



## **THE 2000 RAMON MAGSAYSAY AWARD FOR PEACE AND INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING**

### **BIOGRAPHY OF JOCKIN ARPUTHAM**

**J**ockin Arputham of India was not to the manner born, but neither was he born to extreme poverty, as his work for the past twenty-eight years may tend to suggest. His paternal grandfather was a village magistrate in Tamil Nadu who owned vast tracts of land, but the family's fortune dwindled when the old man was killed after having sent a bandit to prison. His widow fled the village with her two young children and ended up in the Kolar Gold Fields in Karnataka, thirty-four kilometers from Bangalore. Kolar was owned and managed by the British and, at the time, was one of the largest private gold mines in India.

Not having had the benefit of higher education, Jockin's father, Chinapan Arputham, had to content himself working as a carpenter in the Kolar Gold Fields. But he rose to become a foreman and was chief engineer by the time he retired. He was also a freedom fighter affiliated with the National Congress Party.

Jockin, the second of eight children, was born in Irudaya Puram in the Kolar Gold Fields on September 15, 1946. He was a sickly boy who almost died of smallpox in early childhood. He was raised by his grandmother, who was the real authority in the Arputham household. His mother, Pariporanaman, was a simple woman who did the chores and kept to the background. Both she and her husband were devout Catholics who spent much time in church. Jockin recalls that he prayed often, in church and at home. He started his schooling at the Kolar Gold Fields School, which was run by Indian Catholic priests and nuns who used English as their medium of instruction. His parents wanted Jockin and his brothers to enter the seminary, but the priesthood held no attraction for him.

Although the Arputhams had moved to the gold fields, they continued to own agricultural land in their old village, which they leased. At Kolar, they lived in a large terrace house with six or seven rooms and a tiled roof that set it apart from lesser homes in the area. Over the years, however, Chinapan took to drinking and by the time Jockin reached seventh grade the family had lost all its land. Moreover, its already meager resources had to be shared with Pariporanaman's seven brothers and three sisters who all depended on her. Food became scarce at the Arputham home. Their dwindling fortunes drove a wedge between husband and wife, a fact that was not lost on young Jockin. He lost all interest in school and, one day, came home wearing only one worn-out shoe; he had thrown the other one away, a gesture of protest over his family's worsening poverty. It was the last time Jockin wore shoes.

His once loving relationship with his father gradually deteriorated until, one day, he announced that he was leaving because he no longer wanted to be part of the family. He took ten rupees from a jar he found in the house, put them in his pocket, and left. That evening, he got on a train without bothering to buy himself a ticket. He was barely sixteen.

Jockin got off at Bangalore and, having no place to stay, decided to sleep in front of a church. He took on odd jobs until he found an inexpensive school that offered a course in carpentry. He had cousins on his mother's side who were living in Bangalore and doing well as carpenters; one of them offered to take him in as an apprentice. It was his first real

job. But he did not stay long in the job because he discovered that he was being paid less than the other workers. Outraged, he left his cousin's house and went back to sleeping outside churches and other buildings. On Saturday nights, he walked over to the public faucet to have a bath and to do his laundry.

He was on his way to becoming homeless. In India, this term is used to denote someone who makes his or her home along a pavement. The phenomenon of pavement slums emerged in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) and Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India's two largest cities. During the 1960s and 1970s, Mumbai, the capital of the state of Maharashtra and the commercial center of India, drew hordes of migrants, mostly poor farmers or landless rural folk from other parts of the state as well as from the rest of the country, especially areas frequented by drought. These poor migrants were lured by prospects of work in Mumbai's textile mills and factories, construction industry, domestic service, and various other small trades.

They continue to flock to Mumbai today, arriving with high hopes only to be confronted by a critical housing shortage and high rents. Their usual alternative is to build huts on the footpaths or pavements of city streets, using the walls or fences that separate building compounds from the pavement and street outside. Their houses make use of recycled waste products such as scraps of cloth, corrugated iron, cardboard, wood, plastic, bricks, and cement. Privacy is unheard of in these huts; nor is there protection from foul weather and vehicular traffic. Pavement dwellers also fall prey to extortion by the police and organized criminals and to demolitions and other slum-clearance programs of the local government.

Today, people living in the streets or in slums comprise half the thirteen million people who populate Mumbai. Pavement dwellers are even poorer and more marginalized than slum dwellers, who are given ration cards that allow them access to basic services. Pavement dwellers are not entitled to any benefits. In 1998, there were more than twenty thousand of them in Greater Mumbai alone. Researchers found that "over one-third of pavement-dwelling households have four or five members, and the same proportion have been living in Mumbai for over fifteen years." Over a third of them occupy less than five square meters of space, and nearly half occupy areas of only five to ten square meters.

In Mumbai and other Indian cities, many slums are located on land that belongs to either the government or private landowners. Large tracts of land are owned by state-linked agencies such as the Airports Authority of India, the Ports Trusts, the Indian Railways, and the Armed Forces, through so-called cantonment boards. Local bodies such as municipal corporations, housing boards, development authorities, and improvement trusts also own land. Under existing laws, both the central and state governments have the power to acquire land for public purposes and to control its use. In reality, however, the estate management departments of public agencies have not been able to police their lands adequately; as a result, lower-ranking officials have often connived with middlemen to allow encroachments. In addition, the government tends to overlook the concrete contributions of slum dwellers to the city's economy as industrial workers, construction laborers, domestic helpers, rag pickers, and vegetable and fruit sellers. Instead, along with professional groups and the middle classes, it is inclined to perceive them as a nuisance.

Before the 1970s, the policy of the government of Maharashtra and the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai was to demolish slums and clear the land of "encroachments." This policy proved to be unworkable because, after some time had passed, the displaced people simply rebuilt their huts in the same location or, to avoid harassment, found themselves another unoccupied piece of land nearby. In the 1970s, however, the government began to view slums more positively: as solutions to the housing shortage.

Laws and policies were adopted to provide basic amenities in the slums. At the same time, the government recognized that it had to provide for resettlement when slums were demolished. In the mid-1980s, the World Bank began supporting a Slum Upgradation Programme under which cooperative societies of slum dwellers were granted thirty-year renewable leases for the land they occupied; the program provided basic amenities on a cost-recovery basis and loans to upgrade people's houses.

When he was eighteen, Jockin Arputham left Bangalore and moved to Mumbai. He could not speak the local language but found occasional work as a carpenter, sometimes taking his fellow street sleepers with him to do odd jobs. The workers gradually evolved into a community and from it emerged an informal school where hundreds of slum children learned from their adult "teachers." Arputham became their leader. One of his first moves was to do something about a garbage dump in the neighborhood that had been ignored by the city authorities. Marching to the local administration offices, he and the children each dumped a bag of rubbish on the doorstep.

"Soon," he recalls, "mountains of garbage covered the entire entrance to the offices. By the time we got back to our homes, angry civic officials were in the area looking for me. Before long, though, education officials came to visit our district and garbage trucks appeared for the first time in years. The dump was cleared."

Arputham marks that day as the beginning of his true work in the slums.

Early in his career as an organizer, Arputham realized that government planners and executives had no grasp of how the poor live and what they want, and that he and his fellow urban poor could not depend on the government to solve their problems. At the same time, he realized that change could be achieved if there existed a critical mass of people to demand change. Authorities, he learned, were not inclined to deal with individual communities or disempowered groups. He also learned that he did not need money to organize people. All he needed were people.

In the late 1960s, the police in Mumbai were carrying out demolitions daily. In 1969, Arputham decided it was time to unite the people to oppose the evictions. He started to mobilize slum dwellers. He met with them, listened to their concerns, and inspired them to work together to find solutions to their problems. That year, he organized the Bombay Slum Dwellers Federation. Its objective was clear from the beginning: no evictions, no demolitions. If an eviction was inevitable, the federation demanded that the people at least have a right to ask for a dialogue with the authorities. Arputham refused to register his federation with the government, arguing, "Why do you want registration? To beg for money? To give an accounting to somebody? Only people who know how to read and write can run [the organization]? But we are not educated, that's why we are talking."

In the beginning the Bombay Slum Dwellers Federation was an all-male organization. In the course of his work, however, Arputham discovered that women were the "key to developing the community." To him women meant three things: communication, information, and money. These are the "ingredients that make development possible," he says. "Women talk sense. In India they are like human money purses. They keep their change in their sleeves, in their saris. Their whole body is their pocket. You shake them, the money will fall down." Arputham's faith in women as handlers of money is based on two considerations. "Money," he believes, "is very close to the hearts of women." Secondly, "You put some money and ten women together. They will take care of it. Once you convince women to save money, they will not leave you." Arputham claims that in all his travels around the world, he has yet to meet a woman who told him she has not saved some money. He discovered another advantage that women put to good use where money was concerned: it was the starting point for conversations about other things. Once women began

discussing money, he learned, they easily moved on to other issues of importance—and to dialogue with men.

Thanks to its women members, the membership of Arputham's federation rapidly grew three hundredfold. By 1974, it had expanded beyond Mumbai to become the National Slum Dwellers Federation, or NSDF. Its mission continued to be organizing slum dwellers in the cities where they lived in order to protect their rights to land tenure and basic amenities. The concept of a "federation" gave communities a sense of ownership and, more importantly, of empowerment. They owned their organization and their community; they had the power to take charge of their lives and to find solutions to their problems. In coming together for the first time and hearing the experiences of others as marginalized as themselves, they learned that they were not alone and that they had options; better yet, they learned that if they united they could demand action from the government.

Arputham himself had operated at the start as an urban guerrilla, often hunted by government authorities. In the mid-1970s, the district where he lived, known as Janata Colony, was scheduled for demolition to make way for the Atomic Energy Commission. The NSDF responded by barricading roads, organizing mass demonstrations, securing stay orders, and fighting the eviction order all the way to India's Supreme Court. The situation turned serious when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took a personal interest in the Janata demolition case. In 1975, Arputham went to New Delhi and demanded an audience with her, but she made him and his followers wait for twenty-nine days. Refusing to return to Mumbai unless he met with the prime minister, Arputham staged a hunger strike. His twenty-four-person delegation slowly dwindled to four as their resources became scarce. In the meantime, he won sympathizers among the members of Parliament, including those from the ruling party.

When Mrs. Gandhi gave the go signal for the demolition, Arputham circulated pamphlets and leaflets warning in bold red letters that he would bomb the houses of the scientists. The day before the demolition, he met with the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, arguing that he and his people were not contesting government's right to evict them but that due process was not being observed in the order to evict and demolish. The chairman told him, "Even God will not be able to stop it tomorrow." At half past four the following morning, Arputham was knocking at the chairman's door with a court order for a stay of eviction. By then, about thirteen thousand policemen, six hundred trucks, and five thousand municipal workers had arrived on the scene. They had to leave.

Arputham, however, lost his case in the Supreme Court. The government gave the slum dwellers forty days to leave the area. On the day of the eviction, police arrested Arputham and thousands of women from the Janata Colony. Rumors floated that Arputham would be liquidated. Alerted, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) announced to the world that the leader of Janata Colony had been placed in police custody along with his followers and was about to be killed. Arputham's life was spared but it was no longer safe for him to remain in India. In 1976, he fled to the Philippines. There, he received training in organizing slum communities at the Tondo Foreshore Area in Manila, the capital city, and with the Philippine Ecumenical Council for Community Organizations in Cebu City. He returned to India in 1978.

The Janata Colony experience taught Arputham a valuable lesson. He realized that there was a more effective way of dealing with the authorities than violent resistance. From then on, his approach changed from agitation and confrontation to constructive engagement, negotiation, and even collaboration with government. Dialogue, he realized, was the key, and change could be achieved if a critical mass was clamoring for it. He also discovered that, as a militant confronting powerful opposition, information was a more powerful tool

than agitation. When government authorities told him that no land for resettlement was available, he was ready with a list of available lands. “I will not say no to demolition, but I want to know why, what, how, who, where, and when,” he told them.

Other militant nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) criticized Arputham for his change in approach and tactics, but he did not care. He explains, “I was doing all agitation, breaking this and that, being completely militant, but the material benefit to the people was zero. I couldn’t even build one toilet. I had not even asked the government if it could build the toilet.”

In the 1980s, the NSDF had acquired two valuable partners, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resources Centres, or SPARC, and Mahila Milan. Together, they form the Indian Alliance. The nongovernmental organization SPARC was established in 1984 by a group of middle-class professionals who had previously worked with more traditional and welfare-oriented NGOs in the Byculla neighborhood of pavement dwellers in central Mumbai. Seeing that these NGOs could not deal effectively with the demolitions, SPARC began to work with the women pavement dwellers, helping them to understand the consequences of the demolitions on their lives and to think of ways to fight them.

One of SPARC’s first activities for the women was a process of interaction between the various pavement communities, after having observed that (as Arputham puts it) “the women on one side of the street had not spent much time with those on the other side.” Together, the NSDF and SPARC initiated training programs for women in aspects of community development such as savings and day care, and designing and constructing houses. These programs enabled women to survey their own settlements and to start using the data they had generated to campaign for secure land tenure and other needs. The programs were unique in that they made use of technologies that were familiar to the slum dwellers. Since most of the people in the target group were illiterate, the NSDF and SPARC had to think of creative ways to encourage them to participate and work. For instance, Arputham asked them to visualize the houses they wanted to build by drawing shapes. To produce circles, for example, they traced plates on paper; to measure the area and size of the houses they wanted, they used their saris.

What was important in the training programs was not the technologies alone, but the spirit of independence and self-reliance that the participants developed. In contrast to most NGOs that try to do the work for the community, Arputham made the community do the work itself. He likes to say, “If we ourselves don’t know what we want, lots of people, like NGOs and big-project wallahs, will be very happy to come and dance on our heads.” He offers well-meaning NGOs another piece of advice: “Don’t think for people. The main thing is to offer a fresh way of looking at the situation. If a person tells you he wants to die, instead of saying ‘No, don’t do it. Life is too precious,’ you could say, ‘Very good—you might use a knife, or a rope, or torch yourself, or jump in front of the express. So many options are there.’ Bring out disadvantages, but don’t say the N word. Let him come to his own conclusion.”

The NSDF’s second NGO partner, Mahila Milan (“women together” in Hindi; officially, Women’s Collective) grew directly from these NSDF- and SPARC-initiated activities involving women pavement dwellers. It is a network of women’s collectives whose main activity is the operation of savings and credit programs. Training is an important component of Mahila Milan’s work. Its training philosophy is: “Poor people teach poor people best.” Using informal and in-house methods, it trains women in local micro communities to participate more actively in community activities, and strengthens and builds women’s capacities to participate in the transformation of their communities. This process also gradually helps women develop the confidence to move beyond micro communities and

enter into negotiations in support of other groups in the network, to teach other women, and to participate in the leadership of the NSDF. Today, thanks to Mahila Milan, 70 percent of the NSDF's community leaders are women.

It took the government ten years to acknowledge that women are capable of more than just keeping house and bearing children. When the government insisted no land was available for their homes, even in areas where the NSDF had identified vacant lands, the women were ready with a plan. They passed on the information they had gathered to all slum and pavement dwellers. To convince government of their credibility, they started saving one rupee each a week. Armed with their newly acquired knowledge and plans for their houses, they confronted the government.

Within the alliance, SPARC's role is to design and develop strategies and to create mechanisms that enable large numbers of people within the NSDF and Mahila Milan to learn from one another and, with other agencies, to create the space that these two people's organizations need to make and negotiate their demands. As the NSDF gains confidence and legitimacy in its dealings with government, SPARC recedes into the background, helping instead to write proposals and raise funds.

Arputham and the participatory problem-solving process of the Indian Alliance (which added a fourth partner, a SPARC-affiliated nonprofit company called Nirman in 1998) not only serves the people; it *builds* people. The NSDF believes that communities can build on their own strengths and that poor people do many things more efficiently than the state does. The business of the state is to create procedures that ensure the availability of resources and equal access to them. While making sure that its members get access to resources, the NSDF is careful not to infringe on the rights of other groups to do the same.

As for its dealings with government, Arputham always emphasizes that he is not looking for dole-outs or welfare. He demands, rather, that government respect the basic rights of urban slum dwellers. He also encourages savings and credit programs because he knows that any additional leverage can strengthen the people's voice. Indeed, saving money is a basic element in NSDF development strategy. It begins with a crisis-credit fund created from the small change most households can spare and collected daily by designated treasurers. Those who wish to participate in the fund are made to observe how such funds work in other communities. The Alliance then helps communities to establish savings groups, which form the basis for community participation and ensure that women remain central participants in the process of change. Within three months, most settlements are able to understand, agree upon, and manage the rules and regulations to get their own crisis-credit fund started.

The credit process highlights the importance of women's participation and their new role and status in the community. The women start off by handling small amounts and graduate to bigger sums. They acquire financial management skills and increase their access to financial resources. Once they become able managers of their own resources, they draw the attention of external sources of credit. A small amount of money saved and circulated, therefore, paves the way for larger amounts. Once a federation has collective savings, the Alliance can negotiate with local and international donors and leaders for financing for housing. With government, moreover, having collective savings is proof that communities have become better managers and can deliver subsidies allocated to the poor more effectively than the state can.

Women inevitably learn that membership in a savings group transforms their relationships with one another, with their families, and with their communities as a whole. Community members soon find that communication processes developed through the savings organization become a vital channel linking the whole settlement together. Because

women control these channels, they become centrally involved in the community development process.

Having established their credibility, the groups of women assisted by Arputham were eventually able to access loans from banks. This was an uncommon practice in India in the past. Normally, banks lent money to local governments but not to communities. Moreover, conventional housing loans are almost nonexistent in India. Ninety percent of the country's salaried and professional people borrow from non-housing, finance-related sources that are totally inaccessible to the poor. Lacking land tenure and an institutionalized system of shelter construction, poor people are viewed as poor credit risks. The NSDF thus works on many fronts: to secure land tenure, to standardize house construction and design costs, and to demand that institutions that provide housing loans lend directly to organizations of the poor.

This process moves, but at a snail's pace, as the Federation explores various possible options. One is to help communities to begin saving separately for housing so as to cut down on the length of time between the initial commitment to save and actual construction. Savings serve two functions: they reduce the loan requirement for the household, and they assure nervous bankers of a family's potential capability to pay off its loans.

Local residents have come to realize that financial management skills are essential to the process of housing development. It is useless to negotiate for land if the communities do not have the necessary resources to develop it. The issue of land tenure is critical, but as soon as communities obtain tenure they must be ready immediately to respond with strategies for residential development. Once savings groups have been organized and have gained some experience managing credit for crises and income generation, their "internal" credit line begins. But that is not for housing. Loans for housing emerge only after a community cooperative obtains land.

Investment schemes are plentiful in India but are beyond the reach of the poor. SPARC and the NSDF looked for an investment scheme whose requirements were tailor-made for very poor communities, i.e., schemes in which savings could amass safely and in which there were options for housing loans. The two organizations approached the Unit Trust of India (UTI), which is known as the "mother of all investment schemes," and it responded with India's first "very small investors' scheme." Its terms were within reach of the poor: participants had to invest a minimum of one thousand rupees, with subsequent investments in multiples of five hundred rupees each; they could withdraw their money but had to agree to keep it in the bank as long as possible; and, although they would hold accounts in their individual names, Mahila Milan would handle all the collections and transactions with UTI collectively. The scheme began modestly and was initially open only to Mahila Milan and the NSDF in Mumbai, until the details were worked out.

The UTI considers the venture not as charity but as a joint undertaking with a poor federation to develop a suitable investment strategy; it is a gesture of social responsibility. The Unit Trust is optimistic that this unique partnership will be a means of tapping a large, previously unexplored, market. For the UTI, the NSDF is a worthwhile partner because it is capable, together with Mahila Milan, of bringing in large numbers of investors while helping the UTI to cut down on administrative costs.

Housing construction has remained an area of scarce experience for most NGOs in India, especially urban NGOs. By and large, the state has assumed the task of "delivering" houses, amenities, and services to the poor, but not in the quality or in the quantities needed, nor at viable and reasonable prices. The result is a huge backlog in construction. On one hand, the poor and the NGOs and institutions that work with them have no

experience with projects of this kind. On the other, the state seeks to free itself of these responsibilities, not by delegating them to others, but by cutting subsidies and other support measures.

Sometimes a displaced community is allotted land even if it is not yet prepared to save and to construct homes. The Federation treats such a community as a flagship or training site. NDSF member communities that are already well-versed in the process lend the new community a practical hand. Meanwhile, the Federation itself guarantees the community's creditworthiness for external finance and agrees to absorb the mistakes, however expensive these may be.

The NSDF is demonstrating new and effective ways of doing things. The strategy of the NDSF-SPARC-Mahila Milan alliance is to create large numbers of precedents to make housing for the poor accessible not only to its members but also to other poor people. In advocating negotiation and dialogue, Arputham engages the stakeholders and lets them solve problems themselves. When a community is facing eviction, the Alliance proposes a two-stage rehabilitation program. Stage one involves the peaceful transfer of the community; stage two involves helping community members to establish new homes in the land allotted to them. An alliance of various actors is necessary to carry out the two-stage process effectively—the government provides the land; the municipal corporation provides infrastructure such as water supply and services; the NGOs pull the communities together in designing and implementing plans; and the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) coordinates the activities. The community itself is involved at every step.

A case study of a cooperative housing project in a slum community in Pune, a major industrial and cultural center in the state of Maharashtra, illustrates the working style of Jockin Arputham's alliance. Almost half of Pune's 2.7 million population lives in slums that have constantly been threatened with demolition by the city's Municipal Corporation. The project was guided by two objectives. The first was to resettle fifty families of the Rajendranagar slum in regular housing through a participatory, community-based, and woman-centered approach that would take into account both the aspirations of the families and their means. The second objective was to demonstrate a workable alternative to the restrictive choices of state-sponsored or market housing that could serve as a model and precedent for future housing developments for the urban poor and, to this end, to exploit the project as a training and learning site for communities, NGOs, and government officials.

Shelter Associates, an NGO established in Pune in 1993 by three architects, played a supportive role, along with SPARC, in the resettlement project. They were intent on following the working philosophy of the Alliance, which is that the best way to train poor communities is by organizing exchange visits for slum dwellers (particularly women) to other slums and cities where they can learn what can be achieved through people's organizations and negotiations with government agencies. Consequently, both the founders of Shelter Associates and the slum dwellers of Pune visited Mumbai—the former to interact with Arputham and with SPARC director Sheela Patel, and the latter to study housing projects and other developments in the city. In return, teams from the NSDF and Mahila Milan visited Pune regularly.

Work at the Pune slums began in earnest in 1994. The first step was to organize the women into savings and credit groups. When the Municipal Corporation demolished all 175 huts in the Rajendranagar settlement two years later, Shelter Associates sought the advice and assistance of the Alliance. It was a bewildered community the NSDF found at the site. The NSDF advised the people to approach the municipal commissioner about their rehabilitation, but warned them not to make him feel defensive by questioning the demolition of their homes. The community followed the advice and the commissioner agreed to help

them search for an alternative place.

The Housing and Urban Development Corporation, a government-owned company, had introduced a scheme that provided housing loans to NGOs working with poor communities, with SPARC as the intermediary. Through this scheme, a chapter of Mahila Milan launched a savings scheme. As a result, each of the fifty families affected by the demolition in Rajendranagar was able to put together enough money for the down payment on a housing loan. In consultation with the community, especially the women, Shelter Associates designed a building with flats for fifty-six families. The design was provided by the pavement dwellers of Mumbai, who had experimented with construction materials and processes and learned the principles of architecture. It included a loft, which has become a standard feature in the design of the Alliance's housing projects because it provides extra space at little additional cost.

At every step of the project, it was the Rajendranagar community that exercised control. Its members made all the prefabricated components (such as concrete blocks) and every household contributed one laborer per day. Construction took a year. The community grew accustomed to having visitors from other slums in Pune and other cities of India, as well as from squatter settlements in the Philippines, Cambodia, and South Africa, who wanted to learn from their experience. There were other types of visitors as well: three young architects from the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), who came to learn about low-cost housing, and students from Minnesota in the United States, whose visit was part of a "development studies" program. The presence of observers was sometimes disruptive and annoying to the community, but not to Mahila Milan, whose members realized that their work, as the case study report put it, "was not just to construct a building but to transfer information, knowledge, and skills they had gained to others."

In another case, that of a railway community in Mumbai, the NSDF had to explain to the slum dwellers that the railway authorities were evicting them. When the community indicated that they were ready to relocate, the NSDF acted fast. It initiated discussions with government officials, conducted surveys, set up a savings scheme, organized a search for land, and mobilized the community to dump filling at the site. All these activities were carried out by the people themselves, working in coordination with the federation and government authorities. In the process, sections of the old community were cleared every fifteen days and relinquished to the Railways Department. Not one family was hurt. Water supply was assured, and electric power was provided in the streets. The municipality collected garbage on certain days, but the community was also encouraged to do its own composting. Thus were 914 families moved. Today, some 450 of them occupy multistory dwellings. Similarly, in Dharavi, one of Mumbai's oldest slums and often referred to as "the largest slum in Asia," eighty-four tenements of three stories each were built in nine months by the Rajiv Indira Cooperative Society.

The Federation today operates in over forty cities in seven states of India, encompassing almost four million people. In the Federation's organizational setup, all units are autonomous, with organizations formed at every city level. Although the NSDF is not legally registered, it has created a networking system that connects all the informal settlements that are members. In local "city federations," communities agree to share information and learn from one another. SPARC's Sheela Patel explains it this way:

*The federation in India now has what we call a critical mass. This means that large enough numbers of people are working towards solving their problems, helping others to solve theirs and learning from each other's experiences—to start effecting real change. As the exchange process in India has progressed, it*

*has created enough catalysts and trainers to ensure that the process can reach out to more and more communities across the country, and the process has snowballed. In India, every single new idea, every single new program and innovation that has come into use in the federation in the last ten years has come out of communities doing it.*

How has this been possible? Patel further elaborates as follows:

*First you need enough people in one place to feel strongly about wanting to get something done, to get their hands on some solid idea and actually demonstrate some kind of solution to themselves—something about which they can say, “This is how we want it.” Having done that, anyone interested can come have a look at this solution and explore the process which produced it. A whole lot of people in different communities around India have begun to acknowledge their own preoccupations, to try to understand them, to experiment. The federation is kept alive by all this experimentation in all these scattered communities. It’s like a hundred cooking pots simmering away, each with its own masala (ingredients), its own concoction of local circumstances, personalities and whimsy.*

*Out of these hundred pots, maybe ten, twenty, or even fifty—will find similarities in what they are doing and intensify their interaction with each other. That enables them to look at their situation from a wider perspective, at a larger scale. Through exchange, these ideas and strategies circulate, and with so many people sustaining their experimenting, all these groups get inspired, and in turn inspire others. This is how a collective awareness grows among the urban poor—an awareness determined by their material needs.*

The full NSDF-SPARC-Mahila Milan alliance operates in twenty cities throughout India and in similar NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) in Asia and Africa. It has a partner in Mumbai, a federation of street children called Sadak Chaap, meaning “the stamp of the street” in Hindi. Sadak Chaap traces its beginnings to the work of SPARC, Mahila Milan, and the NSDF in setting up night shelters in 1989. Its members were also looking out for jobs that would be attractive to street boys, as well as ways to give them job training. Night shelters now house about three hundred children, and a health and vocational training program serves a network of some two thousand street children. The NSDF and Mahila Milan leaders, being self-taught grown-ups who have learned many skills, are good role models for the street children, many of whom now have jobs as electricians and brick masons and in other trades.

Arputham has helped build the NSDF into the International Slum Dwellers Federation, with networks in ten countries. In 1996, Arputham, along with his colleagues from Asia and Africa, founded Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), a network of slum dwellers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. SDI aims to create a critical mass and a critical voice of slum dwellers at the global level, with a strong footing locally. These organizations of slum dwellers build their capacities to negotiate with their local and central governments and other international agencies of development. The NSDF model encourages groups to look at their available resources as well as their long-term relationships. The training technology and community-organizing strategies developed by the NSDF are now being applied in

several countries in Asia and Africa, among them Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Kenya, Namibia, Senegal, and Zimbabwe. Arputham, though, prefers the term *exchange to training*.

The Alliance's basic strategy, he says, is very clear and straight to the point. It goes into the strategy of how to mobilize, how to save, how to start, and how women can develop their potential for leadership. The number one message is: "Development can be done by you—not by anybody else. You have it in your hands."

Arputham does not speak in terms of theories or frameworks but with the wisdom and insight of one who has experimented with the strategies he is now using. He says, "My whole education comes from my family and people." He highlights an issue and translates this in simple ways that people can understand. Fr. Eduardo Jorge Anzorena, SJ, who has known and worked closely with Arputham since 1976, says, "He has a special touch with the people and is able to push them to do the work in a very charismatic way. Despite language barriers, he is able to communicate with slum dwellers all over the world." Father Anzorena has observed that Arputham devotes "twenty-four hours a day to the service of the people." He eats only once a day and says that, in all his years of marriage, he has never had lunch with his family. He has no concept of time and receives people no matter what time of day or night they come to him.

Ruth McLeod, Homeless International representative and a longtime supporter of the NSDF, says that the Federation's work has communicated process, capacity, and dignity to thousands of people. Dr. Ramaswamy Sudarshan, assistant resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in New Delhi, adds that Arputham's contribution has been in preparing other cities that have not yet reached the magnitude of Mumbai's problems, by mobilizing them in advance to avert a crisis. For example, Arputham identifies small towns and puts together groups to organize people through self-help programs.

*Asiaweek* magazine quoted William Cobbett, head of the Shelter branch in Mumbai of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (called United Nations Human Settlements Programme since 2001), as saying that one of Arputham's greatest achievements was "to demand a seat at the table, to decide his own agenda and not merely listen to government."

Another of Arputham's gifts, according to Somsook Boonyabanha, managing director of Bangkok's Urban Community Development Fund, in the same *Asiaweek* article, is that he "understands the 'people' way of doing things."

Arputham has been invited to speak about the poor in many countries in Asia, Europe, and the United States. His simple, clear, and direct presentations have given the international community new perceptions and a better understanding of the poor, their strengths, and how to work with them constructively.

In Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the Squatter and Urban Poor Federation (SUPF) has learned from an ongoing exchange program with the NSDF. One such visit in 1997 took seven Cambodian government officials to a construction site in Pune's Dattawadi area to observe the different ways in which slum dwellers were dealing with problems similar to those in Cambodia involving housing, drinking water, and sanitation. The families that had been displaced from the city's slums were collectively building their own houses. At the end of their visit, one of the Cambodian visitors said, "The strategy adopted by our counterparts here in forming cooperatives, organizing collective savings, and negotiating with the local administration to explore house building can be adopted in our country."

In November 1997, Cambodia witnessed the first case of government's granting land for resettlement to squatters in Phnom Penh. One hundred twenty-nine families of the Toul

Svay Prey roadside settlement were officially allotted land by the municipality. The Mahila Milan/NSDF projects, which the city officials saw in Mumbai, helped them to recognize that eviction was not the answer, that a close working partnership with the SUPF could create solutions that help everyone. Arputham, along with ACHR (Asian Coalition of Housing Rights), helped SUPF and the municipality set up a special Urban Poor Housing Loan Fund, which communities will help manage in view of the low finance rates. The fund will start with seventy-five thousand US dollars, with contributions from SUPF, the municipality, ACHR, and Slum Dwellers International. He has made several visits to Cambodia, where he supports the community development process and has helped set up the Urban Poor Development Fund to support housing for the evicted and homeless in Phnom Penh. About forty community groups have been involved in the savings and development process.

The oldest international partnership of the Alliance is with the South African Homeless People's Federation/People's Dialogue alliance, which began in 1991. Arputham recalls the very first visit to Mumbai of a delegation from South Africa. He had invited the minister of land affairs to come to India, on one condition: that he travel with three women from the slums. It was the first time a South African official did so. The land affairs minister later said that the NSDF was his first genuine contact and dialogue with homeless people anywhere. Immediately, a partnership emerged and, eventually, all the tools that had become standard in India made their way to South Africa: shelter training, daily savings, community enumeration, mapping, and house modeling. Over the years, nothing was ever simply taken from India and reproduced in South Africa. Instead, community leaders came to India, saw how things were being done, and took the information home, where they adapted the ideas to suit their own situations. Afterwards, the Indians visited South Africa to assist and to participate.

As the exchanges went on and the relationship deepened, ideas began to flow back and forth. The exchanges brought unexpected benefits to both sides. Over the years, both Indians and South Africans, once teacher and learner, respectively, have evolved a style of exchange in which each learns from the other. The South Africans learned an additional lesson from the Indians: In place of "resistance politics," which they had practiced before 1994, they picked up the new strategy of negotiation, politics, and working together with government to seek solutions and resources. When the South Africans started going to India, they assumed that their newly installed government led by the African National Congress would provide the economic and social uplift for the poor. In India, however, they saw that despite forty years of independence the urban poor still had neither land nor homes.

Arputham's advocacy efforts have affected policy at the city, state, and international levels. In October 1999, the NSDF was among nine winners of the Habitat Scroll of Honor award, "for enabling deprived communities and defending their fundamental housing rights." The award is presented annually on World Habitat Day by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. The NSDF has developed a growing number of leaders who have the skills and the confidence to assist their peers in the journey toward improved participation in their own growth and development. The groups organized by Arputham's team in India are now working on their own and doing their own demonstration projects. The daughters of the women they have trained are also helping, particularly in the financial aspects of the program. Most of the women they originally trained were illiterate.

The continuous flow of learning exchanges ensures that communities learn and grow. In February 2000, Arputham resigned as president of the NSDF, but he continues to serve as its coordinator. He claims not to cleave to any ideology and insists that he has merely

picked up social issues such as social exploitation while living in the slums. He has never claimed credit for the accomplishments of the NSDF, preferring to acknowledge the people and the alliance.

Arputham has never learned how to drive or how to operate a computer. His manner of dressing has remained unchanged through the years, usually a simple Indian *kurta* over loose pants and well-worn sandals, rather than shoes. SPARC manages the finances for NSDF, as Arputham and his group have chosen not to handle the money of the organization, “so that I don’t get corrupt, I don’t get sold out,” he says. The Alliance has been receiving funding from the Indian government and from the World Bank.

Despite having resigned as NSDF president, Arputham still averages three to five meetings a day and visits settlements on his way home from his office to inquire into their problems—the need for a toilet, for example, or garbage collection, or street maintenance, or drainage. These visits keep him going; they are as natural to him as breathing. Far from being an autocrat, he takes pains to listen, to ask questions, to consult. He says, “You learn from the people. Most of the time I get the answers from them.” He offers government authorities this advice: “If you do not believe your citizens, what is there to believe? You are underestimating our capacity.” And he adds this gentle reminder: “We don’t live the way we do out of choice.”

Arputham has been offered better living quarters—a bungalow, in fact—but he has chosen to remain in Cheetah Camp, the place to which he moved after the demolition of the Janata Colony. “I don’t want to replace this slum community with a middle-class community,” he explains to the disbelieving. Besides, he states simply, “I have to be in the slum area where I belong.” He lives in a twenty-square-meter home with his wife, Natal D’Souza, whom he married in 1973 when he was twenty-seven, and the younger of their two daughters who is a school teacher.

Early in their marriage, Mrs. Arputham had to sell her sari to help her husband’s cause; Jockin himself pawned his typewriter. Those days are long gone. The pavement may still be home to Jockin Arputham, but today it is by choice, no longer by a cruel twist of fate.

Lorna Kalaw-Tirol

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