

Community upgrading in Lucknow, India

Sonia Gandhi Nagar Community :

Sonia Gandhi Nagar is a poor settlement of 200 families located along the steep banks of the Pata Nala, a canal which runs through the inner city of Lucknow, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The area is right behind the historic Bara Imambara Mosque, one of the city's most important monuments. For many years, the community has been under threat of eviction by the municipality. Because their tenure was so insecure, people here were reluctant to invest in improving their houses.

Project Background :

In 1997, Sonia Gandhi Nagar became part of a large project to clean the River Gomti and all the drainage canal that feed into it, one of which is the Pata Nala. The Pata Nala canal is a polluted, broken down, blocked with silt, debris and raw sewage. Some of these problems could be dealt with by a major canal clean-up operation, but a longer-term solution to such polluted canals has to activate more comprehensive and longer-lasting changes in the settlements and the city which surround them.

Between 1996 and 1997, Mahila Milan, SPARC and NSDF teams from Bombay and the nearby city of Kanpur worked in Lucknow to help create conditions within the project for communities living along the Pata Nala to improve their own living environments, and ultimately to help clean up the canals. The National Slum Dwellers Federation and the NGO SPARC helped set up a local federation in Lucknow, first in Pata Nala, and then in poor settlements across the city, to work with the state on issues of survival vital to all the city's poor.

The redevelopment project :

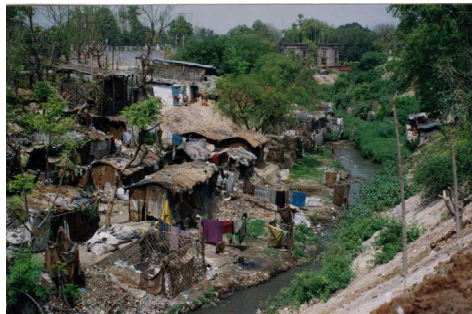
The Gomti project involved a first-time partnership between a lot of groups who had never worked together :

- **The communities :** planned and carried out their own community upgrading improvements and contributed labor, materials and some money
- **The NSDF / MM / SPARC team :** helped negotiate, assisted communities to organize themselves and plan their improvements, and supported the learning process with expertise from poor communities in other cities of India.
- **The Municipality of Lucknow :** provided secure tenure to the informal settlements along the canal.
- **The State Government of Uttar Pradesh :** supported the river and canal cleaning.
- **The British Department of International Development (DFID) :** provided funding for the canal cleaning and community upgrading.

Features of the community redevelopment :

People in Sonia Gandhi Nagar are exploring ideas which go far beyond simply building new toilets. These ambitious redevelopment plans represent the de-luxe version of community involvement, and look at ways out of the trap of exploitation by slumlords, to better houses, a cleaner settlement, basic services that work for everyone. Ask anyone, and they'll tell you it's possible for Sonia Gandhi Nagar to transform itself into the most beautiful settlement in Lucknow. Here's how :

- 1 Community-planned, built and managed services :** Common toilets (1 per 4 families), water supply (1 tap per 10 families), storm and waste water drainage, paved footpaths, stairways down to the canal, solid waste disposal systems and street lighting.
- 2 Control erosion of canal banks :** One of the community's first tasks is to stop Sonia Gandhi Nagar from sliding down the badly eroded banks and into the canal. This involves:
 - Using "green" methods of erosion-prevention like terracing, contour-trenching and tree planting
 - Channeling storm and waste water away from the vulnerable banks.
 - Avoiding big invasive civil works; using simple engineering and building techniques which people can handle on their own.
- 3 New Settlement layout :** Realignment of all the houses with equal plot sizes, and efficient planning to make room for more families in the same area.
- 4 New house construction :** Most houses in Uttar Pradesh, even in slums, have little walled courtyards ("Angans") in front. Angans make tiny living spaces more habitable during the extremes of heat and cold in Lucknow, by making private outdoor space for sleeping, working, cooking, hanging laundry. All the house-types being explored respect this living, appropriate tradition.
- 5 Secure tenure on 99-year lease :** The city wants back the land behind the historic Bara Imambara, now occupied by part of the settlement. These families have agreed to shift into the canal areas. In exchange, the city has agreed to give that land to the people on a 99-year lease.



Conditions before improvement : Basic services are almost non-existent in Sonia Gandhi Nagar : no lights, no roads, no garbage disposal. For all 200 families in Sonia Gandhi Nagar, there were only two hand-pumps, one municipal tap and a few make-shift pit latrines of mud, brick and cloth. Most people just squatted down below near the canal. The difficulties were especially difficult for women, who had to wait until dark to go down to the canal for their toilet purposes.

BEFORE

community upgrading . . .



Asian
Coalition
for-Housing
Rights



AFTER

community upgrading . . .

