal sector for self-reliance through four organisational pillars: trade unions, co-operatives, the bank and social services. Inspired by Gandhian ideals of non-violence, truth, encouragement of local employment and industries, frugality and self-reliance, SEWA aims to promote poor women's full decision-making and control over their assets and resources at home and at work (SEWA 1988: 13).

It believes that through collective action, women in the informal sector would become strong and visible, and their contributions to the urban economy would become recognised because they are leading such action (SEWA 2003: 5). One of the impressive achievements of SEWA in the context of urban protest is the organising of street vendors, who are often deemed 'encroachers' in the public space and thus subject to eviction, towards their right to stay put.

Under the SNP, the SEWA Bank, as a micro-finance organisation, provided loans to the benefiting households on the condition that female residents would open accounts with the Bank. It offered a short-term loan up to a maximum of INR 1,500. It also encouraged women in the SNP-slums to continue their membership for purposes that would enhance their productive works.

Whereas the SEWA Bank played a part as a financial intermediary, the MHT, another sister organisation of SEWA, worked for the capacity-building of female CBO leaders. MHT has striven to create improved access for poor women to services such as shelter finance, legal advice information on the housing market and job opportunities (MHT 1997, 2001). The SNP thus offered MHT an opportunity to bring the benefits of urban development policies within the reach of poor women by promoting their own institutions such as CBOs (SEWA Academy 2002: 9–10). In the SNP, MHT identified new possible slums for implementation of the physical upgradation through a socio-economic survey and community meetings. By 2009, MHT helped 115 slums establish their own CBO. Each MHT-mediated CBO had several female leaders who would not only ensure the financial contribution being made by every household in

---

[6]   Interview at the SNP Cell on April 6, 2004.

their slum, but also negotiate with the AMC for repair when something went wrong with their installed facilities. By this token, MHT intended to help slum-women build skills for collective negotiation with external agencies.

3.3 Slum policies after 2005: infrastructural development and rehabilitation

Urban renewal financed by international financial institutions has shifted its foci from the upgradation of slums and livelihood generation towards the building of consumption and transport infrastructure. In order to be globally attractive for investment capital, cities must be seen as engines of economic growth to which infrastructure development becomes central (Harvey 1985).

It is in this context that the construction of flyovers, road-widening and the lakefront and riverfront development projects came into being in Ahmedabad. Among these, the highest profile urban revitalisation project is the SRFD Project. It is administered by Sabarmati River Front Development Corporation Limited (SRFDCL), a special purpose agency of the AMC established in May 1997.[7] The AMC partnership with quasi-governmental corporations like the SRDC denotes its neoliberal strategy to recreate a decaying urban landscape. It is now an ally of the capitalist classes for growth-driven development rather than as a redistributive agent. The AMC used to advocate pro-poor agendas such as the role of NGOs in community development as part of the SNP (Mahadevia 2010).

These infrastructural schemes were flagship projects of Gujarat State, which during 2001–14 was headed by Narendra Modi, now the Prime Minister of India. The Modi administration attempted to project impressive performance of the state government through promoting the growth of Gujarat under the banners of 'Vibrant Gujarat' and 'Gujarat shining'.[8] In this regard, political scientist Neera Chandhoke (2009) criticises the Modi administration for masking the damaged image of Gujarat by attracting investment from within and outside India as well as beautifying the decaying urban landscape.

The impact of the spatial reconfiguration produced by the SRFD and other projects on livelihoods and habitat for the urban poor has been immense. For instance, most of the SNP-implemented slums are now subject to land redevelopment since their 10-year guarantee of land tenure has expired.

4. The rise and fall of community organising in the slums

The local government's drive towards infrastructural development that gentrifies the poor neighbourhoods has invited some unanticipated consequences. This section will

---

[7] However, the idea of the riverfront development as well as the SRFD was first suggested in the 1960s by Bernard Kohn, a French American architect.

[8] During the fieldwork in 2003–5, the author often received an SMS with these slogans on my mobile from the Government of Gujarat.

illustrate the experience of the two slums by closely looking at the internal dynamics of neighbourhood relationship as well as their negotiation with NGOs and petty bureaucrats.

4.1 Self-organising the fragmented community

What characterises Colony A is the fragmentation of its neighbourhood relationship. This explains how the leaders of this area have exercised their power in the course of the SNP and the on-going threat of relocation.

Colony A was formed in 1981. The SNP was implemented from 1997 to 2001. Because the CBO was formed in absence of any NGOs, the male residents represented it (Table 1).

A thumbnail sketch of a CBO leader, Mukesh, demonstrates the power structure of Colony A from the outset of the SNP. There are seven members who are registered with the CBO of Colony A, but except Mukesh, all of them are illiterate.[9] According to Mukesh, due to their illiteracy, he has alone been concerned with matters of the CBO.

The exceptions are two other CBO leaders, Mirai and her husband Shakti. Mirai is a vocal woman, the author found, who is proud of her second husband with whom she had a love marriage. Mirai was selected as a CBO leader since the neighbours regarded her as capable of solving the problems of female residents. When the election for CBO leaders took place, as per the requirement from the AMC, all the women present unanimously voted for her. They visited the Foundation for Public Interest (FPI), an NGO that closely worked with MHT,[10] to ask for establishing computer classes for the children in Colony A. However, their attempt did not bear fruit due to Mukesh's opposition.[11] Indeed, male residents' opposition to women's leadership for fear of losing their vested interest in the context of the SNP has been well documented (Bhatt and Shah 2010).

Mukesh claimed that the lack of development in Colony A was what had driven him to take action for this neighbourhood during the SNP.

> *"When I passed Year 10, I thought of doing something new in my life. With this dream, I moved in a village [in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh]*

---

[9] The area indeed has a female CBO leader but Mukesh reiterated that all the CBO members were men.

[10] During the SNP, the FPI ran a programme called the Urban Planning Partnerships to help women in the slums build the capacity to organise their female neighbours for community action.

[11] Interview, February 6, 2003. The author's later field visits to Colony A in March 2012, however, revealed that they were seeking to maximise the compensation they might receive from the AMC as a result of a possible eviction and remained tyrannical to those neighbours who questioned their attempt.

for administrative work. I did this job with farmers. I took up this job on contract … But some familial problems arose and I returned to Ahmedabad. I started to live in Colony A. This area was devoid of any amenities. I visited the AMC once and the person who I spoke to told me about the SNP. After that, I applied for the SNP. Having had responsibility for the SNP, I decided to stay here for good. I have completed my entire responsibility here."

Mukesh's commitment appears to derive more from his personal ethos and desires rather than from a genuine wish to improve the area. He maintains a close relationship with two AMC officials who are from lower-caste backgrounds. They have invited him for dinner, about which he feels very proud. His leadership has imbued him with skills and confidence through his rich personal networks. The following dialogue proves his prestige:

> **YS (author)**: *Are you friendly with any AMC officer? How have you become closer to them?*
>
> **MS (Mukesh)**: I had a good relationship with AMC officers during the SNP. I've had a very good relationship with Raju because he started working with the SNP in our ward which successfully finished. Because of this success, he got a promotion in his job. Now he is an additional city engineer. At every festival, he visits my home and I visit his home too.
>
> **YS**: *How have you organised the CBO alone?*
>
> **MS**: Before the SNP, nobody of the area knew me. I provided all the residents with the information by making door-to-door visits. It was too difficult for me to convince them about this scheme but somehow I made it possible. Because of this, I've been maintaining a good relationship with the officers.
>
> **YS**: *What and how have you benefited from AMC officers?*
>
> **MS**: I came to know about the SNP from Mani. After that I met Raju and requested him to initiate this work. There wasn't any official who wanted to work in this department. But Raju accepted this challenge and started to work for it. He made a success with my support. Though he was new to this ward office, his success got him a promotion.

His strong leadership does not make Mukesh supportive of any NGO striving to improve the well-being of the area. He refused to accept the proposals from NGOs such as the FPI and SEWA to work for women and children of the area. Meanwhile, a Hindu religious charity, Jai Mata Di, provided sewing machines to female residents. Simultaneously, some residents formed an endogenous self-help group. It provided loans to female residents in Colony A without any collateral, but with a daily membership fee of INR 20.

Mukesh enjoyed respect from his neighbours hailing from Uttar Pradesh as well as the same sub-caste group and not from others. This indicates that the social divide within the slum with respect to caste, regional origin and language has barred communal interaction across the neighbourhood in Colony A from emerging.

Mukesh left the area in 2008 and went first back to his village in Uttar Pradesh and then to Surat in search of a better job. Some residents alleged that Mukesh left Colony A, after depleting the money that he had collected from each household during the SNP. Simultaneously, one informant called Sita corrected this information, saying Mukesh's alleged misappropriation of the money is just a rumour, although his somewhat peculiar trait was quite unpopular among the residents. However, it is true that whereas the CBO in each SNP slum was responsible for transferring the community's contribution to the SEWA Bank, Mukesh refused to allow any NGO to work in Colony A and chose to transfer the money directly to the AMC. Indeed, the fact that MHT had to pull out from Colony A due to the vested interests that were established between the leaders and the politicians was documented (Acharya and Parikh 2002: 327).

4.2 Rebuilding life after the communal violence, unmet expectation from NGOs

The Colony B experience demonstrates the loss of livelihood that many residents experienced and their dissatisfaction with the partial support that they received from SEWA. During the SNP in 1997, MHT helped the female residents to form their own CBO. Not only did the CBO help women from each household open an account in the SEWA Bank, but it also motivated them to save their money in the Bank. Nevertheless, not all the members were women. The CBO had two male residents who took the lead in executing their actions. They trained the women as to how to talk to people from outside the slum and how to take necessary administrative steps in forming their CBO. Out of the 11 CBO members, four were Hindus and seven were Muslims.

Along with the CBO, MHT helped the women to set up a crèche in 1997. The school initially began with 20 children aged 1–5: 10 boys and 10 girls. It opened from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. In this way, working mothers with small children in Colony B were able to work outside the neighbourhood after taking their children to the crèche. The teachers were female residents of Colony B. They fed, taught and sanitised the children whenever required. During the time of fieldwork, there were 40 children in this crèche. However, the fee was recently hiked from INR 10 to INR 50 per child, which has reduced the number of students. One woman said: *"I have four children. How should I feed and educate them?"* Another woman said: *"if we take a loan from SEWA [Bank], they'll keep giving us the pressure to pay the interest on time."*[12]

---

[12] The annual interest rates of SEWA Bank's loans vary. The one for housing loans is 14.5 per cent and the one for enterprise loans is 17.0 per cent. The differentiation is due to the fact that housing does not generate an instant higher income flow. Whereas these rates are slightly higher than those of nationalised banks, to which many illiterate and semi-illiterate poor women are deprived of

To be fair, as the SEWA Bank is not a charity but a banking institution for microfinance of poor women, its interest rate is meant for 'disciplining' women and supporting their enterprise in the informal sector. However, this 'capitalist' discipline does not always eradicate the structural causes of chronic poverty and insecurity that loom large in the neoliberal regime (Rankin 2004).

In the post-SNP phase, women's negotiation with SEWA in terms of housing became more complicated. Their 'unmet' expectation with SEWA was also expressed with respect to their effort to reconstruct their life after the 2002 communal riots, during which some houses in Colony B were burnt. The mob was comprised of Hindus and all of them were outsiders. During the riot they were compelled to live in a relief camp where they were given whatever little amount of water and food they needed to survive. The majority of the residents left Colony B after the communal riots and returned when the tension curbed. They started rebuilding their houses gradually, in bits and parts. They raised their house plinth level and built strong houses. Each affected household received a relief fund – the 'written-off loan' – of up to INR 35,000 from the SEWA Bank under the '50:50 Scheme'. The idea is that each household would bear another INR 35,000, for which the SEWA Bank provides a housing loan. Through MHT, they also took a loan from the SEWA Bank for restoration work and repaid it in small instalments.

The achievement is rather grim. Out of 110, only four houses have RCC roofs and the rest have only tin-sheet roofs. The damage caused by the riots on their livelihoods looms so large that most of them are unable to repay the SEWA Bank. One woman said that she and her neighbours restored their life by dint of sheer hard work. She went on to say that there is hardly any role in which the government and NGOs could play. Out of the 12 members in the self-help group, eight left due to some reasons. As a result, with only four members they are not in a position to make any decision on behalf of the whole neighbourhood.

The focus groups repeatedly said that they got some food ration and clothes from NGOs during and after the communal riots but their help fell too short against their loss of livelihoods. Meanwhile, the relief in the form of ration and clothes was provided to them by all political parties. During the group interview in September 2010, I met the trustee of Shradha Charitable Trust, a charity affiliated to the Congress, the major opposition party in Ahmedabad, Gujarat and now India. He started a crèche in this neighbourhood in 2005 with the aim to provide primary education to residents in all age groups, including working people.

---

access, my fieldwork found out that some of them were indebted to unscrupulous moneylenders who do not require any collateral or residential proof but charge a predatory rate of over 10–15 per cent per month.

The experience of Colony B exemplifies the shrinking space for NGOs in the time of neoliberalisation and the communalisation of politics. It was an opposition party, which found niches to mobilise the poor Muslim minorities as part of its vote bank politics. Yet, its fragile base of political society is capable of neither representing the plight of residents into urban planning nor securing their livelihood as much as NGOs used to do.

5. Negotiation with political and civil societies
5.1 Power of the leaders in a fragmented settlement

The on-going threats of eviction in Colony A have shaped the direction in which slum dwellers organise themselves or get incorporated into the interest of the powerful. The previous section described that the former CBO leader, Mukesh, allegedly depleted the money that he had collected from each household and left Ahmedabad. However, several informal visits that the author made to Colony A revealed a different fact. A female neighbour called Sita secretly told me that it was not Mukesh but Shakti who, along with his wife Mirai, kept that money.[13] They succeeded Mukesh's leadership. They had the desire to build a temple for their caste group called *Madrasis*, which are Gujarati *dalits/ harijans* and hail from a Dravidian clan in South India.

Sita says that everyone was so afraid of Mirai and Shakti that they might take violent action against them had they confronted them.[14] According to her, Shakti sold a plot of the slum for the construction of a primary school by evacuating the people living in that area. Sita continues: *"People never speak ill of them and their associates ... if someone discloses any 'tyrannical' action that they enforced, the person will be beaten up with a stick and forced to walk naked in front of the neighbours."*

Opposite to Colony A, across the flyover, is a neighbourhood inhabited by middle-class landlords. Some portion of their land was recently developed for the construction of blocks of flats. Their possible desire to develop the land of Colony A is something which worries Shakti, Mirai and their associates. In response to this, they increased the total number of households in Colony A (i.e. 225 as is recorded in the AMC's list of SNP slums) to approximately 400. By doing so, they would be able to maximise the compensation provided by the AMC in case it relocates them to blocks of flats called the BSUP (Basic Services to the Urban Poor) Resettlement Sites, which are typically located on the fringe of Ahmedabad.

---

[13] Interview, March 14, 2012. The interview took place in Sita's one-room hutment secretly. In Gujarat, it is a common practice that one takes off his/ her shoes at the entrance when visiting someone's house. The author, instead of leaving my Crocs™ sandals outside, brought them inside Sita's hutment so that no one would ever find the author listening to her narrative.

[14] This came as surprise to the author, given that Mirai was an elected leader of the CBO and once requested the FPI to run computer classes for children in Colony A. Nevertheless, not only did Sita warned the author not to rely on Sita for fieldwork but also one of team members from CUE sensed that Sita and Shakti were involved in some politics for personal gains.

In order to make this fake data *bona fide*, Shakti and his neighbours prepared a form with the help of a lawyer and submitted it to the Delhi High Court through some governmental agency in Gujarat. It was crucial for them to get their manipulated information approved by the landlord of Colony A, who presently lives in Hyderabad.[15]

By the time the author interviewed Sita, the author had built rapport with Shakti and Mirai, and was fortunate enough to photocopy the aforementioned form for myself. In it, they requested compensation from the authorities, as well as the allotment of flats to the Colony A residents should the colony be demolished. It accompanies the photographs, signatures and thumb impressions (if they are illiterate) of 125 residents. According to Sita, Shakti claimed that his family had four houses – Shakti's and the rest owned by his three sons, whereas the entire family owns only one house in Colony A. The untruthful information that he reported was intended to secure more flats for his family after relocation.

This paper contends that the illegal means by which Shakti and Mirai secured their rights to housing indicates the instability of the notion of citizenship in global South cities (Holston 2008: 317). They are subject to evictions due to their illegal land ownership on one hand; on the other hand, they constitute vote banks for which the government takes benevolent action.

In sum, the social fragmentation of Colony A has encouraged Mukesh, and later Mirai and Shakti, to monopolise their CBO and access to petty bureaucrats and policemen. The lack of mutual trust among the residents was evident during my fieldwork. For example, the area has a corner inhabited by two groups of residents from Gujarat and Maharashtra. Some of them keep stray dogs as watchdogs. As much as they stay vigilant to outsiders, they were either reluctant to co-operate with our survey or refused our request. Access to resource persons is the key to moving out of poverty, but it may also widen the gap between a few powerful leaders and the rest of the residents in heterogeneous slums like Colony A.

All these tactics of the leaders clearly show their intention to profit out of the weaknesses of the housing regime in India. Driven by the desire to secure governmental compensation amidst their uncertain status of land tenure, they abandon their neighbourhood-level collective struggle for individual gains (Baviskar 2003: 96). The fragmentation of Colony A in terms of sub-caste and language has encouraged them to adapt to, rather than resist, the neoliberal system of Ahmedabad's anti-poor planning.

---

[15] The land is privately owned. The AMC sanctioned the land and gave the entire Colony A a 10-year land tenure when the SNP was implemented in 1997.

5.2 Privatisation of the slum land: Whither the residents and NGOs?

Like in Colony A, there has been a general sense of uncertainty among the residents in Colony B as to whether they will be relocated to the BSUP Resettlement Sites on the fringe of Ahmedabad. The demolition of neighbouring slums and the construction of an embankment along the 10-kilometre stretch of the river Sabarmati began in 2009 by the SRDFCL. It spread the fear among the residents. The focus groups said that, due to the low wages of their casual work, they could not afford to travel from the new place to Colony B where they obtain their casual work as daily workers. Because of being Muslims, they are treated as 'secondary citizens' under the Hindunationalist BJP rule. The majority of them obviously do not have much trust in the local government. Out of the 39 valid answers, 20 women are in favour of the Congress, whereas two support the BJP, five find favour with both the Congress and the BJP, and 12 dissent any political parties. A community worker of MHT is of the view that the women of Colony B are unaware of their rights as citizens. She says: *"they approach neither AMC officials and workers nor local leaders even when they need any kind of support."*

Meanwhile, MHT persuaded the AMC not to relocate the people of Colony B from their original sites under the SRFDCL. MHT's persuasion bore fruit and the AMC decided not to relocate the people from the present settlement. Simultaneously, it had the plan to build three-storied BSUP blocks of flats near Colony B, while making arrangements for the protection of people's livelihood.[16]

However, changes have happened since then. Four big construction companies, i.e. HN Safal, B Safal, NA Builders and Gala Group, took interest in investing in Colony B. One of them, the Gala Group, persuaded each household of Colony B with a one-page pamphlet with pictures of beautifully designed dwelling units. It starts with the banner: "As per the Slum Redevelopment Act, 2010, let's build a perfect future for our upcoming generations. It is a future that you build with the Gala Group." It promises to provide each household with two rooms, a separate kitchen and a bathroom at no cost. By the time the author interviewed one leader from Colony B in September 2012, the company had received consent from 75 per cent of the dwellers. The AMC was in the process of deciding whether to give this government-owned land to the SRFDCL or the Gala Group. The residents whom the author asked about their proposal appeared sceptical of the promises that the Gala Group made.

In response to this public-private collaboration, both MHT and the opposition party started taking action separately towards the redevelopment of Colony B. Badruddin Shaikh, an Opposition (the Congress) leader in the AMC Electoral Wing, opposed the idea that the Gala Group and the AMC proposed: the developer constructs blocks of flats on some plots of the land, rehabilitates the slum dwellers in them, and then use

---

[16]   Interview with the staff of MHT, September 20, 2010.

the remaining land for commercial development.[17] He instead advocated an *in-situ* upgradation model, like the SNP, for Colony B and other slums.

MHT, on the other hand, is not negative about the SRA model being implemented for the Colony B residents. The director of MHT endorses the rehabilitation of slum dwellers into BSUP Resettlement Sites, which are modern in terms of both appearance and function. This does not mean that MHT supports the practice of the SRFDCL; it is highly critical of the SRFDCL model of resettlement, which has driven slum dwellers to the city's periphery where they are deprived of access to transport networks as well as livelihood opportunities.

To this end, MHT conducted a 'biometric survey' on behalf of the AMC in 2010, which would then be used as a proof of residence for each household in Colony B. With this, they will be eligible to move to the dwelling units built by the Gala Group.[18] MHT also proposed that it would ensure the community participation of women once the rehabilitation takes shape for Colony B's residents. Whereas the Congress leader's opposition to the rehabilitation is populist and rooted in the slum dwellers' concern, MHT's action demonstrates its *realpolitik* (McFarlane 2004), which seeks the way to protect slum-women's livelihoods while compromising the neoliberal ethos and practice of public-private partnerships in urban redevelopment.

6. Conclusions

The experiences of the two case study areas with the potential threats of relocation exemplify the importance of examining the complexity of power relations that come into play between different actors: slum dwellers and leaders, NGOs, private developers and petty bureaucrats. The micro-politics among the slum dwellers on their efforts to defend their rights to land and housing is shaped by the agendas and strategies of urban planning that keep changing over time. This paper has examined these processes in the following contexts.

Firstly, investment in, and speculation on, urban slums is increasingly the norm of urban planning in Ahmedabad where there is a growing coalition between the local government and private developers. Serving the interest of the burgeoning middle-class, rather than the poor, has become the means for the local government to gain legitimacy. This explains why the rehabilitation of slum dwellers is a part of the neoliberal recreation of urban space and how the notion of redistributive justice has been replaced with the ideology of economic growth.

---

[17]   This model is a replication of the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) Schemes in Mumbai. The SRA model brings profits to private developers as the land prices in Mumbai are high, as compared to those in Ahmedabad.

[18]   Earlier, two other criteria were proposed for the would-be relocatees to meet. First, 10 years of stay must be proved by each household with one of the following: a ration card, a voter identity card, an electricity bill issued eight years ago, and any other relevant proof of residence. Second, 25 years of domicile in Gujarat state for non-Gujaratis.

Secondly, the concentration of power on slumlords can sustain the patron-client relationship, which serves their profit maximisation at the expense of other residents. This vertical relationship among the slum dwellers and between the slum and the local government is strengthened in the wake of anti-poor, neoliberal practices of urban development as evidenced above. Such inequality is overlooked in the 'right to the city' debate, which tries to uncover the agency of collective actors to contest the élitist creation of urban space (Kudva 2009). This understanding is problematic in the context of neoliberalising postcolonial cities where economic growth and the beautification of the city actually are opening up aspirations among the poor to be part of the mainstream of politics and society. They make it difficult for slum dwellers to forge solidarity based on shared identity and experience towards social justice in urban planning.

Thirdly, the experience of failed negotiation that slum dwellers had with NGOs and the local government can open up the possibility for political parties to integrate the poor into their own agendas. Due to the political and economic hardship that they had experienced during and after the communal riots, people in Colony B tended to remain cautious of the AMC and private developers which had joined the project of large infrastructural development led urban development. SEWA offered them some scope for rebuilding the community and livelihood in the post-rehabilitation phase.

Briefly, the recent restructuring of governance in global South cities has reduced efforts on the pro-poor component of urban development and the ethos of grassroots activism. Whereas poverty alleviation and the redistribution of scarce resources in favour of the poor was the norm in urban politics, the recent economic development of Ahmedabad, like many other global South cities, has brought the interest and voices of the rich back in. The political agendas in Southern democracies now have stronger foundations in the interest of the burgeoning middle-class, rather than the poor, who nevertheless still constitute a thin layer of the urban society.

References

Acharya, S.K. and S. Parikh (2002). "Slum Networking in Ahmedabad: An Alternative Paradigm," in A. Kundu and D. Mahadevia (eds) *Poverty and Vulnerability in a Globalising Metropolis: Ahmedabad*, New Delhi: Manak Publications, pp. 309-348.

AMC (nd). *Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation: Slum Networking Project – A Concept*, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, Unpublished manuscript.

Annez, P.C., A. Bertaud, M.A. Bertaud, B. Bhatt, C. Bhatt, B. Patel and V. Phatak (2012). "Ahmedabad: More but Different Government for "Slum Free" and Livable Cities," Policy Research Working Paper, No. 6267, Washington, DC: Sustainable Development Network, Finance Economics and Urban Department, World Bank.

Appadurai, A. (2001). "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics," *Environment and Urbanization* 13(2), pp. 23–43.

Baviskar, A. (2003). "Between Violence and Desire: Space, Power and Identity in the Making of Metropolitan Delhi," *International Social Science Journal* 175, pp. 89–98.

Bhatt, B. and P. Shah (2010). "Mobilizing Women for Change: Case Study of Sanjaynagar, Ahmedabad," CUE Working Paper 7, Centre for Urban Equity, CEPT University.

Breman, J. (2004). *The Making and Unmaking of an Industrial Working Class: Sliding Down the Labour Hierarchy in Ahmedabad, India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Chandhoke, N. (2009). "Civil Society in Conflict Cities," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44 (44), pp. 99–108.

Chatterjee, P. (2004). *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Delhi: Permanent Black.

de Wit, J. and E. Berner (2009) "Progressive Patronage? Municipalities, NGOs, CBOs and the Limits to Slum Dwellers' Empowerment," *Development and Change* 40(5), pp. 927–947.

Desai, R. (2012). "Governing the Urban Poor: Riverfront Development, Slum Resettlement and the Politics of Inclusion in Ahmedabad," *Economic and Political Weekly* 57 (2), pp. 49–56.

Desai, R. (2014). "Municipal Politics, Court Sympathy and Housing Rights: A Post-Mortem of Displacement and Resettlement under the Sabarmati Riverfront Project, Ahmedabad," CUE Working Paper 23, Ahmedabad: Centre for Urban Equity, CEPT University.

Desai, V. (2008). "Role of Non-Governmental Organizations," in V. Desai and R.B. Potter (eds) *The Companion to Development Studies*. London: Hodder Education.

GOI (2012). *Economic survey 2011–12*, Government of India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Hamid, N. and J. Martin (1999). "*Asian Cities in the 21st Century: Contemporary Approaches to Municipal Management, Vol. 1: Leadership and Change in City Management,*" Manila: Asian Development Bank.

Harvey, D. (1985). *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Holston, J. (2008). *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kudva, N. (2009). "The Everyday and the Episodic: The Spatial and Political Impacts of Urban Informality," *Environment and Planning A* 41 (7), pp. 1614–1628.

Mahadevia, D. (2010). "Tenure Security and Urban Social Protection Links: India," *IDS Bulletin* 41 (4), pp. 52–62.

Mahadevia, D. (2011). "Branded and Renewed? Policies, Politics and Processes of Urban Development in the Reform Era," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46 (31), pp. 56–64.

Mahadevia, D., R. Desai and S. Vyas (2014). "City Profile: Ahmedabad," CUE Working Paper 26, Centre for Urban Equity, CEPT University.

Mathur, N. (2012). "On the Sabarmati Riverfront: Urban Planning as Totalitarian Governance in Ahmedabad," *Economic and Political Weekly* 57 (47/48), pp. 64–75.

McFarlane, C. (2004). "Geographical Imaginations and Spaces of Political Engagement: Examples from the Indian Alliance," *Antipode* 36 (5), pp. 890–916.

MHT (1997). *Parivartan: Housing Clinic*. Ahmedabad: Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust. (in Gujarati).

MHT (2001). *Parivartan Project: A manual*, MHT Manual Series 1 and 2, Ahmedabad: Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust.

Our Inclusive Ahmedabad (2010). "Report on a Public Hearing on Habitat and Livelihood Displacements (held on December 19, 2009)," Our Inclusive Ahmedabad, Ahmedabad, http://www.scribd.com/doc/66023157/A-Public-Hearing-on-Habitat-amp-Livelihood-Displacements-in-Ahmedabad-2010, Accessed on January 15, 2012.

Rankin, K. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Markets: Economic Liberalization and Social Change in Nepal*, London: Pluto Press.

SEWA (*1988*). *Annual Report 1988*, Ahmedabad: Self-Employed Women's Association.

SEWA (2003). *Annual Report 2003*, Ahmedabad: Self-Employed Women's Association.

SEWA Academy (2002). *Parivartan and Its Impact: A Partnership Programme of Infrastructure Development in Slums of Ahmedabad City*, Ahmedabad: Self-Employed Women's Association.

Shah, G. (1997). *Public Health and Urban Development: The Plague in Surat*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Spodek, H. (2011). *Ahmedabad: Shock City of Twentieth Century India*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Srivastava, S. (2014). *Entangled Urbanism: Slum, Gated Community, and Shopping Mall in Delhi and Gurgaon*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Tripathi, D. (1998). *Alliance for Change: A Slum Upgrading Experiment in Ahmedabad*, New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill.

Tripathi, D. and J. Jumani (2001). *Change after Alliance: Sequel to Alliance for Change*, New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill.

Weinstein, L. (2014). *The Durable Slum: Dharavi and the Right to Stay Put in Globalizing Mumbai*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Centre for Urban Equity (CUE) advocates a human-centered and equitable urban development paradigm. The activities of CUE are research, policy advocacy, training and capacity building and data documentation and dissemination. The centre is a National Resource Centre of Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation,

CEPT
UNIVERSITY
| CENTRE
| FOR URBAN EQUITY

Kasturbhai Lalbhai Campus,
University Road, Navrangpura,
Ahmedabad - 380009. INDIA
Phone: (0) 91-79-26302470, 26302452 Ext: 149
Fax: (0) 91-79-26302075
E-mail : cue@cept.ac.in

CEPT University
Kasturbhai Lalbhai Campus, University Road, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad-380009