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What is This?

How community-based enumerations started and developed in India

JOCKIN ARPUTHAM

Jockin Arputham became a community organizer in the 1960s when the settlement where he lived, Janata Colony in Mumbai, was threatened with demolition. After a 10-year long struggle, Janata was bulldozed and Jockin realized that slum dwellers would never be able to stop forced evictions and influence government policies unless they were organized. He founded India's National Slum Dwellers Federation and, working with Mahila Milan (a federation of savings groups formed by women slum and pavement dwellers) and SPARC (a Mumbai-based NGO), has offered city and state governments all over India partnerships for slum redevelopment. He also helped found Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), through which federations of slum and shack dwellers in more than 20 countries support each other and learn from each other. In 2000, he received the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation Award for International Understanding and in 2011, the government of India bestowed on him its highest civilian honour, the Padma Shri Award.

This paper is drawn from an interview by David Satterthwaite in 2010 in a car going from Mumbai to Pune to visit the upgrading programme being implemented there.

ABSTRACT This paper explains how community-driven enumerations were first undertaken in Janata Colony in Mumbai, India in the early 1970s as a way of fighting the threat of eviction. Jockin Arputham was a resident of Janata and was drawn into community organizing to fight this eviction. The enumerations provided evidence of the importance of Janata's economy and of the many legal facilities there, including electricity and telephone poles and licensed shops. This supported the residents' case in court that Janata was a legal settlement. Undertaking the enumerations helped mobilize the population and provided them with information about their settlement that helped them consider their priorities. The paper also describes how enumerations of pavement dwellers helped them get a legal address, and through this ration cards, and a dialogue with municipal authorities. The author suggests that surveys of informal settlements are needed before any physical development is planned; also that they should be undertaken by the residents and their community organizations, to learn, to mobilize and to plan their own development so that they are not dependent on outsiders doing so.

KEYWORDS community organizing / enumerations / evictions / informal settlements / Janata

I. THE FIRST ENUMERATIONS

The first enumeration was in Janata Colony in Mumbai in 1973. We were fighting against the threat of eviction.[1] We were going to the courts to try to stop the eviction and to do this, we wanted to show that Janata Colony was a legal settlement. Doing an enumeration – counting and listing all the houses, the electricity poles, the telephones, the shops, the businesses, the people who have ration cards[2] – was to show to the courts how well established the settlement was. Janata was also not an illegal settlement; the inhabitants had been given this land by the municipality.

If you do not do an enumeration, you cannot stand in the courts to prove your legality. So you need to collect all this information. And this helps show how well established the settlement is and how it has legal services. Each telephone pole shows you are an established settlement. Every telephone pole has an official address – a district, an area. So it means that the settlement too has an official address. When the government says you do not have any documentation, we can show how many telephone poles or electricity poles we have and these have addresses. At this time, you could not have a telephone without telephone poles.

File a petition in court and you include the documentation as evidence – the telephone poles, the number of land lines for telephones,

the water connections, the number of licensed establishments and other enterprises.

Doing the enumeration also helps to mobilize the people living there. Ask them to go and count the number of poles and they do so and report back. This helps to organize the community so the community does not depend on outsiders. This is doing their own documentation. It does not require a big education to count the poles. Even illiterate people can collect this information. So we used enumerations not only to collect information but also to help the community organize.

II. SETTLEMENT AND HOUSEHOLD PROFILES

After that we realized that we needed to get two kinds of data – settlement profiles and household profiles. Settlement profiles come from asking questions and are on what the whole settlement is about – the date of birth of the settlement and so how old it is, who owns the land, who first came and built their homes, did they encroach on the land they occupied and if they did, for what reason, when, where did they come from, how they came to be here, how much the land cost, where they are working, what kind of employment pattern, what languages they speak, where the police station is. The settlement profile also has a head count and a hut count – how many people, how many households. What amenities they have – water, electricity, drainage, garbage collection. What other services are available – and so schools, dispensaries, *balwadis* (nursery schools), kindergartens, police stations. Also shops. So when you know everything in the settlement, you collect this information for other settlements and so have this for one municipal ward. As you collect this, you get to learn who the key people are in the community, the leaders, the spokespersons, the women who are organizers. After collecting all this information, you call a public meeting and invite the key people in the settlement to come. You put all the figures to them – the settlement is like this. Then you get comments and more information. This also encourages the people to press for development and forces them to think about development.

The settlement profile then allows you to do an enumeration of all households. When you collect information from every household, you learn even more about the community – with social and economic information about each household. You learn about household incomes and how much money is coming into the settlement. So we can say that 200,000 Rupees comes into this settlement every month. This information is also presented back to the community, showing them how much income there is, what they could do with this, how much they could afford to save. Showing how they can better use their own resources in any mobilized community. Not only what they can do but also what they need to think about. If a settlement gets so much income – why is there no toilet? Where do you go for water? So you are able to help the community to know their settlement, know their neighbours, know each other. When a community has helped collect all this information, you almost have an answer, then you cannot sit quietly. Can we start saving? Can we set aside a proportion of our income for saving? Can we afford to build a toilet?

The information from the social and economic survey for each household is also made public. This is to help avoid corruption and

mis-information. The information collected is given back to the community. When you bring the statistics to the women, they will look at it, check it. It also does not take long to train people to do the enumeration. Ask the women living in a community to help collect data and they bring to this their knowledge. In one hour, you can train them to do the household survey. I remember doing a survey for 315 houses in 1974. I did it 10 times, counting the households, going with the women as I counted the households and the people who lived there. Then asking another person to count. So eventually the community sees this, agrees with this and it strengthens them. They help collect data and as they do this they mobilize the community. They may start savings. They identify issues; help prioritize issues to be tackled. They start making collective decisions, not just individual decisions.

Enumerations also provide a document to each household. Of course, each household in any settlement needs documentation. It helps show the government that they exist. They often need documentation to get government services – for instance, to get a ration card. So we used the household enumeration to provide every family with a document. In the household survey, we ask all the questions about the people living there. We also number each house structure and do the physical mapping. Then you present the information back so they can check the map, the plot and settlement boundaries, the houses. Each household can check the data about them and their house. From this you create a document for each household with a photo of the whole family; it identifies everyone who is living there. The photo is taken right in front of their house and shows the house number too. So even if the government does not count you, each household has a document with a photo. There is also a map and a settlement profile and these are very useful as a public document. Any time a family needs to show documentation, they have the document with the photo of themselves in front of their house. Producing this documentation does not depend on outsiders. It is your own resource. It means you can prove you are living in that settlement.

III. THE ENUMERATION OF PAVEMENT DWELLERS

3. See SPARC (1985), *We the Invisible: A Census of Pavement Dwellers*, SPARC, Bombay, 41 pages; also SPARC (1990), "SPARC – developing new NGO lines", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 2, No 1, April, pages 91–104.

The enumeration of the pavement dwellers in 1986[3] showed the government that they had addresses. The government did not recognize pavement dwellers – they lived in undeclared slums. Government officials could say they were newcomers. They had no address, no identity. So the enumeration of the pavement dwellers included details of where they lived, the name of the street, which part of the street, how many huts, how many electricity poles. When the enumeration covering the whole municipality was done, we could take the information to the municipality. Here is documentation for each household, here is a map, here are the addresses. They could use this to get a ration card. It is very difficult to get a ration card without an address. You often needed to pay a bribe to get a ration card. I could get a ration card for anyone for 5,000 to 10,000 Rupees. We went to the ration card office and said we wanted ration cards. They said where are the documents? We said we had a map and this shows the houses of the pavement dwellers. So they have an address and you can keep the map. So when a pavement dweller goes to get a ration card and is asked their address, they can point to where they

live on the map. This has been accepted by the ration card departments. This is why maps are so important.

Getting an address is also important for getting a bank account. The enumeration of pavement dwellers also encouraged them to save and they started two kinds of daily savings scheme – one for consumption, one saving for housing. We went to the bank to help them get proper bank accounts. It took a year of negotiations but finally they were allowed to set up bank accounts. This also meant they had more official documentation. So when the municipality came to demolish their houses, they showed that they had savings accounts with the Bank of Baroda. This helps change the government perception of pavement dwellers. The pavement dwellers say we are happy to move if you help me get a house. And look at my resources. It starts a dialogue between pavement dwellers and local government. We said that we know that the pavement is not a place to live; we have to live here because there is nothing else. I want to work and to live properly. I am ready to move but you have to tell me where. I need somewhere where you won't evict me later – or where another government agency won't evict me. We need communities to mobilize, to know what they want and to work with municipalities to achieve it.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Many governments and international agencies are now doing surveys of slums and settlement and city profiles – collecting information. But this is a task for communities, to learn, to mobilize as they go forward. So support them to collect information and prepare documentation. This documents the resources that they have and can bring. This means they can plan their development. Not dependent on someone else. So I call this self-development. You cannot do development in these slums without an enumeration done by their inhabitants. Before going for any physical development you need their enumeration and their settlement profiles.

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