“Misaligned Expectations for Participatory Slum-Upgrading: Lessons for Sustainability of the Ahmedabad Slum Networking Project”

Author: Laura W. Russ
Affiliation: UCLA School of Public Affairs, Urban Planning

Abstract: Based on interviews conducted in Ahmedabad, India, this paper explores differing expectations program stakeholders have of Community-Based Organizations under the internationally-lauded Slum Networking Project. The paper analyses the ways that contradictory expectations led to inconsistencies in how CBOs develop, focusing on two specific aspects of organizational formation – gendered leadership development and training. The paper argues that misaligned expectations and methods of CBO development result in uneven organizational abilities to manage and maintain individual upgrading sites across the city. Even slight institutional variation leads to difficulty scaling-up and sustaining decentralized and participatory slum-upgrading efforts. The paper concludes with lessons learned from Ahmedabad.
Introduction

Despite over four decades of innovation, researchers and practitioners still have little idea of how to scale-up and sustain slum-upgrading projects. Accountability, flexibility, and potential for cost recovery have improved (Davis 2006; Rondinelli 1990; Streeten 1997; UN-Habitat 2003), as has the capacity for local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to take on roles not only as community organizers but also as developers of large-scale public service and housing projects (Howell and Pearce 2002). Existing research on such efforts, however, has focused on large structural forces or micro-level individual behavior (Beteta 2006; Carpenter et al 2006; Eade 2000; Kothari 1999; O’Reilly 2006; Smyth 2007). Such lines of inquiry, while important, have not sufficiently investigated the institutional factors that may enable or constrain local organizations to scale up slum-upgrading efforts (Bebbington 1997; 2002; Kilby 2006; Mitlin et al. 2007; Stiles 2002; Uvin et al. 2000). Further, lack of clarification of the expectations for and abilities of CSOs in slum-upgrading initiatives has led to inconsistent actions, a resulting lack of uniformity in program outcomes, and, ultimately, difficulty in sustaining and expanding programs (Baruah 2007).

The Ahmedabad Slum Networking Project (SNP) has been internationally lauded for its success at providing urban services by relying in part on local Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to provide and maintain infrastructure in their neighborhoods (Das and Takahashi 2009). Using the SNP as a case study, I explore the differing expectations of CBOs for slum-upgrading on the part of various institutional actors and program stakeholders. Based on field research conducted January – May 2009 in Ahmedabad, India, I present findings from twelve interviews with staff from three NGO partners and local municipal representatives. The analysis clarifies the ways in which contradictory expectations lead to inconsistencies in how CBOs are formed and
later trained, ultimately resulting in uneven organizational abilities to manage and maintain individual upgrading sites across the city.

The paper is organized in the following sections. First, I provide a brief introduction to the Slum Networking Project, followed by an overview of data collection and research methodology. Following this, I examine how two specific misaligned expectations (gendered leadership and NGO training for CBO leaders) among municipal workers and NGO staff, with regard to the importance and utility of CBOs under the Slum Networking Project, led to diverse approaches to CBO formation and training, resulting in varying degrees of CBO activity. The discussion on gendered leadership focuses on the NGO decision to create women-only or mixed-gender CBOs. The section on NGO training examines training provided to the CBO leaders as a result of these differences in gendered leadership selection and other misaligned expectations for CBO activity. I conclude by considering the larger policy implications of how even slight institutional variations can lead to difficulties in sustaining and maintaining decentralized and participatory slum-upgrading efforts.

**Ahmedabad’s Slum Networking Project**

The Slum Networking Project (SNP) – also known as Parivartan (roughly translated this means Improvement or Change) – is an *in situ* redevelopment program that provides both physical infrastructure services and complementary social services. Unique for its integrated approach, services are provided to communities as a bundle, meaning that all program participants must agree to and financially contribute to all aspects of the program up front (Baruah 2007). Additionally because the program focuses on upgrading existing communities, the entire neighborhood must agree to participate. In other words households can not apply for
services under SNP individually; the area must apply together as a unit (see below for list of services).

Table 1: Services Provided by Slum Networking Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Upgrading</th>
<th>Social Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Water Supply to Individual Households</td>
<td>1. Establishing Neighborhood Groups for Women and Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Underground Sewerage to Individual Households</td>
<td>2. Community Savings and Loan Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Roads and Paving</td>
<td>3. Non-formal Education Opportunities for Children and Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Storm Water Drainage</td>
<td>4. Community and Health Interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Street Lighting</td>
<td>5. Vocational Training and Job Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Landscaping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Source: AMC ND

The program is unique in that the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC, the municipal agency responsible for the program) has developed a partnership model with voluntary community councils and with NGOs. Under the guidance of the AMC, three different NGOs have successfully carried out the SNP program in different slum communities. These NGOs have taken on the responsibility of organizing communities via community councils under the SNP guidelines for infrastructure service delivery as well as the responsibility for providing ongoing social services in the community.

Given the nature of the SNP as a neighborhood-level intervention, the program requires the participation of a community council in each neighborhood with the authority to act as a liaison between the neighborhood, the AMC, and NGO. It is the responsibility of the local voluntary community councils – called Community-Based Organizations or CBOs – to act as advocates to the AMC and as community managers with the purpose of collecting community contributions, overseeing the initial upgrading and later sustaining the physical infrastructure in the community. As such, many CBOs exist well before slum upgrading begins and are expected
to last in the long-term to sustain services once physical upgrading has been completed. In short, continued CBO activity is a prerequisite for the long term maintenance and sustainability of slum-upgrading efforts in each neighborhood. Earlier studies (Baruah 2005; Das 2008) suggest, however, that while some CBOs have managed to sustain themselves, many have disbanded. As a result, not all areas have achieved and maintained equal levels of services.

In this paper I focus on organizational factors that may explain how and why some CBOs have remained active while others have disbanded. Because the majority of CBOs are formed by an NGO affiliate (Russ ND), I pay particular attention to the ways in which NGO organizational mission, philosophical approach and resulting expectations for the CBOs under SNP may have enabled or constrained long-term viability of these community groups.

Data Collection and Methodology

I conducted in-depth interviews (N=12) between January and June 2009 with fieldworkers and managerial staff of the AMC, SEWA Bank (the primary microfinance institution for the project) and the three primary NGO partners. Generally, interviews were conducted in the field (i.e., a community center in one of the SNP neighborhoods) or in the organization’s main office, according to the respondent’s preference. Interviews lasted between thirty and sixty minutes and focused specifically on the role of CBOs under SNP, the challenges to training and formation, and current levels of CBO activity. Interviews with office staff were conducted in English when possible, while interviews with fieldworkers were conducted with the assistance of a Gujarati interpreter. All interviews were recorded, and later transcribed and translated by the same individual who provided interpretation of the original interviews. Because gendered leadership and NGO training for CBO leaders were linked with organizational activity
in a multivariate analysis of a survey of 300 SNP-affiliated CBO leaders in Ahmedabad (see Russ ND), interview transcripts were coded for these two specific themes.

To protect the confidentiality of respondents, individuals are not identified. Each respondent is instead identified by NGO (referred to as NGO 1, NGO 2, and NGO 3) or other institution for which he or she works. My intention is not to compare and contrast the NGOs, but to call attention to the fact that each organization came into the project with different philosophies and expectations for the SNP, and as a result each NGO approached CBO formation and training in unique ways. No one approach is superior; each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses that may result in varying levels of CBO viability, as is illustrated in the following sections.

Misaligned SNP Expectation: CBO Formation, Gender Roles and Leadership Selection

The NGOs can be categorized into two philosophies regarding gendered leadership: creating women-only or mixed-gender groups. In a survey of 300 CBO leaders, the proportion of female to male CBO members was found to be a statistically significant predictor of CBO activity (Russ ND). Given the distinct approach each NGO follows with respect to the gender composition of the CBOs in their project areas, this section highlights reasons why each NGO chose to create either mixed-gender vs. women-only CBOs in order to illustrate the ways in which gender composition impacts the viability of the CBOs in the short and longer-term.

Mixed-Gender Leadership Composition: Both NGO 1 and NGO 2 chose to create mixed-gender CBOs in their project areas to promote gender equality, improve communication between men and women in project areas, and because this approach was more practical for program implementation:
No we don’t have that kind of gender-bias. Both should be equal. We make the CBO according to this. We have from the beginning worked in such a way that everyone is equal. And we keep men and women together. (Interview, NGO 2, 4/22/09)

It’s good to have a mixed CBO. Before we had a youth CBO that was only men that had difficulty working with women. And we had women’s association which has difficulties working with men. So it creates a barrier for them to interact. (Interview, NGO 1, 2/12/09)

Despite a good faith effort to keep the CBOs mixed, NGO 1 staff in particular noted that in the case of the SNP, it was much more practical to create CBOs with strong male leadership:

Now when it came to SNP which was more of infrastructure, in a sense the men made the decisions about what would happen, etc. We felt that the women’s CBOs would have been less effective. In a sense that if you had to convince somebody to give 2000 rupees. Now if a woman went over there and tried to convince, she would not be heard.... But if we had a locally SNP-type of CBO in which the main office bearers were the local leadership...of men, they would have more influence on the male dominated households. (Interview, NGO 1, 2/19/09)

Although NGO 1 worked regularly with women’s groups on campaigns to improve education and health in the project neighborhoods, due to the fact that the SNP required discussions of infrastructure and required financial contributions from each household, NGO 1 decided this would be accomplished more easily by groups headed by men.

Thus, although the NGO 1 CBO groups were technically at least one-third women, the decision to include male leaders with high levels of pre-existing influence made it difficult for women members to participate fully. For example, one field worker commented that women and men in the same CBO do not meet together but hold separate meetings:

“Generally women have meetings in the daytime and men have meetings in the evenings” (Interview, NGO 1, 2/12/09).

Although the fieldworker quoted above did not feel that meeting separately led to any negative consequences with regard to women’s participation or overall CBO activity levels, another fieldworker disagreed. She agreed that the reason men were chosen was because of
the nature of the SNP but also commented that this had a negative effect on the women members of the groups:

So to talk to the officers and give proper presentations and all that, keeping that in mind we chose men for Mandals\textsuperscript{11}. Every association has some women also, at least two or three women who have some knowledge or they know to talk with people. The associations which are going on right now have that kind of situation [that the men are in control]... The women in the Mandals are not very interested because most of these Mandal meetings are in the late evenings, so women don’t go in the evenings. Because men generally go to work in the daytimes, so they have meetings in the evenings. So the women go sometimes, sometimes they don’t go. So the amount of participation they should take doesn’t happen. (Interview, NGO 1, 5/15/09)

These constraints to women’s participation in some of NGO 1’s mixed-gender CBOs were a reflection of community expectations with regard to gendered behavior. Although NGO 1 intended to create CBOs that were mixed-gender to create a balance reflecting the overall community, NGO 1 also consciously recruited powerful local men as leaders.

As a result, women participated to a lesser extent via separate women’s meetings, and according to fieldworker responses, eventually lost interest in participating. Additionally having such strong male leaders may have resulted in more autocratic decision-making. This, in connection with reduced overall membership due to women not participating, created a situation in which the mixed-gender organizations may have developed lower levels of governing capacity and become less active over time.

Of note, however, this pattern was not the case for the CBO sponsored by NGO 2. According to NGO 2 staff, their SNP-affiliated CBO had an almost opposite challenge in which the very strong-willed female CBO president was “quite dominating, even over the gents” (Interview, NGO 2, 4/21/09). According to this NGO 2 employee, the domineering leader stopped being accountable to the other men and women in the CBO, leading to significant problems for organizational decision-making and activity.
Thus, in both CBOs, having mixed-gender groups in conjunction with strong-willed leaders appeared to result in CBOs that had more difficulty developing decision-making skills as an organization, which may ultimately have resulted in lower levels of activity. These struggles, however, existed within women-only groups as well, as will be explored in the following section.

**Women-Only Leadership Composition:** For NGO 3, the decision to create women-only CBOs went beyond the immediate needs of physical upgrading under the SNP and reflected NGO 3’s organizational philosophy. The primary reason NGO 3 formed women-only groups was to encourage women’s participation and discourage men from exerting too much control over the process. One NGO 3 respondent commented: “What we work in we try to make women self-reliant and we train them.... [H]ere we make women members and we make them self-reliant – and this is how we are different” (Interview, NGO 3, 4/09/09). This approach allowed women to join NGO 3 as fieldworkers. One NGO 3 fieldworker remarked about the experience she and another coworker shared, “Our families would not allow us to work outside [the home] but here all the women work. So we heard about the project and took the interview, both of us. And then we came to work here” (Interview, NGO 3, 2/07/09). As this example suggests, working in an all women’s environment was a crucial element in allowing this fieldworker to work for NGO 3.

Further NGO 3 chose to work solely with women because the organization felt women were more personally affected by infrastructure improvements and were more likely to volunteer time and contribute funds:

It is ultimately the women who have to face the problem. What happens is men, when they are politically affiliated then they will say – ‘all these things we can get free from the corporation [AMC], we don’t have to spend money for it’. But nothing is free from the corporation. The men try to do this bullying, trying to say that political connections will get them these things free. But on the other hand women are willing to pay and say ok [to the project]. Because at the end they are the ones who suffer, they have to go for water or they have to get the kids ready for school. They have to face problems with
having to use the bathrooms. So it is the women who come forward. (Interview, NGO 3, 2/07/09)

Although seemingly disparate, whether working with mixed-gender or women-only organizations, all three NGOs reported similar challenges to CBO formation and long-term viability as a result of gendered expectations in the neighborhood. Unlike the other NGOs, however, due to NGO 3’s mission as a housing organization for women, the organization attempted to circumvent these problems in multiple ways.

NGO 3 developed multiple techniques to create an environment in which women were able to participate and men felt comfortable allowing women-run groups into the neighborhood. While some of these techniques followed gender expectations, at other times they circumvented or overtly challenged them. These three overlapping strategies of accepting, circumventing and challenging gender norms can be seen in the ways in which NGO 3 fieldworkers explained how they recruited women to join new CBOs. One fieldworker commented that men were often accepting of women’s participation so long as it did not interfere with their household duties:

As far as the women who are joining the group, mostly if they are doing the housework and taking care of the house and other work, then the husbands don’t have a problem. (Interview, 02/07/09)

When husbands or other male relatives contested women’s participation, for example when they were concerned about losing authority over their families, the NGO 3 fieldworkers would first continue to follow generally accepted gender norms, in this case by treating the decision to participate as the husband’s. They invited the husband to accompany his wife to training and then decide. If this plan did not work, however, fieldworkers sometimes chose to circumvent these norms by encouraging the woman to join in secret. As one fieldworker commented, “We try to convince the husband to come to the [NGO 3] office with his wife to see
what we are doing. But sometimes if the husband is too strict, then sometimes the wife will join the CBO secretly” (Interview, NGO 3, 2/07/09).

If this method of circumvention did not work, NGO 3 developed a strategy of creating male advisors or witnesses for each CBO. These men were generally prominent local leaders who lent legitimacy to the CBO in the neighborhood. Although these men did not have direct authority over the CBO, it allowed prominent men in the community to feel as though they were approving the actions of women in the neighborhood:

For each CBO, we make two men as a witness. That the men have witnessed the CBO being formed, to give their approval ... The men are to make sure that no one else will have a problem or contest the CBO. They witness it so that others won’t give the women trouble. But they are not a part of the CBO. It is just to say it was done in the presence of two men, so don’t harass them. (Interview, NGO 3, 2/07/09)

In this way, prominent male leaders may have felt they were taking on a role as de facto heads of the CBOs, although in reality these men were primarily figureheads.

This strategy was not always sufficient to circumvent male leaders’ expectations in the SNP neighborhoods. According to one staff member it was particularly difficult in some neighborhoods for men to allow women to take control over the financial aspects of the program. Many communities in Ahmedabad were not accustomed to women handling money and making decisions regarding infrastructure. This was in part because men may have felt they were losing authority in the neighborhood as well as over the women in their household. Consequently, as described below, men in some communities would attend CBO meetings and trainings, even when not invited. Because these men felt they needed to be in control of decision-making in the neighborhood, they would intimidate women members and attempt to gain control over the meetings. When this occurred, the NGO 3 staff directly interceded to circumvent the
expectations of these male leaders by saying that as a women’s CBO it was not appropriate for women staff to be interacting with men:

Our experience when money matters are concerned, was men would sort of tend to take the lead, you know.... And the women wouldn’t even speak in their presence ... It was a tough time dealing with them, and one of the strategy that we adopted was that because we were a women’s organization, we weren’t comfortable working with men, and so we wanted to work [with women]. And so we made it very docile. We didn’t you know sort of take it up in terms of empowerment, you know, because otherwise it would have been very difficult. (Interview, NGO 3, 3/26/09)

This process of meeting and/or circumventing gender expectations allowed NGO 3 to successfully work with most of the women-only CBOs. As one staff member described, it was a constantly changing process of meeting men’s expectations, circumventing them and occasionally proceeding regardless of men’s support:

Places where there is problem with the men we keep them both together during the work. Sometimes we don’t let the men know about certain things. Sometimes we let women do it, we don’t let men know about it. Sometimes we let the men know – we don’t want any problems and we want the work to continue in the neighborhood. This has happened in very few cases – generally men in the long term give up. (Interview, NGO 3, 4/09/09)

One outcome of this strategy was that NGO 3 staff and fieldworkers had to be consistently present to support the women’s CBOs, especially in the initial stages. It is possible that this long-term relationship built with the women participants was one factor why women’s groups tended to be more active in the long-term (see Russ ND). NGO 3 was not successful at building these relationships in all project areas, however. In a few neighborhoods, local male leaders continued to disrupt CBO activities despite a concerted effort to include them as advisors. In some neighborhoods male residents disrupted NGO 3 activities by complaining to local council members about NGO 3’s work in the neighborhood. As a result, NGO 3 was no longer in regular contact with the CBOs in these areas and the CBOs were no longer active.
**Summary:** Gender played an important role in the ability to form CBOs and in the ability of members to continue participation. For mixed-gender CBOs, a tendency for strong leaders (male or female) to dominate led to low levels of group participation and less activity over time. Challenges specific to NGO 1, which had mixed gender groups with very strong male leadership, included women and men not meeting together to make decisions and the community not being open to women participating in financial and infrastructure-related activities.

Similar problems existed in the CBOs affiliated with NGO 3 that were all women. Due to existing gender norms under which men expect to make the majority of decisions in their households, NGO 3 staff developed a strategy of circumventing these gendered expectations. The result at times, however, was de facto male sponsorship of the women’s CBOs. The women-only CBOs affiliated with NGO 3 also required more supervision and strategic training, and as a result, may have received training to which other CBOs were not exposed.

**Misaligned SNP Expectations: CBO Training and Subsequent Viability**

While it is certainly possible that having a women-only CBO requires more training and a closer NGO relationship as a result of gender discrimination against women in project areas, other factors may also affect the types of training received and their impact. This section will focus on organizational variation in training based on existing organizational barriers, philosophical approach and expectations for CBOs under the SNP.

Each NGO intended to provide necessary training to the CBOs for long-term self-sufficiency. According to one prominent AMC officer working on the SNP, the purpose of NGO training was to ensure that the CBOs were able to work independently to solve any area maintenance problems after the SNP:
If there is a problem after the completion of the project, then they have to solve the problem themselves. They are enough capable because of the train, the NGO’s training, community development part two – there is a program included. And after that training they have to solve their problem.... Of course for the corporation requirement they get to go to the ward officer and complain to the ward officer and all this there. (Interview, AMC, 4/28/09)

Despite this common goal, each NGO approached training differently. The NGO approaches can be roughly divided into two categories: providing training in the context of other long-term area intervention and providing training specific to SNP without other area intervention. I compare training approaches in this section to clarify what types of training may be more likely to lead to prolonged CBO activity.

**CBO training in the context of long-term area intervention:** NGO 1 and NGO 2 had similar approaches to their community development work in Ahmedabad. Both agencies worked in specific sectors of the city and had created long-term relationships with area residents by providing multiple services such as health care, employment, and education. Both NGOs participated in the SNP to provide services to these specific areas where the NGOs already had a long-term presence. As a result, although the SNP CBOs received some training, there was less emphasis at the time of the SNP on empowering CBOs to be long-term area institutions because the NGOs already had created other institutions to fill this need, including additional CBOs and community centers. The following discussion focuses on NGO 1’s approach to training CBOs.

Although NGO 2 fits into the same typology with regard to its long-term community development approach, because NGO 1 worked with multiple SNP projects, I have chosen to focus this discussion on their experiences.

NGO 1 provided each SNP CBO training specific to community mobilization of funds and management of the slum-upgrading in the area. This training, however, was more limited than the training provided to other CBOs NGO 1 created under other NGO-sponsored programs.
For example, NGO 1 created women’s empowerment CBOs that were active since the mid-1990s on women’s employment, education, and health services. One fieldworker described the strengths and limitations of SNP training as follows:

In Mandal the training they got is – these Mandals are made for SNP project only in which these facilities came under the project – so they learned how maintain them for a long time. So for the project they were given training of what to do, where to apply and how to go. So we gave them the understanding of how to do the application process, how to get receipts and things like that. Only some of the people are active – others are not. There is one weakness is that we have not given them enough training. Also they have not taken responsibility from their side. Just by giving a name and giving responsibility doesn’t create a Mandal. There are a lot of things that you have to do along with it. So it has been a weakness from both the sides. Also the people in the neighborhood also go to work. By joining the CBOs they don’t make anything – this is social service. So because of that also their interest is low. (Interview, NGO 1, 5/15/09)

This fieldworker acknowledged that the SNP CBOs did not receive adequate training but also commented on a major concern repeated by other NGO 1 staff members, namely that the CBO members did not find the CBOs to be beneficial enough to take time out of their paid employment to continue volunteering.

The amount of time dedicated to training may be one reason NGO 1’s SNP CBO leaders did not develop a long term interest in participating. For example in comparing NGO 1’s long-term women’s CBOs with the shorter term SNP CBOs, one staff member commented that the additional time spent with the women’s groups, coupled with more training on social issues, may have resulted in the women’s CBOs sustaining their activity levels:

Over there it was different. First of all was the duration, SNP was of a shorter, much shorter duration. This training [for the women’s CBO] was much longer, a lot of on the job training over here. As I told you before, conscientization (sic) of social economic understanding, sensitization of gender issues, etc all of that went over here [with the women’s CBO] and did not occur over here [with the SNP groups]. (Interview, NGO 1, 2/12/09)

According to this same staff member, it was appropriate for the SNP CBOs to have received more limited training than the other groups, such as the women’s CBOs. This is
because, for NGO 1, the SNP is only one small piece of a larger, long-term intervention focused on a specific area of the city. Because NGO 1 created the SNP CBOs for more short-term work, the NGO did not feel additional training was necessary:

When it came to the SNP, CBOs we were very clear that look the job is number one. To convince people that this is a program they should join to ensure that the design is modified and approved by the local residents. Engineering design.... [M]obilization happens, I mean the financial mobilization happens. People make payments regularly. To ensure quality control when the engineering, physical work is going on. And after that the maintenance. So that was a very limited role for the SNP-related CBOs. (Interview, NGO 1, 2/12/09)

In sum, because NGO 1 viewed the SNP CBOs to be temporary institutions, in the context of a more long-term community development initiative, these CBOs received training primarily limited to the specifics of implementing the SNP and less training on building organizational capacity for long-term activity.

_CBO training without long-term area intervention:_ In contrast to both NGO 1 and 2, which viewed their organizations as community development agencies for specific neighborhoods, NGO 3 focused on providing housing and infrastructure to slum communities throughout Ahmedabad. Further, until recently, the primary vehicle NGO 3 had utilized for slum upgrading was SNP. In order to expand SNP into areas not already familiar with NGO 3’s work, the agency needed significant effort to build trust and provide basic training to their CBOs, as these slums lacked other NGO 3-affiliated institutions to assist with the process. Thus, building long-term relationships with local women was an essential precursor for NGO 3 to establish the trust necessary for women to join the CBO and advocate for the SNP in their neighborhoods:

Initially some women who are extroverted, they may not be educated but want to do something in the neighborhood.... These women often want to come [for training] but lack the trust in us, especially when it comes to schemes that involve paying money. So we bring these women here [to the office] and show them pictures of the project – examples of other neighborhoods and of the scheme.... In this way we create the trust by showing that we will not run away with the money because this is their main concern. So
they can see how the money will be used. So we start the process by showing them things in person, pictures at the office, etc. (Interview, NGO 3, 2/07/09)

Once a basic level of trust was established and women came forward to join the CBO, NGO 3 first trained the women to understand their organizational philosophy and to clarify the importance of women’s participation:

This was largely in the SNP context. So first we started with kind of introducing them to the philosophy of the organization, of the [NGO 3] umbrella. What Gandhiji is, what’s the economic role of women. Because very strong in the [NGO 3] values we have the economic role of a woman. So, you know, what is her contribution to the economy. Every service that we provide, is like for housing you know we say that we do housing because her house is her work place and it’s her good now, her asset. And everything we give an economic angle and that role that a women plays, and what’s her contribution in to the economy. So it’s largely making her aware of her own importance, her contribution in to the economy, the Gandhian philosophy. (Interview, NGO 3, 3/26/09)

In addition, via a ten-part training module NGO 3 trained women participants in how to manage the implementation of the SNP and also to manage their organizations:

We taught them management of the CBOs ... that you have to maintain certain accounts. So one aspect was managing the program and the other aspect was managing the CBO. How to develop your own memorandum of association. So a memorandum of association was developed for the CBOs although the CBOS were registered with our consultation; they were a part of that process. (Interview, NGO 3, 3/26/09)

This long-term investment in training also helped NGO 3 to identify individuals in some communities capable of working as staff members. This helped NGO 3 to create more permanent, long-term relationships in communities that would be difficult to sustain otherwise, given the large geographical distribution of the communities with which they work:

Whatever energy we have invested in training them has totally paid off – the investment shows. Any work related to development, they have showed us that they can do it, even today if there is something. Also a lot of CBO members who are leaders who handle their neighborhood have been offered job as staff members.... (Interview, NGO 3, 4/09/09)

Despite success with some of the more capable individuals, not all CBO members developed core competencies in CBO management or in how to maintain the SNP:
I mean that on an average our observations was that from an 11 member CBO at least 3 people were very, of very good quality. And then the others would be medium and the others would just participate for the sake of participating. But at least 3-4 women took leadership and uh ... They were able to. Well they were able to write applications. Some of the CBOS do that independently also. (Interview, NGO 3, 3/26/09)

In sum although not all members of the NGO 3-affiliated CBOs were capable of managing daily operations, in-depth training – in conjunction with paid employment – allowed NGO 3 to develop lasting relationships with some women leaders in many of the SNP neighborhoods. These women, because of the ongoing support of NGO 3, may then be more likely to continue CBO activities, even after physical upgrading was completed. In addition, the benefits these women received as a result of their relationship with NGO 3 may have been an additional motivating factor for them to continue working with their area CBO.

Summary: For NGO 1, CBO training was limited to basic knowledge needed to implement the physical upgrading aspects of SNP. Once this work was completed, there was little motivation for community members to continue working with the CBO, leading to low levels of activity such as the monitoring of service quality. This was directly linked to the philosophy of the NGOs. Because NGO 1 offered other services in its service area, and had little need to maintain the SNP CBOs after upgrading was complete, it purposely limited training of the SNP CBOs. Thus, in a sense, for NGO 1 the expectation for the SNP was only to bring physical improvements to these specific neighborhoods: additional training was not necessary. As a result, these CBOs declined in activity. And although this is not a concern while NGO 1 continues its work in these neighborhoods, there is little organizational infrastructure in the neighborhoods that can operate independently should the NGO change its service areas or discontinue programs in the future. In contrast, women in NGO 3-affiliated CBOs may have had more to gain from continued participation in the CBO. This is in part a result of the long-term
relationship built through the training offered by NGO 3, a result of NGO 3’s philosophy and also a positive result of the strategies NGO 3 used in facing initial trust-building challenges. Women who were highly capable and completed the training may eventually be offered employment with NGO 3 or one of its affiliates.

**Discussion and Summary: Lessons from Ahmedabad’s SNP**

Because the SNP has a decentralized approach to upgrading, despite shared goals for slum upgrading and service provision, each institutional partner came into the project with different expectations based on their mission and philosophy. Two specific variations for CBO formation were discussed in this paper: the selection of women-only or mixed-gender CBOs and the type of training provided. Lessons that cut across both of these themes are discussed below.

**Various gendered structures for CBO leadership can be accommodated within the same project, if proper support is provided.** Although a minimum of one-third women participants is often cited as a strategic point for women to be fully included in the decision-making process, these target numbers rarely reflect organizational components that create necessary preconditions for women’s full inclusion in organizational decision-making and action (Agarwal 2010). In the case of the mixed-gender CBOs in the SNP, a tendency for strong leaders (male or female) to dominate led to low levels of group participation and less activity over time. The deciding factor for CBO viability, thus, may not have been the gender composition of the leadership, but the ways in which NGOs approached CBO formation as a result of the gender composition.

NGO 1 chose existing male leaders to participate in the CBOs believing this would allow CBOs to more quickly and efficiently administer the project without spending significant effort
on extensive training. As a result, and despite a one-third quota for women, no process was created by NGO 1 to encourage women’s participation in the CBO or to encourage new leadership to emerge. Additionally, by selecting influential figures in the community, NGO 1 set up the expectation that results (in the form of community contribution and project management) mattered more than the process through which the CBO leaders solicited participation.

The approach to assign leadership roles before attempting to intervene with regard to gender expectations and leadership accountability also created difficulties for NGO 2. One staff member commented that NGO 2’s greatest mistake in forming the CBO was assigning leadership positions (President, Treasurer, etc) based on the skills of existing leaders before providing more general training to all the members (Interview, NGO 2, 4/21/09). This rewarded already powerful individuals without setting clear guidelines for accountability to the other CBO members and area residents. This particular staff member felt it would have been more beneficial in the long run to focus first on accountability, open participation and skill development before “cherry-picking” individual leaders.

Because of organizational philosophy and mission, NGO 3 chose to work with women-only CBOs. As a result of existing gender norms under which men expect to make the majority of decisions in their households, the women-only CBOs affiliated with NGO 3 required more supervision and strategic training for these groups to be accepted in their neighborhoods. This close supervision and partnership development may, in the end, have led these CBOs to develop organizational capacity to remain active over time.

**Personal motivation may be an important prerequisite for CBO participation.**

Investing too much responsibility in one individual, without first creating mechanisms for accountability and open participation, may have been one reason why the mixed-gender groups
were less active after project completion. Yet without adequate personal benefit, it is possible that individual participants will have little motivation to continue participating in CBO activities.

According to NGO 3 staff, women had more to gain from continued participation in the CBO than men, because women may have benefitted more personally from improved access to services under SNP. It may also be in part a result of the long-term relationship built through the training offered by NGO 3. Potential existed for women who were highly capable and completed the training to be offered employment with NGO 3 or one of its affiliates. Thus, although strong leaders without support and training may discourage participation, conversely, building strong leaders via training, in combination with additional benefits such as employment, may provide incentive for strong leaders to remain active and to encourage others to participate as well.

In contrast, NGO 1-affiliated CBOs were majority male. Equally important to consider, however, is that these CBOs were not considered important vehicles for community development. As a result CBO members were not trained to tackle work beyond the immediate scope of the project. And since most male members work outside the area during the day, continuing to meet in the evenings after work, with no specific purpose or personal benefit (such as employment via the CBO) at stake, may have created a cycle of low motivation. As a result, these CBOs have declined in activity.

To conclude, misaligned expectations do not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. In many cases promoting flexibility allows more partners to participate. Without a better understanding of the organizational level of analysis – i.e. how institutions operate – however, the advantages and disadvantages due to significant variance in outcomes may go unnoticed. It may be in part this organizational variance that makes it difficult to scale up projects, especially when projects are attempted in new environments and with entirely new institutions.
**Bibliography**


Baruah, B. “Sisters are doing it for themselves: Challenges and Opportunities in Landed Property Ownership for Informal Sector Women in Urban India.” PhD diss., York University, 2005.


NGO 1 Central Office Staff, in conversation with the author, February 19, 2009. Ahmedabad, India.

NGO 1 Field Staff, in conversation with the author, February 12, 2009. Ahmedabad, India.

NGO 1 Field Staff, in conversation with the author, May 15, 2009. Ahmedabad, India.

NGO 2 Central Office Staff, in conversation with the author, April 21, 2009. Ahmedabad, India.

NGO 2 Field Staff, in conversation with the author, April 22, 2009. Ahmedabad, India.

NGO 3 Central Office Staff, in conversation with the author, April 9, 2009. Ahmedabad, India.

NGO 3 Central Office Staff, in conversation with the author, March 26, 2009. Ahmedabad, India.

NGO 3 Field Staff, in conversation with the author, February 7, 2009. Ahmedabad, India.


Russ, L.W. “Does Organizational Empowerment Predict Levels of Activity in the Long-Term? Results from a survey of community organizations in Ahmedabad, India.” *Urban Studies,* under review, no date.


---

i CBOs represent a specific slum community of 200 households or less. They are formally structured with approximately 12 leaders who agree to act as liaisons for the project. (See Das 2008; Russ ND)

ii CBOs are commonly referred to as “Mandals”, which means “association” in Gujarati.