

Excerpt from SMART CITIES – Breaking the Poverty Barrier by Rajendra Joshi

Chapter 12: When Disasters Strike

The Gujarat earthquake

On 26th January 2001, Gujarat was devastated by a major earthquake measuring 7.7 on the Richter scale. The epicenter was in Bhuj, the capital of Kutch. Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Surendranagar and Patan districts were severely affected. **The earthquake killed almost 20,000 people, injured another 167,000, destroyed nearly 400,000 homes and about a million people were rendered homeless.**

Our immediate concern was the well-being of communities we worked with in Ahmedabad. For once, the ramshackle houses in slums proved to be a blessing in disguise. Most houses, not built with concrete and single storyed, survived. The ones that had collapsed did not cause serious injuries or deaths. There had been considerable damage to other structures, as well as deaths, in Ahmedabad. The government, civil society, and individuals in Ahmedabad responded immediately with relief materials and services. With the overwhelming response in Ahmedabad, we wanted to find out the situation in Kutch, where the damage was devastating and, the support systems by the government and civil society weaker.

Kutchchh, because of its location, has a long history of disasters. In 1998, a super-cyclone had hit Kutchchh and caused considerable damage. Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (KNNA), a network of civil society organisations, had been formed to assist the government and aid agencies in coordinating relief and rehabilitation for the victims of the cyclone.

On 29 January 2001, we visited Bhuj to assess the damage and explore our role in providing relief. We met representatives of KNNA, who were coordinating the earthquake relief efforts. They invited us to join them, as there was a dire need for organisations to coordinate relief in the affected rural areas of Kutchchh. We mobilised a team of twelve volunteers from Saath who arrived in Bhuj on 5 February 2001 to undertake relief operations.

We were given the task of carrying out rapid assessment of damage caused in the villages of Bachau taluka, one of the most affected areas, by KNNA. This meant surveying all the 70 villages in the

taluka to determine the number of people killed, or injured, the number of houses damaged, the number of grazing animals killed or injured, the extent of damage to the water tanks and, the type and amount of emergency assistance received and further required.

Emergency Relief

During the two days of rapid assessment, we witnessed, first-hand, the devastation caused by the earthquake. This led to our decision to be involved in at least the relief stage, if not longer. We observed that villages that were further away from the main roads and administrative towns received much less assistance. This was especially so in the villages of the Khadir area bordering Pakistan. We submitted the rapid assessment report to KNNA and informed them about our decision to join in, in the relief operations. KNNA gave us the option of managing one of the Emergency Response Centres being set up across Kutchchh for coordination of relief work of the government and aid agencies. We selected the Khadir area for setting up of the centre. This was the beginning of a four-year relationship, not only in the Khadir region, but also in Rapar town.

Khadir is a unique region in Kutchchh, which itself is a unique district in Gujarat. The region stands out differently in terms of its location, physiographic characteristics, social ecology, economic systems, and culture. The region is isolated, it is an island in the Greater Rann of Kutch and is linked to mainland Kutchchh through a single bridge over a creek at Amrapar in Khadir and Lodrani in the Kutchchh mainland. The region, because of its isolation has remained at subsistence economic level. Ecologically, Khadir forms part of the Great Rann ecosystem. It is better known as the region where the Harrappan ruins of Dholavira are located.

The Khadir area comprises twelve villages and five hamlets, with a population of 11,000, 2,200 households, and a diverse social structure. Kolis, the largest community (28 percent) are landless and work as agricultural labourers, saltpan workers, and as construction workers in other parts of Kutchchh. Ahirs (23 percent) the landholding community keep cattle and have started diversifying into new business activities. Darbars (11 percent) are also landholders; women from this community do intricate embroidery work. Harijans (8 percent) are landless and work as agricultural labourers. Rabaris (5 percent) are cattle owners. Muslims (5 percent) work in a variety of activities, from farming to transport. Kolis and Ahirs are seasonal migrants to other parts of Kutchchh during the summer months.

We set up an Emergency Response Centre (ERC) at Ratanpar village on 9th February 2001, which were basically a few tents and a team of six people. From the ERC, we distributed relief materials provided by the government, relief agencies, and individuals. We undertook surveys to assess the

damage to houses and water storage systems, and the situation of fodder and water supply. We also checked the functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS); whether cash subsidies provided by the government went to the target beneficiaries.

We conducted a detailed survey of the old and destitute, widows, handicapped, and injured persons, as well as of those who lost their lives. This survey formed the groundwork for the government's relief and aid packages. We conducted a household survey at the village level for a better understanding of the socio-economic status of the residents. The approach of the ERC team was to work in partnership and consultation with existing village governance systems. This involved calling of gram sabhas (village meetings) for all major decisions, to ensure transparency and accountability. We recruited five youth from the villages into the ERC team.

February is very cold in Kutch; we were able to procure and supply blankets and warm clothing through an aid agency. Availability of drinking water was restricted in most of the villages, as the water structures had been damaged. We approached the Gujarat Regional Water Supply and Sanitation Project to make an assessment. They recommended building of water storage systems with separate storage and supply areas. The size and number of storage systems would depend on the demographic profile of the village. We discussed the recommendations with the village committees. It resulted in a partnership in which we would contribute water tanks, plumbing materials, cement, and cost of masons and plumbers. The villagers would contribute stones and sand for the construction, and labour assistance to the masons. The village committees would decide location and size of tanks, where the main selection criteria was proximity and availability to all village residents. We constructed 30 water supply systems in various villages with assistance from Cordaid and, set the tone for a longer partnership with the affected people and aid agencies. Similarly, we worked in consultation with marginal and small farmers to provide seeds to almost 1,500 farmers for the monsoon crop sowing.

Our assessment for shelter indicated that almost 200 houses would have to be rebuilt. The remaining were in need of renovation and repair. However, the impact of the earthquake and the subsequent fear and anxiety, led to a situation where people were afraid to live in their houses although they were declared safe.

With summer approaching, which is very hot in Kutch, KNNA decided to provide interim shelters to almost all the affected households. The assistance was in the form of a construction kit, which comprised of tiles, poles, and cement. Local stones were to be used for constructing walls of about 3 feet high, which could not cause damage even if they fell. Village residents were trained as masons

for constructing the basic structure. We ensured distribution of the interim shelter kits in Khadir, as well as training of masons. We supplied 1,200 interim housing shelter kits in Khadir

By June 2001, we had a better insight of the vulnerability of people living in Khadir from a social, economic, and environmental perspective, based on our socio-economic survey, continuous physical presence, and interaction with residents.

These were our conclusions:

- a) The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities in the area are amongst the most vulnerable groups in Kutch District, with limited access to basic services and facilities.
- b) Due its location and extreme climatic conditions, the communities have inadequate access to opportunities for improving livelihood, enhancing literacy levels, and improving their health status.
- c) The common property resources, in terms of grazing areas and water resources, are rapidly dwindling.
- d) The communities have economic links with other parts of India through their handicraft work, for which there is substantial demand. However, they do not get commensurate returns from the middlemen who facilitate the purchase and marketing of their goods.
- e) The women are deeply rooted in their social norms and behaviour patterns. One such devastating instance – a group of women did not leave their building during the earthquake and ended up buried under it.

On the basis of these findings, we planned our rehabilitation strategy. The main aspect of the strategy was that we would work with them for a period of at least three years. The integrated development approach would be participatory. The activities would include:

- I. Construction of earthquake resistant houses, water storage, sanitation facilities, and rainwater harvesting structures
- II. Afforestation and environmental conservation
- III. Promotion of self-help groups for savings and credit
- IV. Training in various skills and support to entrepreneurs
- V. Increase health awareness
- VI. Support pre-school classes through training of teachers with appropriate teaching aids
- VII. Increase disaster preparedness
- VIII. Build capacities of local groups to sustain the activities

Cordiad, a Dutch aid agency, with whom we have had a funding relationship since 1993, agreed to support the integrated rehabilitation of Khadir.

Housing and Shelter

Building earthquake resistant houses was a priority for residents whose homes had been destroyed by the earthquake. We decided to support construction of houses for vulnerable social communities and individuals – the widows and handicapped. We held intensive consultations with the residents about types and designs of houses. The design had to be suitable for the semi-arid environment of Khadir, easy to build and can be repaired locally. It also had to be earthquake-resistant and in keeping with their social norms.

We consulted architects and engineers to discuss designs and structures. Finally, we zeroed in on housing design options. The first was a traditional design using stones, cement, and roof tiles. The second one was a modular construction of reinforced cement. Both designs incorporated living spaces, kitchen, courtyard and, a bathroom and toilet. We built sample houses of both designs at our campsite and invited residents to inspect and choose their preference. The residents were canny and tested both the designs to the extent of ramming a tractor into both the houses to ascertain the strength and durability. Finally, they opted for the modular reinforced concrete design. The traditional design was equally safe, but a sub-conscious fear prevailed, as many similar houses had been destroyed during the earthquake.

We got the modular design approved by the government authorities and started production. The cost of construction was met partly through the subsidy given by the government and the balance, through a Cordiad grant.

The LEGO type design of the modular houses required a production centre where the various components would be manufactured, as per design, and the components then transported and assembled on site. With the help of Mr. Kiran Gandhi, the architect whose design we had adopted, we established a production centre at Ratanpar and commenced manufacturing. The local people remarked that this was the first time a manufacturing unit had come up at Khadir. They came and saw the production process. It increased their confidence in the structural strength of the houses. We contracted the assembling of the houses to specialised contractors from Ahmedabad. They, in turn, trained and employed local residents and house-owners as masons for the work.

Taking into account the social dynamics of Khadir, we had to consider the various social and traditional relationships. This meant that the employment generated out of the production and

assembling of the houses had to be shared equally between the different social groups. It was difficult to maintain a balance, considering the need for quality work, timely construction, as well as the budgetary constraints. In this mammoth and complex task, we built 176 houses in Khadir between March 2002 and June 2004.

Water resource management and afforestation

Khadir is a drought prone region with scanty annual rainfall of approximately 48 cm, which often fluctuates between 14 to 74 percent of the normal. The frequency of a drought is once in every 2.5 years. Our approach was to create water security by upgrading existing check dams or building new ones, desilting existing farm ponds and creating new ones, digging wells and recharging existing ones, as well as supporting the construction of contour bunds to reduce erosion of good topsoil. Two new check dams were built and nine repaired. Two hundred and fifty wells were dug to facilitate recharging of the underground water sources. Four large village ponds were desilted, and the silt was used in the farms. In almost all the villages and hamlets, we supported the construction of contour bunds, which helped retain rainwater. Drip irrigation systems were installed in three villages.

The criteria for selecting villages and farmers were their readiness to contribute, either in cash or kind, towards the cost of construction. If the construction benefitted a larger public, the contribution was 10 percent of the cost. If it benefitted individuals or a group of farmers, the contribution was 25 percent. Most of the contributions were in the form of labour or supply of stones, which were an integral part of construction. We facilitated the provision of cement, sand, and mechanised construction equipment, along with technical experts. Village and farmer committees were formed, which approved the civil engineering work and estimates, monitored the progress, and ensured payment of bills for the work done.

We worked with the Gujarat government's forest department for free saplings of various trees that could grow in the harsh environment. Trees were planted in all the school compounds and in other public spaces. Saath bore the transportation costs; the community nurtured the saplings.

Education and community groups

Sixteen day-care centres were established in all the villages. We built twenty-four centers and the remaining were built by other agencies. The day care centres followed the Balghar methodology, in which, women from the respective villages were trained as teachers. We provided nutrition support and teaching materials. Subsidised fees were charged. Due to strong caste differences, we sometimes had to have separate day-care centres for the Harijan community.

Mahila Mandals in all the villages monitored and supported the day-care centres. Some of the Mahila Mandals became self-help groups, providing savings and credit services.

Youth groups were formed to facilitate and monitor ongoing work with regard to water resource management and construction work. These groups also started sports activities.

Rapar Town

Rapar town is a Taluka headquarter with a population of 28,000, according to the 2011 census. It is the gateway to the Khadir region. Immediately after the earthquake, we were actively involved in the distribution of relief material in Rapar town. The poorer families in the town bore the major brunt of the devastation, lives, properties, and livelihoods collapsed.

On completion of the relief phase, we set up base at Rapar to work out strategies to ensure the urban poor were included in the affordable shelter and basic infrastructure facilities in the new town planning scheme. The Rapar Area Development Authority (RADA) was established to implement the rehabilitation package announced by the Gujarat Government. Financial assistance by the government for construction of a house was pegged at a maximum of Rs.55,000. The urban poor would be given plots measuring 25 sqm. at an earmarked location (within the town plan zone), with an option of purchasing an additional 25 sqm at a highly subsidized cost of Rs.2,500. Those who owned land would be given Rs.55,000 for in situ upgradation. They would be legal owners of the houses.

RADA allocated a large piece of land to accommodate families to be relocated. Based on its interaction with the affected below poverty line families, we decided to build 200 earthquake resistant houses at the relocation site and, 50 houses at in situ locations. We approached Mr. Rajendra Desai and Ms. Rupal Desai from the National Centre for People's Action In Disaster Preparedness (NCPDP), an Ahmedabad based NGO, which works towards bringing viable, eco-friendly and sustainable technologies to help people reduce their vulnerability in the aftermath of disasters, to prepare a comprehensive plan in all matters related to design, architecture, civil and structural engineering, and construction for the housing rehabilitation

To increase the accountability of all concerned, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the beneficiary families, Saath, RADA, and the Deputy Collector's (Earthquake Relief) office was drawn up, which listed the project commitments that the concerned government departments and the NGO had to honor. The beneficiary family made a commitment of a financial contribution to the project, which was almost 70 percent of the earthquake related compensation. The contribution gave them a sense of ownership once the shelters were built and occupied. The money contributed in excess of the

cost of the house was used to build more shelters and cross subsidise families who received negligible or no compensation at all. We would like to note our appreciation for the RADA authorities who were very cooperative in this effort to provide housing for the very poor.

Unlike Khadir, these families opted for a traditional design of brick, tiles, cement, wooden beams, and rafters. The houses had two rooms and a sanitation block. Beneficiaries trained as masons were involved in the construction of their houses. The RADA authorities that subsequently released the housing subsidy approved the constructed houses. The resident's need for a community hall was fulfilled.

Two years after the construction of houses in Rapar, we did an evaluation to assess the condition of the houses. There was one anomaly – the wooden centre beam had bent. The NCPDP team devised a mechanism that successfully addressed the problem.

Rehabilitation in Maliya Taluka

Maliya taluka is a part of Morbi district in western Gujarat surrounded by the Arabian Sea, Kutch, Rajkot, and Surendranagar district. Morbi district was severely affected by the earthquake.

We were not involved in the immediate relief phase after the earthquake. We participated in Care India's multi-dimensional earthquake rehabilitation programme - SNEHAL (Sustained Nutrition, Education, Health and Livelihood Project), in Kutch, Rajkot, Patan, and Surendranagar districts of Gujarat. The SNEHAL programme aimed at achieving livelihood security of the poor and marginalized, mainly primary producers of salt, and charcoal, fishermen, and milk suppliers, as well as weavers and handicraft workers. We worked in Maliya taluka and Surendranagar district.

Maliya Taluka

With Care India, we conducted a participatory assessment (PRA) in 60 villages in Maliya taluka to identify villages most vulnerable in terms of livelihood security. Saath subsequently worked in the 15 most vulnerable villages. We established an office in Morbi town and recruited a team of 8 persons, which included people in the fields of engineering, health care, animal husbandry, as well as livelihood specialists.

We initiated our work in all the villages by forming grass root committees of farmers and women. These committees were partners in decision-making, implementation and monitoring of all village level interventions.

We discussed the PRA assessments with these groups to help decide which works related to water, farming, animal care, land levelling, check dams, bund contours, drip irrigation, etc. should be taken up in each village. The committees, after consultation with individual producers, decided the works to be done through a formal resolution, which was handed over to us. These works were partly funded by CARE. The work would then be implemented through the committee with specialist support from us.

In Kakrechi village, the village committee had recommended construction of a check dam within a budget of Rs.12 lakhs. The villagers contributed Rs.5 lakhs and CARE and the Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell contributed the balance amount. Our engineers supervised the construction. Material was purchased through tenders by the committee.

With a history of having been washed away six times, the dam constructed by the committee and Saath still stands.

Deepening of existing village ponds or excavation of new ones was taken up in a similar fashion, with financial contributions shared between the villagers and us. Contribution by villagers was mostly in kind - by way of labour or use of their equipment. The farmer committees approved all bills for final payments.

Small farmers without access to irrigation facilities or bore wells excavated farm ponds and lined them with plastic to prevent seepage and sprayed them with a monomolecular film to reduce evaporation. These farmers were able to grow vegetables as an additional cash crop.

We worked with the farmer committees to facilitate regular farm animal health camps and immunisations in partnership with veterinary colleges. These were especially effective in controlling foot and mouth disease during the monsoon.

With the women's groups, health camps were organised for fisher folk and the Agariya community who suffer severe skin diseases; a result of working as salt pan workers in very harsh conditions.

The women's committees ensured quality of the mid-day meals served in schools and Aanganwadis. They helped improve school facilities by influencing teacher committees and village Panchayats. They addressed the pressing issue of child labour (when school children dropped out of school during the cotton harvesting season) by creating awareness among the parents.

In Haripar village, women formed Self Help Groups (SHGs). These groups were provided with a revolving fund of Rs.60,000 to reduce spurious borrowing of working capital from money lenders who lent them on the condition that the salt was sold to them at almost 25 percent of the market price. The SHG lent its members at 5 percent annual interest and, provided mutual guarantees for repayment. Similarly, fishermen groups were provided with a revolving loan as working capital to buy and repair nets, for storage facilities, and purchasing equipment.

The women's groups from the fifteen villages formed a federation for taluka and district level advocacy.

An Agriculture Resource Centre (ARC) was set up in Kakrechi village, for which the Panchayat provided land and the farmer committees contributed construction material. The ARC consolidated the input needs of farmers to enable them obtain supplies at affordable prices. They also guided farmers on appropriate use of fertilizers, seeds, and pesticides.

A Rural Resource Centre was established in Maliya town to facilitate access to the numerous government schemes for vulnerable communities.

Surendranagar

Surendranagar, another earthquake affected district, is home to a substantial number of artisans and weavers engaged in khadi, patola and tangaliya weaving, as well as brass handicrafts. Tangaliya is a beautiful, but tedious art of weaving (used to be only in wool), which dates back 700 years and is particular to the villages of Surendranagar District in Gujarat. There used to be a large community of Tangaliya weavers but now the numbers have dwindled.

Babubhai Rathod is from Dedadra (in Wadhwan Taluka of Surendranagar District) and is an expert Tangaliya weaver. He told us about his craft and how they used to weave only in wool that was hand-spun locally. Their customers were Bharwad women (shepherd tribe) who only wore these woolen long skirts woven with traditional motifs. But as time went by, and in Babubhai's words, "As the "fashion" era came in, and colourful, mill woven, cotton material came into the market, the Bharwards moved with the times; changed over to wearing cotton instead of woolen." The transition took ten years, during which time their incomes started dwindling and weavers gave up their traditional weaving and went into other trades.

It was during these trying times that Saath got in touch with them. They didn't know anything about who or what Saath was; neither did Saath know anything about them. They had heard about the

Tangaliya art of weaving and had come in search of them. They, along with students from the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and representatives of CARE worked out a training programme for them. They were taught how to use cotton in their art. They also introduced them to different colours and designs.

They were given stipends during the training period. The youth were organised into a working group and were made aware of how to go about saving. They went through periods of ups and downs for a while.

The village went through a water crisis as the village water tank gave way. Saath helped build a tank and when it gave way some years later, they once again helped rebuild it.

Babubhai has been associated with Saath for the past eight years. He goes on to say that working with Saath has been good. He sells his products to Rweaves at Saath and gets a good return. He is very grateful to them because they have guided him in terms of colours, patterns, and products.

When he was the lone weaver supplying goods, he found it difficult to produce in good quantity due to paucity of funds. Saath put him in touch with an organisation, Rang De, which assists artisans with loans. He recalls his first loan of Rs.40,000 and then of Rs.2,00,000. It helped set him up for full-scale production. He has not had to look back since; it has been a forward move to becoming self-sustaining. He attributes it to Saath's way of encouraging people to work towards independence.

He went on to say that he has never had a bitter experience of any kind with Saath. He also adds, that Saath invites them to participate in other programmes and exhibitions as well as live demonstrations. He started out working alone to meet production orders. Today he has a group of six to seven weavers affiliated with him. They too had started from scratch and are doing well for themselves.

On being asked what specifically did Saath do to bring about this turn-around, he explained that Tangaliya originally was not the fabric or the pattern, it was the garment itself; the skirt that the Bharwad women wore. But now Tangaliya represents the dots that make up the design or pattern. He further went on to explain that, the Dangasiyas, the community he belongs to, were originally Bharwards. His story goes – “Bharwads lived in community settlements with space around each house for their cattle. One day, a calf died and the younger of two brothers picked up the carcass and disposed of it. On his return, the elder brother told him not to enter or to touch anyone as he had handled a dead animal. He moved out and lived separately. This branch of the Bharwads is today's Dangasiyas.” According to Babubhai, the name Dangasiya comes from the word Dang, the wooden rod that the Bharwards carry to herd their cattle.

The art of weaving Tangaliya is a craft that all Dangasiyas are comfortable with. The original ethnic designs and patterns are still used in some products, along with the modern designs incorporated after their training.

Saath has helped bring Tangaliya, an unknown, disappearing art, onto the international map. People go to visit them of their own accord now. Babubhai said, “Our income levels have gone up 40 to 50 percent and our art is now flourishing. I am very thankful to Saath for all of this.”

With the Snehal programme of CARE India, we helped form 155 Self Help Groups (SHGs) of artisans in twenty-five villages. We then facilitated the formation of the SUVASA Federation – a federation of all the SHGs.

The National Institute of Fashion Design (NIFT) joined as a partner. It provided professional inputs on brand building of SUVASA, introduced contemporary designs and products, and created marketing links with larger wholesale and retail enterprises. A Geographical Indication (GI) tag, which certified the uniqueness of Tangaliya weaving in Surendranagar district, was obtained.

With SUVASA, a raw material bank for purchase of cotton, silk, and wool was established to ensure the weavers could buy raw materials on credit at affordable rates. Through SUVASA, Dena Bank and State Bank of Saurashtra graded artisans for financial assistance. Artisans were linked with government welfare and insurance schemes. A revolving fund was set up to provide credit for purchase of weaving equipment. A Common Facility Centre was established in Surendranagar town to facilitate the activities of SUVASA, Saath, and NIFT

What we learnt about relief and rehabilitation after the Gujarat Earthquake

We worked in two distinct geographies during the relief and rehabilitation of the Gujarat earthquake. One was the Khadir region in Kutchchh, and the other was mainly in the Maliya taluka and Surendranagar district of Saurashtra. Our experiences were dissimilar in the two locations.

Khadir is an island surrounded by the Rann of Kutch. The inward-looking mindset associated with isolated communities was prevalent in Khadir. The residents were wary of outsiders and did not repose trust easily. As it is a backward region, there had been very few development initiatives by government and civil society, which generally lead to the formation of community and social groups. The existing groups were rigidly divided into two main caste-oriented formations. The Ahirs, whose main occupation was farming and trading, led one. The Darbars, who are the traditional ruling and

warrior community, led the other. The Harijans and the Muslims would align themselves with one of these groups. The division had also manifested itself by these groups' identification with different political parties. The caste and political divisions affected almost all aspects of economic activities in Khadir.

The limited investments made by the government led to a scarcity mindset, and as a result, intense competition between the two groups for garnering the resources we brought into the region for relief and rehabilitation. We could not always make decisions based on the vulnerabilities of a community as it led to conflicts and in one instance, violence against one of our workers. We had to balance our assistance and investments between the two groups. For example, when we required tractors and other machinery for building dams, we had to be very careful that we hired these from both the groups. We could do very little work with women because the gender rigidities, due to lack of exposure to developmental activities, were very strong, compared to similar rural areas in Gujarat.

In contrast, working in Surendranagar district was less stressful. Surendranagar is not isolated as two major highways and a railway line cut across the district. There have been subsequently, more government and civil society interventions. The people were more outward looking and aware of their rights and entitlements. There were more self-help groups we could engage with. The diversity of economic activities meant increased livelihoods and income. There was more interaction between differing castes and communities. For example, when a check dam was to be built, villagers put aside their social differences and contributed for the good of the village.

Gujarat Riots

“All that I am today is because of Saath” - Noorjahan Diwan’s story

“In 2002, about a fortnight after the riots, before I joined Saath, I vividly remember visiting the Vadilal hospital for a medical problem with my sister-in-law. The doctors there referred to us a ‘bombs.’ I was so scared that I insisted we leave without consultation. Outside the hospital we were once again chased by a mob. We got into an auto rickshaw and asked the driver to just drive us to Pravinnagar. Once we were on our way, the driver asked us point blank whether we were Hindus or Muslims. We told him we were Muslims and needed to go to Juhapura. He asked us to get off. We pleaded with him and he said he would drop us off a little away from Juhapura. He was compassionate and dropped us off and didn’t even take the fare from us.

“I was very traumatised and actually felt that the Hindus were bad people. I had been living a very protected life and was always surrounded by Muslims. I had had no interaction with Hindus.

“Some time later, I visited one of the camps and was horrified at the situation. I was so shaken that I broke down and cried. When I returned home, I described what I had witnessed at the camp to my husband. He got very angry and slapped me saying that there were men there. During that time, we lived in a very strict environment at home – we wore the ‘parda’ (covering of the face with a cloth).

“The next day, however, on the pretext of shopping for vegetables, I visited the camp once more and I met a friend of mine who was also a teacher. I enquired as to what she was doing, and she informed me about Saath. She was working with children through a Saath programme. I told her I too would like to work there. She made enquiries and I was called for an interview. I told the interviewer that I wanted to work with the riot victims and that I would resign from my school job. She outlined the work, which included teaching children and dispensing medicines to women.

“I joined Saath the next day. I started work with the children, doing different activities with them. The children were a very traumatised lot. They suffered nightmares and woke up screaming from their sleep. They were initially petrified of Hindu women who wore bindis (a red spot on the forehead). Gradually, as the Saath team of Hindu men and women interacted with them and helped them, they started accepting them.

“After some time, we were asked to work through Aman Samudhay, an organisation working for the riot affected. We formally joined them through Saath. Here we were trained in dealing with trauma, teaching children games, how to lodge FIRs at police stations, etc. Members of the Saath staff too attended these trainings.

“Subsequently, we started work on various fronts. My first experience at filing a FIR at the police station is a very memorable one. I had gone to the police station wearing a burkha. The police officer on duty asked me to go and remove my burkha and then come to file the FIR. On enquiring why, he said, “you may be hiding a bomb underneath.” I complied and then filed the case.

“I had problems on my home front too. I had two small school-going children and one six-month old infant. I was constantly reminded that my place was in my home not out in the streets.

“When the camps were being disbanded, we worked for the rehabilitation of the people. We helped distribute home kits, as well as livelihood related goods and equipment. We attended Saath meetings and learnt about peace and justice. We worked alongside them.

“People wanted to return to their homes in the Naroda Patia area but were afraid of what was in store for them. A group of us were posted in the area to assist them. We were chased by the people of the area a couple of times and had to run for our lives.

“A Muslim committee, as well as other NGOs, also assisted in the process of rehabilitation in various areas.

“Saath later started forming Self Help Groups and were encouraging women to save. I worked with them, as well as with the children. This work I did under the aegis of Aman Samudhay. I worked with them for five years, during which time I also did some work on peace and justice, towards unity between the two communities. Our centres were situated between the two community settlements. We worked to bring about unity through children, as the grownups had strong views and had formed a divide between the two communities. We encouraged the children to intermingle during studies, as well as during activities. We ensured that team games had a mix of both communities on both sides. Gradually, the children mixed freely.

“When we held parent’s meetings at the centre, both communities would form their own group and take part. We took the women on an excursion and played team games with a mix of both communities in each team. We ran an embroidery centre and encouraged women from both communities to mingle. It was working. The biggest hurdle was getting the men together; they never took part in the unity and peace meetings.

“As it happened, the Torrent Power Company had started a drive to legalise the electricity connections and went about disconnecting illegal ones. It was during this time that we took up the work of assisting those in need of connections. Everyone had to come to our centre to apply or make payments. It was then that the men folk finally started coming together. Then Saath assisted in bringing the basic amenities to the area; roads were built, and water supply made available. It was the meetings held during these works that helped completely break the ice among the men between the communities. Youth from the VHP and RSS cadres in Guptanagar joined the unity campaign.

“When the political leader, Haren Pandya, was killed Muslim houses were targeted, many burnt, and people started to flee the area. The Hindus from the area formed a human chain and convinced the Muslims that they would stand by them and let no harm come to them. It was the most heartwarming time. It brought me immense joy that our efforts at unity had borne fruit.

“This, however, as was to be expected, did not go down well with the higher ups within the Hindu organisations. They came to our community centre and demanded that it be shut down and threatened

to take me away if I did not comply. I stood firm. They filed a case against me at the police station claiming that I was a terrorist inciting the people. I received summons to present myself at the police station. From the Hindu Bharward community, the men came along with me and gave their statements stating that I am working on communal unity and peace. This happened a few times and, each time they came and baled me out.

“At my home front however, they were worried that I could be attacked on my to or from the centre, so I decided not to take the risk any further. We shut down the centre.

“Our work all over the city continued. Wherever there were riots or unrest, we, from Aman and Saath intervened. We held hands and sang songs of unity. We intervened at Gomtipur and Bapunagar. We received complaints from both communities, which we solved through compromises and talks on unity. We had about 35 centres all over the city.

“We joined hands with Jan Sagharsh Manch, run by Advocate Mukul Sinha, to fight against innocent Muslim boys being jailed under POTA. During this period, we were often incarcerated.

“I later joined the Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, working with Muslim women at the state level. I helped form groups of Muslim women all over the state – Kutchchh, Junagadh, Jamnagar, Bhavnagar, Rajkot, Baroda, Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Panchmahals, etc. I was incorporated into the national level team through which I worked in many states and later went on to become the convener at the national level. Soon I was encouraged to join a political party. I did. I joined the Congress Party and was made the state president of the Minority Cell. I created Muslim Women’s groups within the party.

“I had joined Anhad in 2003 and am still associated with them. They work on peace and justice and keeping democracy alive. I am presently working with women on these issues, as well as on our constitution. I work with and for the exploited and downtrodden. My work includes working on the rights of the Dalits. Basically, I now work wherever there is unrest and exploitation.

“In the field of education, from 2003 to 2010, I have helped enroll around 500 poor children in hostels. Anhad meets their expenses through donations received for the same. Now, when a young boy or girl comes up to me, says hello and asks if I remember them, and introduce themselves as children I had helped admit into a hostel, it gives me great joy.

“Counseling married couples on the verge of a break up is part of what I do today. Our counseling centre is in Juhapura. We had run a Shariat Adalat through the Bharatiya Muslim Andolan. We

mainly got cases of triple talaq. We had taken out a rally against this tradition in Juhapura and had received a lot of flak. It was after this that the issue went to the Supreme Court through a petition signed by seven people; I was one of the signatories on behalf of Gujarat.

“I have been the chairperson of Aman Samudhaya thrice. I am a recipient of a number of awards over the years. My first award was for my work in peace and justice around 2010-11. All that I am today is because of Saath. Their initiation, trainings, guidance, and nurturing have made me who I am.”

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On 28 February 2002, we were celebrating Saath's thirteenth foundation day at our office. During the festivities, we received calls from Sankalchand Mukhi ni Chali and Guptanagar informing us that rioting had erupted in Ahmedabad in the aftermath of the burning of passengers in the Sabarmati Express. Our staff members were requested to talk to the community leaders to prevent violence in the areas that we were working in. Some of us tried to visit the areas, but were prevented, as curfew was declared in those areas. The reports from our community staff members were not encouraging. The scale and intensity of the violence was beyond belief. Authorities were not responding to their pleas for assistance. In the ensuing days, it was apparent that the rioting, violence, arson, and looting, especially in Muslim areas and business establishments, were on a very large scale. We learnt that the victims of the riots, mainly from the Muslim community, had fled to relief camps. We took the initiative to provide immediate relief to people living in these camps; and later joined in rehabilitation efforts.

This was not the first time we were getting involved in relief and rehabilitation of riot victims. In December 1992, after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, riots on a much smaller scale had taken place in Ahmedabad. Economic activities had come to a halt, as curfew had been imposed to prevent further violence. The hardest hit were daily wage earners, who often do not have savings to buy basic foodstuffs. With the support of Oxfam, we distributed food grains to almost 2,000 households in Sankalchand Mukhi ni Chali and Guptanagar in 1992. The modus operandi was working with community leaders to identify households that were the most affected. Subsequently, coupons were distributed, and we managed two distribution centres with the aid of the local police.

But 2002 was different. The number of people affected over wide geographical areas was enormous. We joined the Citizen's Initiative (CI), a network of NGOs that had been formed the previous year to support relief to the victims of the Kutch earthquake. In the first meeting held at the Gandhi Ashram on 3 March 2002, CI decided to form teams that would do damage and need assessment, assist in legal support, provide food and medical assistance, and coordinate with government agencies. We

took the responsibility of procuring food grains for the affected people in the relief camps on behalf of the Citizens Initiative. Other members of the group took the responsibility of distributing these food grains to the camps.

Emergency relief in camps

After our experience of having done similar purchase of food grains for the Kutch Earthquake victims in 2001, we were confident of managing the procurements for the camps. But we were in for a rude shock! We soon found out that due to the communal nature of the riots, food wholesalers, who mainly belonged to the Hindu community, refused to supply foodstuff, even though we were willing to pay market prices. Our staff members decided to contact the stores from where they bought their monthly rations for the bulk procurements. Through this personal networking, we able to supply about 113 tons of foodstuffs, mainly consisting of wheat, rice, cooking oil, potatoes, onions, and milk powder, to almost 37,000 people in 29 relief camps for the initial five days, after which, the government machinery stepped in. Our team worked 24x7, finding and convincing retailers and traders, mostly from the Hindu community to spare a few kilos for the camp inhabitants, to achieve this.

We then developed a short-term strategy to work with refugees in the camps. Subsequently, we worked on long-term rehabilitation of the victims through the Integrated Slum Development programme. We decided that we, and our associate community based organisations (CBOs), Sakhi Mahila Mandal (SMM) in Guptanagar and Ekta Yuvak Mandal (EYM) in Sankalchand Mukhi ni Chali would work with children, women, and youth in the relief camps and provide emotional support.

The managers of the camps initially welcomed us, as they were familiar with Saath and the Citizens Initiative. However, when we introduced them to members of the SMM and EYM, who happened to be mainly from the Hindu community, they were hostile. They said that members of the Hindu Community had caused so much harm, it was difficult to accept that the Hindu members of EYM and SMM would provide helpful emotional and other support to the Muslim inhabitants of the camp. We explained the secular nature of Saath and the CBOs, the type of work we had done with all communities in Ahmedabad since 1989, after which they reluctantly agreed to allow us in the camps. They indicated that they would keep a close watch on our activities and would not hesitate to throw us out, if anything untoward happened. Similarly, the women and youth members of the EYM and SMM were afraid too. They were unsure if they would be accepted in the camps. Further, the husbands and fathers of the CBO members were not at all keen on their wives and children working in the camps. In this mutually suspicious atmosphere, we started working in the relief camps.

Saath, EYM, and SMM worked with the residents of five relief camps at Jamalpur, Behrampura, Ramol, Saraspur, Juhapura for eight months before the camps were disbanded in October 2002.

We found that children and women were the most traumatised residents in the camps. We decided to carry out activities, which would keep them occupied, as well as provide a platform for emotional support and counseling. With support from Save the Children, we started Balghar type of classes for children between the ages of 3 and 10. The teachers of SMM trained women in the camp in basic pedagogy. Professionals from The National Institute for Mental and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS) explained the basics of counseling to the teachers, who in turn counseled the residents. Teaching material, games, toys, and stationery were provided. Balghar classes were conducted in the camps for five hours a day and children were given nutritious snacks. Gradually, when the fear and trauma had reduced, trust between camp residents, Saath, SMM and EYM members increased. Almost 1,190 children attended the Balghars in the camps. As part of CI initiatives, we facilitated the provision of food coupons, government assistance, legal aid, and livelihood support for the residents.

The relationships and trust built during the eight months at the relief camps became the foundation for our long-term rehabilitation of the residents.

Long term rehabilitation

We linked development, peace building, and reconciliation in the long-term rehabilitation process; made it part of the Integrated Slum Development Program for riot victims. We selected four clusters of slums in the Saraspur, Behrampura, and Santoshnagar in the eastern part and, Sankalitnagar and Juhapura in the western part of Ahmedabad with a total of about 2,100 households. Care India, through its Gujarat Harmony Project, and the American India Foundation, provided programme support.

The key to effective ISDP is building capacities of local people and communities to address developmental needs. We identified and recruited women and young men, who were inclined to work towards development and peace, into our team. The new staff members were trained through theoretical inputs and on the job-training, by members of SMM and EYM. They later formed CBOs in their local areas.

The various ISDP interventions in the rehabilitation phase included community health, education, livelihoods, savings and credit, and community participation.

Community health

Our assessment revealed that neurotic conditions such as hypertension, migraine, insomnia, and anxiety related to the riots were prevalent, especially among children. Awareness on maternal and childcare was minimal. Tuberculosis was prevalent.

We trained local women as Community Health Workers. Regular camps were held for immunisation, growth monitoring, and gynecological issues. We started TB referral centers in all the areas and, a DOT center in Juhapura. A dispensary was opened in Juhapura to provide affordable and basic curative services.

People of both communities accessed the various services. Home visits made by Hindu workers to Muslim households and vice versa, which had seemed like an impossibility, was part of the development process that took place. This led to a decrease in prejudices on both sides.

Education

The education initiatives aimed at decreasing the dropout rate of slum children in schools. We started fifteen Balghars for children between the ages of three and five. Picnics and outings, which are an integral part of Balghars, helped tremendously in establishing interest, credibility, trust, and rapport. When the first picnic was held, parents were reluctant to send their children, especially girls, away from home. Later, the parents demanded that more outing be held. The mothers felt that the Balghars had helped the children psychologically get over the trauma of the riots.

Supplementary classes were introduced in Juhapura, Behrampur, and Saraspur to provide additional help to school going children. We started activity centers in the four areas, as interaction platforms for members of all ages in the community. The centers were primarily a library with various indoor games such as chess, carom, badminton, etc., which were an added attraction for the children. Various competitions like hair styling, sports events, etc., were held at regular intervals. The centres were run by local committees, which selected the magazines, books, and games. These participative processes led to a sense of ownership among the residents.

Livelihoods

Tailoring classes, which had begun as a rehabilitation activity in the camps were continued as a six-month certificate course. The classes became a forum for girls to interact (all communities), and discuss various issues regarding adolescence, puberty, etc., which was not possible at home. These classes increased interaction of the two communities at all levels - teachers, students, and parents.

We partnered with AWAG. They had a production centre in Saraspur, which exported embroidery and other specialized tailored items. We trained women for the high quality export work.

Savings and credit

Savings and credit groups were formed to reduce vulnerability by increasing savings and facilitating institutional credit. The response in all the areas was heartening. The initial fears that we would dupe them of their hard-earned money, quickly faded away. The credibility established by us in other programmes played an important role in gaining their trust. But more important, was the fact that the responsibility of the programme was given to the residents from within the community. They were trained to handle the programme. When the residents feared losing their savings, the coordinators assured them that they would take the responsibility of their savings. These groups later became part of the Saath Credit Cooperative Society.

Electrification

In Juhapura, Saath and Sanklap Mitra Mandal, the local CBO, partnered to provide legal electrical connections through the Slum Electrification Programme. After the initial 875 connections during the pilot phase, almost a total of 4,000 connections have been given.

Community participation

The crux of ISDP is capacity building of the people. The process of imparting training to local workers in various programs and making them capable of managing these programs was an enriching learning experience. Members of SMM and EYM, who were mostly Hindus, would be the torchbearers in the Muslim areas where the work was carried out. The resulting interaction between the Hindu and Muslim workers reduced prejudices and preconceived myths. This, in turn, percolated down to the communities. A more positive mindset emerged. Through parents' meetings, street meetings, sports events and various other programmes, people of both communities had the opportunity of engaging on the same forum.

In Juhapura/Sankalitnagar, Sankalp Mitra Mandal was registered in May 2002. Sanklap promoted a volleyball team to engage the interest of the youth. It organized an unprecedented volleyball tournament in Juhapura between thirteen teams from different areas of the city. The non-Muslim players from other teams were of the opinion Juhapura was a 'restricted zone' for them and had never dreamed that they would play a match in the area. The tournament raised hope for the future, helped in partly removing the taboos that existed.

Sankalp established good linkages with the gram panchayats of Maktanpura and Vejalpura. It coordinates with them for various programmes aimed at the development and betterment of people. For example, it helped in the mapping of houses, which were not under the Maktanpura gram

panchayat. This helped in those houses getting individual water connections, streetlights, and other amenities.

The long-term rehabilitation work demonstrated that trust could be rebuilt between communities on a development platform within participative processes.

Relief and rehabilitation in infrastructure projects

Infrastructure projects, which acquire land and other assets, lead to disruption of social and economic activities. People affected by infrastructure projects lose land, housing, productive income generation, assets, and community structures. To ensure that losses due to land acquisition and resettlement are minimised, the government of India and international bilateral agencies have recognised the need to resettle and rehabilitate Project Affected Persons (PAPs). NGOs are recognized as sensitive intermediaries between the affected people and government authorities. They are given the task of ensuring PAPs are compensated, rehabilitated, and resettled as per the policies of the government and bilateral agencies.

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) Project

In February 2003, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) entrusted Saath, in collaboration with the CRCB Kassar Trust, with the implementation and Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) for four-lane and upgradation of National Highway 8A & 8B from Samakhiali to Porbander, covering a distance of 311 kilometers. The project was supported by the Asian Development Bank, which had comprehensive guidelines for resettlement and rehabilitation of PAPs.

The broad tasks of the RAP were:

- a) Identification, verification, and counseling of Project Affected Persons (PAPs)
- b) Educating the PAPs on their right to entitlements and obligations, and ensuring that these were given to the PAPs
- c) Preparation and implementation of micro resettlement plans, which included income restoration, livelihood training, alternative housing, and land allocation
- d) Disbursing financial assistance to PAPS
- e) Assist the PAPs in relocation and rehabilitation, including counseling and coordination with the local authorities
- f) Assist the PAPs to address their grievances (through the grievance Redressal cells set up by the project)

- g) Impart information to all PAPs about the functional aspects of the various district level committees set up by the project and assist them in benefiting from such institutional mechanism
- h) Assist the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) of NHAI in ensuring social responsibilities of the Project, such as, compliance with the labour laws, prohibition of child labour, and gender issues
- i) Collect data and submit progress reports for NHAI to monitor progress of the RP implementation
- j) Assist PAPs and the CRRO identify and negotiate new land for resettlement

A total of 336 families were rehabilitated with provision of a plot of land and infrastructure like water, and sewage facilities, near Navagam in Rajkot. 1679 families were assisted in procuring compensation.

MEGA (Metro link Express for Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad) Project

Harshad Prajapati, a resident of Vejalpur, had his electric rewinding workshop, at the Mangaldeep Complex at Jivraj Park. Besides the rewinding work, he had tie-ups with wiremen who did other electrical job-work. His father is an auto rickshaw driver. During the planning stage of the Metro, a number of meetings were held in the Jivraj Park area where his workshop was situated. The authorities had initially informed them that there was a possibility of the block of commercial shops/workshops being in the path of the Metro but had not confirmed it.

Harshad's shop was over thirty years old. He had bought it four years ago. It was a small space in the basement of the building. During the monsoons, he would have to physically empty out the rainwater that flowed into his shop. Nonetheless, he was doing good business. His wife is his working partner; she too works hands-on at the shop. "I had a monopoly on this work in the area. I was well known and had a regular clientele. It is an essential service of sorts. People wake up and find their pump isn't working, and cannot pump water into their tanks, they call. It is an emergency," he said.

When the Metro plans were finalised, he said he was happy to find that his shop would be demolished. He had hoped it would, he would then be able to get a better space. Which happened.

When it was finalised, they held a number of meetings with those affected. It was during those meetings that he came in contact with Saath, through Madhviben and Mayankbhai. They were

extremely helpful and guided him through the entire process. “I will never forget them for the way they helped me,” he said.

“I was asked to find a place to relocate my workshop to. I found the one I wanted. It is in Vejalpur, where I live. In fact, right opposite my residence,” he said, smiling. All the shop owners in the building, which was demolished, were given space in the place he had located. It was owned by the AMC. They have given him the relevant documents like the Allotment Letter and Possession Letter and Ownership Certificate; he did not have a Sale Deed. He was told that he would be able to apply for a loan or even sell the premises on the basis of these documents. He had not checked it yet.

“I am now an owner of a much larger workshop, twice the size of my old place. It is newly constructed, about three years old. It is fitted with electricity and water connections. My income has dropped by almost fifty percent. It does not trouble me. It will take me a few years to get to where I was. I will have to build my reputation and clientele, once more. The work with wiremen brings in about thirty percent of my income. It’s not enough, but we are able to make ends meet, for the time being,” he concluded. His sense of total satisfaction was palpable, as he walked out of the room.

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MEGA (Metro link Express for Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad) is constructing a metro rail service between Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar cities covering a distance of 37.7 kilometers. The Japanese International Cooperation Agency is providing financial assistance for MEGA. Saath Livelihood Services was inducted to implement the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP).

As it is an on-going project, according to the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) report, about 1,047 families (3,597 persons) will get affected. Total properties that will be affected are 1,047. Out of these 548 are residential, 351 are commercial (including one industrial unit) and 144 are residential cum commercial units. Further, structures that will be affected due to land requirement for the project have also been identified.

The (RAP) included providing entitlements to the affected families as per the GOI and JICA guidelines, and legal provisions. All PAPs getting directly and indirectly affected are to be provided with their rightful entitlements and compensations, which include alternate housing and new business locations, shifting costs, and restoration of livelihood.

Our work was initiated by an information awareness campaign amongst the PAPs regarding the MEGA resettlement guidelines for providing compensation, assistance, including livelihood

restoration opportunities. This included personal and group meetings, as well as public consultations, to help create awareness and build trust between Saath, MEGA, and the PAPS.

In the next phase, we verified persons and families that were identified by a socio-economic survey carried out by MEGA. Persons and families that were left out during the survey were added and identity cards issued to all affected by MEGA.

After identifying all the affected individuals and families, we are ensuring that compensation according to the policy and guidelines of MEGA, which are based on the Land Acquisition Act of 2013, is given to both title and non-title holders. For residential non-title holders, EWS housing measuring 36.5 sq.mt. and the construction cost of their old property is provided. For commercial non-title holders, MEGA tries to provide alternative business locations, which could be a shop or a plot of land. For non-title holders, residential, a shifting allowance of Rs.50,000 and a subsistence allowance of Rs.36,000 is provided. Mobile vendors get Rs.18,000 as financial assistance. Commercial non-title holders receive a one-time financial assistance of Rs.25,000, a one-time shifting assistance of Rs.50,000 and construction cost of their old structure.

PAPS, especially the poor and who are from the informal sector, are the most vulnerable in city infrastructure projects. They are not aware of the entitlements that are due to them. We try to ensure that they get their entitlements by not only making them aware, but handhold them during the whole process, and when they are not satisfied, assist them through the grievance redressal procedure set up by MEGA.

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