

Research and Methodology Discussion Paper 4

25th of April 2003

With Romi Khosla and Sundar Burra of Sparc, India

Discussions for the Mumbai Workshop

Romi Khosla opened the discussion and explained to Sundar Burra what was expected out of the Mumbai workshop. He explained that the objective of convening a workshop was to introduce, in some detail, the ideas that Sen has put forward about linking Development with Freedom. He said that there was a general consensus amongst those who would be coming to the workshop, that the pivotal discussions would be held with SPARC representatives. Sundar clarified that SPARC was a support organisation and was not sitting in the driver's seat. That seat was occupied by representatives of the community.

Sundar felt that the role and importance of "community" as different from "individuals" has been given inadequate attention by Sen. The success of the Grameen Bank, Seva and SPARC, just to name a few, had not been adequately recognised in the freedom approach to development. He felt that Sen's work needed to reflect more on the role of civic society. Romi explained that one of the main objectives of the Bombay workshop was to have this sort of dialogue. It was important, he said, to determine whether any sort of freedom was really relevant to community perceptions about their future. The workshop, he said, would provide a unique opportunity to take the ideas of an economist and philosopher and knock them about in a community interface discussion.

Sundar pointed out that the community representatives often thought less about unfreedoms and more about organisational matters, their women's role, daily savings, housing infrastructure, federating with other communities across the city to create a large scale pressure group. How much of this could be translated to a pursuit of freedom remained to be seen. He talked about the importance of differentiating between 'formal' and "substantive" democracy as pointed out by the Pakistani Economist Ayesha Jalal.

Sundar explained that theoretical approaches to development were always problematic subjects of communication to the Community. For instance Jockin would be extremely skeptical about any theoretical approach be taken to analyse his work.

Romi explained that the workshop was not intended to prove a theory. Indeed there was no preset output that he was expecting. It was more an exchange of ideas. He drew a parallel between the traditional notion of gaining "Moksha" (enlightenment) and gaining freedom. There were many ways to gain enlightenment as there were many ways to gain

freedom. The question was more about whether "freedom" is a real desired goal for the human condition or is the human condition satisfied by more material goals such as wealth and shelter.

Sundar explained that in the work of communities being supported by SPARC, the "Public-Community Partnership" was important. He said, just like one heard a lot about Public / Private Partnership in large nationalised ventures, community work involved a Public-Community partnership. He explained that SPARC did not believe that a 'Rights' based approach to development was effective. This approach he felt, was concerned about getting "rights" released by the state, to the individual. Such an approach overstressed the role of the individual and tended to regard the individual as the center of the universe- a view that the Enlightenment proposed. He was concerned at Sen's emphasis on this. If the individual is to be the 'agent of change' then it is the individual who becomes central to change thus supporting the enlightenment definition of the individual.

SPARC, he explained believe that it was the role of the community that is important. The strength of liberty or development lay in the strength of the collective. He said that a recent book "Civic Identity and Ethnic Strife" had studied the impact of communal riots in 4 towns, in Bombay during the 1997 riots. The least violence was committed in settlements where the Slum Dwellers Federation was strong.

He gave details of the Pune Public Toilet project and the way SPARC had utilised the opportunity. A particularly enlightened Municipal Commissioner had invited a number of NGOs to help him solve the problem of quickly constructing and maintaining thousands of Slum level public toilets. Sundar felt that the Sulab Sauchalya "pay as you use" scheme was not suitable for the Slums. Because the use charge was Rs 1/- per use per person, a family of five could ill afford such a facility. "Imagine" he commented, "If one member of the family had diarrhea - that family would literally see their savings go down the drain". A community led approach was more appropriate. So SPARC had worked out a scheme whereby there was a standard monthly charge for a family passes to use the toilet facilities. At Rs 30/- (10P) per month per family. It was affordable. The building and maintenance of the facilities was given to the community instead of a contractor.

Sundar said that such situations were very vital to development and that links between these experiences and a Freedom framework would not be easy to establish. One way out, he suggested, was to discuss with the community- what changes they thought had entered their lives because of a successful project. For instance, he pointed out, that families who lived by the railway line in squatter slums, may be centrally located in the city, but the young men and women in the family seldom received desirable marriage

proposals. No bride's parents wanted their daughters to go and live by the railway track. So, explained Sundar, when we rehoused 13,000 railway line slum dwellers, there were many changes in their social lives. May be it could be said that they gained some freedoms from Sen's point of view.

The structure of the Bombay workshop was then discussed. Sundar suggested that during each of the three days of the 13th, 14th and 15th May, the first half of the could be taken by site visits to these different communities and the rest of the day in discussions back at SPARC's office.

Three project types could be visited:

1. Sanitation
2. Resettlement & housing
3. Slum Re-development at Dharavi

The fourth day of the workshop the 16th of May could be taken up with clarifications, presentations for July 7th, and arrangements for transcriptions etc.

On the bases of the discussion it was agreed that Jane Samuels would co-ordinate the content of the formal programme with Sheila Patel and Sundar so that a clear date wise programme would be made available to the participants on the 13th. Arrivals, stay, times for gathering, transport logistics etc would need to be worked out with Smita. Sundar would ensure that the Sahil hotel would be booked after he had received a list of participants and dates of arrival and departures.

The meeting concluded with the exciting prospect of sharing and continuing the dialogue in Bombay.