INTRAC

The International NGO
Training and Research Centre

Occasional Papers Series
Number 22

Finding a Pathway:
Understanding the Work and Performance of NGOs in Ahmedabad, India

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March 1999

ACRONYMS

AGP	Ahmedabad Green Partnership
AMC	Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation
ATLA	Ahmedabad Textile Labourer's Association
AWAG	Ahmedabad Women's Action Group
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CHETNA	Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness
IEGA	Income and Employment Generating Activities
INHAP	Integrated Nutrition and Health Action Programme
INTRAC	International NGO Training and Research Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PMES	Planning Monitoring and Evaluation System
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
SXSSS	St Xavier's Social Service Society
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: NGOS IN THE URBAN CONTEXT

Rapid urbanisation is creating serious social and economic problems throughout the developing world. Third World cities, previously seen as a potential solution to rural poverty, have expanded beyond their capacity to provide an economic and social infrastructure capable of feeding, housing, employing, transporting and hospitalising an ever growing population. Conditions within such mega-cities are affected by external and internal economics, but few systems of government seem able to cope with the vicissitudes of the international environment and its local socio-economic manifestations.

Combating urban poverty is therefore a complex and time-consuming task, and has attracted the attention of governments, large donor agencies and small local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) alike. At an institutional level, sustained attempts at tackling urban poverty have been frustrated by over-stretched bureaucracies, limited finance, a lack of institutional learning, high levels of political turnover and conflicts of interest between key stakeholders. Within Ahmedabad, these factors have contributed to a failure by local government, the state and NGOs, to curb an absolute increase in the number of urban poor and the spread of impoverished settlements.

Despite these bleak facts, an impetus to broaden the institutional landscape of urban development interventions is emerging. In particular, there is increasing optimism within Indian NGOs concerning the potential of municipal government and NGO partnerships, to address citywide poverty concerns. This follows a recognition by local governments that certain NGOs have been more effective in mobilising communities, influencing national frameworks and reducing the vulnerability of marginalised urban groups. NGOs are now being seen as increasingly important to the urban poverty alleviation debate, and as a consequence greater funds are being channelled through them. In these circumstances, NGOs have the potential to represent to local authorities an additional source of resources, experience and pluralism.

Given these developments, it is surprising that the experience and abilities of NGOs working in urban areas has yet to be rigorously assessed. Consequently, this research has been conducted as part of a project, co-ordinated by the International NGO Training and Research Centre, INTRAC, to examine the role and performance of NGOs in five selected cities throughout the developing world. The study attempts to redress some of these deficiencies, by addressing key questions concerning the roles, relationships and internal organisation of urban NGOs in Ahmedabad.

- How effective and efficient are NGOs in reaching the urban poor?
- Which institutional relationship between NGOs and city authorities works best?
- Why are certain sectors of urban NGO activity more successful than others?
- Do NGOs have the potential to play an enlarged role in helping the urban poor?
- Are there any distinct characteristics of an effective urban NGO?

By examining these questions, and others, it is hoped that the following discussion of NGO activities will go some way towards contributing to the work of similar organisations in cities comparable to Ahmedabad.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is the outcome of a detailed examination of ten NGOs in Ahmedabad between 1997 and 1998. The typology of Ahmedabad's NGOs and civil society associations varies widely, from small rural charitable organisations to large urban developmental institutions; which differ in size, nature, strategies and geographical coverage. The organisations included in this study were identified from existing NGO directories and information provided by key informants. The criteria for selection were:

- registration under the 1951 Bombay Act (covering voluntary organisations);
- working with more than one community or beneficiary group in Ahmedabad;
- Having an explicit agenda of empowering beneficiary groups and redressing urban poverty; and
- Having a full-time programme and staff.

These prerequisites filtered out unregistered NGOs, with limited experience or part-time staff. The criteria also excluded NGOs with offices in the city that worked exclusively within rural communities. NGO networks and umbrella bodies were also omitted. The research did however take into account the work of the Self-Employed Women's Association, SEWA, although the organisation is frequently considered to be a trade union. As one of the largest and most influential development entities in the city, comprising 55,000 female members, it was felt that SEWA could not be excluded from any study of development organisations in Ahmedabad. Moreover, SEWA provides an interesting comparison between formal NGOs, and institutions with a different organisational form seeking broadly similar goals.

Following an initial literature review, field research was conducted in two phases. The first part consisted of a structured questionnaire, which was delivered to each of the designated NGOs. One to three semi-structured interviews were then conducted with the directors of each NGO, with separate interviews attempted for other individual staff members. In other cases, core team members of the NGO were questioned so that participatory discussions could be undertaken. From these responses, three NGOs were then selected according to the opportunities they presented for further study. These institutions were then researched in greater depth, and formed the basis for phase two of the report.

In each case, a range of informants and different research methods were used. And where possible, annual reports, internal documents and published papers were examined. Beneficiary groups were also approached, both with and without the presence of NGO staff. This facilitated observational research and open interviews, followed by focus group discussions. The information gathered was then recorded on a data schedule for each NGO, which was analysed using an INTRAC organisational assessment framework.

2.1 Organisation of the Study

The paper has been organised into four distinct parts. Part I (Chapters 3 to 5) provide an overview of urban poverty in Ahmedabad, and looks briefly at the history and role of NGOs within the city. Part II (Chapters 6 to 8) then analyses Ahmedabad's NGOs in more detail, and examines issues related to internal organisation, sectors of intervention, target group involvement and NGO relationships with the state and other development actors. The focus of the study then narrows in Part III (Chapters 9 and 10) where a fuller assessment of three selected NGOs is made. This section is divided between detailed descriptions of the work and approaches undertaken by each organisation, and a more analytical examination of the internal and external factors most affecting urban NGO performance. In Part IV (Chapters 11 and 12) these themes are broadened to include the entire NGO sector in Ahmedabad. This section can also be divided into two parts, with Chapter 11 looking at the impact of specific NGO programmes, whilst Chapter 12 offers a more qualitative appraisal of the future role and capabilities of NGOs in Ahmedabad.

PART I

3. SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS: FOR TEN NGOS IN AHMEDABAD

3.1 Internal Organisation

- **NGO size** varies from under ten full-time staff members to over fifty. In each organisation the majority of personnel are women, and the average ratio of field to core staff is 3 to 2. Within these units, a variety of leadership arrangements exist. These range from formal co-directorships in the case of Vikas, Sanchetna and Saath; to informal co-directorships in the case of the Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA) and Gantar. A team leadership philosophy typifies Samvad, whilst a single executive director heads St Xavier's Social Service Society (SXSSS), SEWA, and the Ahmedabad Women's Action Group or AWAG.

- Each NGO has well-developed **organisational, management and communications procedures**. These are structured along project or programme lines, with some latitude for cross-

organisational sharing. In management theory terms, they are role culture organisations with task-team capabilities. Whilst the majority of NGOs have prominent and long-established leaders, the NGOs exist as legitimate institutions in themselves.

- In terms of **income**, the NGOs range from under US$5000 to over US$200,000 each year. Eight of the ten NGOs reported that 100% of their income is project-specific funding, whilst the remaining two stated that 20% and 25%, respectively, of their grant income is utilised for core costs. Grants are given for between two to three years on average, with the main grant-givers being Northern NGOs, followed by bilateral agencies and indigenous sources. Seven out of ten NGOs believed they could influence their donors in some manner, for example by changing funding criteria or reviewing donor performance.

- NGOs often exist with an unstable mix of **funding** sources, staff qualifications, legal status and quality of physical assets. Within Ahmedabad, concerns have been voiced about the nature of NGO funding, which is thought to be too project-specific and short term. Furthermore, the rate of staff turnover causes organisational instability in some NGOs, whilst it is not clear in all cases that a shared and owned organisational mission exists. This problem may be a result of the diversity and demands of work within the individual organisation, but can reflect an over emphasis on management as opposed to leadership in the sector.

- Of the **documents** provided by the NGOs, annual reports were produced more consistently than mission statements. Although the existence of mission statements is taken to reflect the strategic clarity of the organisation, their absence should not automatically imply that an organisation is unclear about its aims or strategy. Such ideas can often be articulated as effectively in non-literary ways. However, in some instances a significant gulf was noted between the NGOs' written vision and the work actually being undertaken.
- Most of the NGOs have a clear and innovative **community intervention procedure**. Internal constraints include short-term and project-based funding, high rates of staff turnover and a dearth of second-level leaders.

3.2 Programme Delivery

- NGOs within the city have taken an **integrated approach** to development interventions, and most work within a number of social sectors. Several NGOs, however, tend to focus on particular areas. For example, SEWA works specifically on finance for women, whilst Samvad concentrates on land rights and Gantar monitors child labour.

- The main **activities undertaken** by Ahmedabad's NGOs are service delivery, grass-roots capacity-building, research and training. The common working approach is to engage in activities with a select number of communities, and then narrow the programme's focus onto specific target groups. Such a community development approach often starts with work on health issues - a sector perceived to be relatively uncontroversial and subject to immediate quantifiable changes.

- The main **target groups** of NGO interventions are women, children and specific categories of employment. The main organisational target groups are Community Based Organisations (CBOs),

followed by the municipal authority. On the whole, NGOs are able to manage a number of projects concurrently.

- The **capacity of NGOs** to initiate institutional development and technical assistance is frequently constrained. NGOs cannot be seen to supplement or replace services provided by the state, despite the widespread lack of basic services available to low-income communities. Only in some individual cases has the provision of services to such settlements been opened; with NGOs beginning to construct an interface between poor communities, the state and municipal government.

3.3 Urban NGO Relationships

- The **intensity** of NGO relationships is affected by the strategy, resources and size of the NGO concerned. Organisational competition and internal rivalries may also circumscribe the intensity of co-operation among NGOs.

- Co-operation **between NGOs** is limited to training, discussion fora and participation in short-term projects. There are few examples of medium- or long-term collaborations, joint projects or learning partnerships. Despite this fact, recent examples of citywide initiatives in which a third party like the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), an industrial house, or the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) plays a role, indicate that greater collaboration between NGOs is emerging.
- The relationship between **NGOs and the AMC** is often *ad hoc* in nature, although four of the NGOs studied receive regular funding from local government. Seven out of ten NGOs have worked on a short-term basis with the relevant AMC department. Five out of ten NGOs have also lobbied the AMC on specific issues, and four organisations have been contracted for consultancy services.

- The ability of NGOs to play multiple roles in relation to the AMC is related to their size and pattern of organisational leadership. NGOs as a sector have had little impact on the policy and institutional framework of municipal management. NGOs as a whole have a mixed relationship with the AMC, which can be classified along a range from antagonistic to amicable, as in the case of CHETNA, SXSSS and Saath. Three NGOs stated that greater collaboration with the AMC is undesirable: because they believe that co-operation will give local government an opportunity to renege on its responsibilities. Significantly, none of the NGOs report having the support of an elected local politician. However, these NGOs have not yet developed an effective advocacy policy, capable of persuading the AMC how it could better deploy its limited and unequally distributed resources.

- Few NGOs have reported difficulties in their **relationship with CBOs**. However, NGOs tend to stimulate the formulation of new CBOs as opposed to working with existing ones. The main components of the relationship include a mixture of meetings, training and joint ventures - although four NGOs have also provided funding. Whilst the majority of CBOs remain project-oriented, it is clear that a number have the ability and experience to tackle broader developmental

issues. This relationship often enables NGOs to identify and recruit committed beneficiaries as personnel.

3.4 Urban NGO Performance

- Seven out of ten NGOs reported that they continue to meet their **intended goals** and objectives, defined here as between 50% and 70% target accomplishment. Of these, six NGOs gave examples of the targets met, such as forming CBOs, securing legal rights, opening access to services and improving health indicators. Of the remaining three, one NGO did admit that it is barely able to meet its stated targets.

- An NGO's **ability to achieve its objectives** depends not only on the nature of the task and the capacity of the NGO concerned, but also on the social, political and economic environment. NGOs are able to identify, target and reach the urban poor only within the parameters of their individual programmes, and it is often impossible to determine whether they are reaching the poorest of the poor. Given the absence of longitudinal studies and baseline data, the impact of NGO outputs remains ambiguous and difficult to ascertain. Previous studies have revealed that the greater the specialisation of the NGO, the more critical is the need for periodic assessments of target accomplishment.

- Overall, the financial management, economic organisation and income level of **beneficiary groups** has improved in the geographical areas serviced by NGOs. The access of the urban poor to state education, healthcare and environmental services has also been greatly enhanced. Improvements have also been noted in school attendance levels, literacy, immunisation and mortality rates; but the contribution made by NGOs in this respect has yet to be differentiated from that of state agencies alone. NGOs have also helped alleviate tensions caused by conflicts over land rights, the legal status of self-employed women and female children.

4. HISTORY AND PROFILE OF AHMEDABAD

Ahmedabad is the state capital of Gujarat and has a population of 2.8 million people, growing at the phenomenal rate of 21% from 1981 to 1991 (1991 Census). The city covers over 200 sq. km. and since its inception, has functioned as a trade and financial centre for the region, guided by an elite mercantile class organised into local guilds. These indigenous merchants were responsible for initiating the industrial development of the city, by investing heavily in textile industries.

Industrialisation was the principal factor behind the growth of the city's population, and the first factory was established in 1861. This decade was to be the golden age in the industrial development of the city, and it coincided with the establishment of Gujarat as a separate state. With a highly prosperous textile sector, diversification into metal and chemical industries became inevitable. And during this period, Ahmedabad was imbued with the urbane character of a culturally rich and modern state capital. To this day, the city still boasts a number of institutions of national repute, such as the Indian Institute of Management, the National Institute of Design, a Space Application Centre and an International School of Architecture.

This period of relative prosperity lasted well into the twentieth century, and it was not until the 1960s that Ahmedabad witnessed major social and political disturbances (Bock, 1997). This took the form of communal violence, whilst further social conflict was caused by the growth of the radical socialist *Navanirman* movement - all events heightened by the decline of the textile industry, beginning in the 1970s. Political instability was further aggravated in the 1980s by an increase in communal violence and a rise in religious fundamentalism. Structural adjustment

policies, financial liberalisation and a weakening of the state mechanism has added a new dimension to these problems during the 1990s. It is in this context that new and expanding NGOs have emerged to challenge the relentless marginalisation of the poor.

4.1 The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC)

The governance of Ahmedabad is the legal responsibility of the AMC. The municipality's obligatory functions include the provision of basic services such as water, sewerage, healthcare and education; whilst discretionary functions include the construction and maintenance of parks and community halls. The AMC is a unique local authority in India, however, in that its discretionary responsibilities are increased by the combined presence of a mass transportation system, a public library, two hospitals, a medical college and several swimming pools. Functionally, the elected wing of the AMC, through its various committees, undertakes most major policy decisions and is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the authority.

Rapid increases in the city's population and an expanding urban area have seriously stretched the budget of the AMC, at the same time that a deteriorating economy has slashed the authoritie's tax base. In recent years, the quality and extent of service delivery by the local government has deteriorated; especially in the case of the AMC's obligatory functions, upon which the poor depend most heavily.

Such contemporary urban problems need to be examined in the light of changing perspectives concerning the issue of governance in India, where two contradictory arguments are emerging. One argument is that power needs to be devolved to the local authority, and ultimately to the local communities themselves. Attempts to activate this philosophy have been made through the 74th Amendment Act, which seeks to increase local authority power both functionally and financially. In the spirit of this Act, it was intended that endeavours would be been made to respect the aspirations of poor people, and to improve their representation in decision-making processes. This challenges organisations working with marginalised groups to orient their activities towards meeting goals that encourage participation and empowerment.

So far, however, there are still no official institutional mechanisms which effectively translate popular grievances into planning and development policies. This means that one limitation of the AMC is its lack of public accountability. Although the rhetoric of participatory planning is widespread, there are few mechanisms to facilitate this process by involving other stakeholders like NGOs and the general public. These pressures have created internal conflicts within the AMC, between the elected and administrative wings - a factor not helped by frequent changes in the chief executive, according to the political whim of the party in power.

The second argument emerges from a belief in market forces as a mechanism for distributing the resources of a society. In this perspective, market-oriented institutions receive preferences which enable them to play the major role in the development of the city. This neo-liberal philosophy completely contradicts the values ingrained in the 74th Amendment Act, which attempted to institutionalise participatory and decentralised methods of governance. By concentrating power in the hands of a few economically powerful institutions, market forces make democratic forms of decentralisation an impossibility, and the role of local government and civil society is confused. How effective these institution will be in the context of these problems will depend upon how

their individual perspectives and strategies evolve *vis-à-vis* the relationship between state and market.

Consequently, over the last twenty years Ahmedabad has witnessed a displacing of local government powers by special purpose authorities like the Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority and other state level utility and housing authorities. Recent efforts to privatise many obligatory services, in the interests of financial efficacy, generally overestimate the ability of the poor to pay. The cumulative effect of this disempowerment is that the performance of the local authority has been severely retarded, and this has impacted negatively on the city's marginalised communities in particular.

4.2 Urban Poverty in the City

Estimates vary, but is likely that up to 1 million of Ahmedabad's population live in poverty. The majority of Ahmedabad's urban poor belong to marginalised social groups, and are invariably women and children of low caste status, or people from traditional tribes or ethnic and religious minorities like Ahmedabad's Muslims. These groups are socially heterogeneous and are generally segregated geographically from other social groups within the city. Women however, constitute nearly 46% of this vulnerable population, and in addition to being the victims of exploitative market relations, they continue to be the worst casualties of household violence. It is in the context of this diversity that the responses of different NGOs have evolved.

Urban poverty in Ahmedabad needs to be understood in relation to the economic opportunities available to common people, their living environment, social characteristics, levels of political participation and vulnerability to social conflict. High rates of population growth have not been accompanied by any significant growth in formal sector employment (Mehta and Mehta,1988). Moreover, the decline in the textile industry has forced a large number of workers, especially women and children, to take up work in the informal sector, in order to supplement the household income. As a result, a large percentage of workers are engaged in informal activities characterised by low and fluctuating levels of income. Much of the increase in informal sector employment has been absorbed by small commercial enterprises and craft manufacturing or trade (Mahadevia and D'Costa, 1998). The danger for marginalised groups is that as the formal economy becomes ever more globalised, in the absence of adequate safeguards to protect the poor, the informalisation and casualisation of workers will increase their vulnerability to adverse socio-economic changes.

Because of a lack of education and hence low levels of literacy, the poor are also vulnerable to political forms of manipulation. And exploitative political rhetoric keeps the poor divided over issues of religion, caste, language etc. Despite their great numerical strength, the poor remain unable to organise themselves into an effective group, and leadership and organisational capacities are lacking. Indeed, social interaction and organisation amongst the poor is constrained by social differences within the same locality. It is no surprise therefore, that it is the poor who are the worst victims of caste and communal violence in the city.

4.3 Ahmedabad's Slums

The majority of the urban poor resides in an unhygienic slum environment; and in 1991 this meant nearly 40% of the urban population. Considering only the criteria of income, the *Swarna Jayanti Sahari Rojgar Yojna* survey estimates that 20% of the slum population lives below the poverty line, defined here as a monthly income of 373 rupees per capita or less. When non-economic criteria are applied, this figure rises substantially. Most of the slums lack basic amenities such as water, sanitation, healthcare and other related facilities. These fundamental problems are compounded by the fact that slum dwellers often lack tenurial land rights, which increases their susceptibility to exploitation by private landlords and a corrupt state government.

5. THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL MOVEMENT IN AHMEDABAD

5.1 Gandhi, Industry and the Birth of the NGO Sector

Voluntarism is part of a long tradition in Gujarat, and is incorporated into the religious and cultural beliefs of the people. Some of this commitment is reflected in the notions of *Dharmadan* and *Yedimkhan*, which are ingrained in the mindset of Hindus and Muslims respectively. Caste, community and religious organisations have been involved in various social and charitable activities for centuries, and despite being patronised by rich and influential industrialists, these institutions were founded on the principle of open access to the policy-making process. The traders guild, known locally as the *Mahajans* played a very important role in the early welfare of the city, and this tradition continues today in the form of charitable trusts which fund hospitals or educational institutions.

The arrival of Gandhi in 1915 gave a new impetus to the social reconstruction movement, especially among the lower castes and tribals. One implicit objective of this faction was to prepare workers for the Freedom Movement, which was considered to be part of a wider political conscientisation and social empowerment process. Although most of this work was directed towards rural areas, its impact was visible in Ahmedabad after the formation of numerous vocal Gandhian organisations. During this period, the Ahmedabad Textile Labourer's Association (ATLA) grew significantly in size and stature to set in motion the establishment of SEWA.

Besides the Gandhian movement, many other charitable and voluntary organisations flourished in Ahmedabad during the 1930s. Some of the earliest contributors to the development of the city were industrial and business houses grounded in a philanthropic philosophy. One of the most influential was the Ahmedabad Educational Trust, which was actively supported by a large business concern owned by the *Lalbhai* family, who had considerable influence within the local authority. This trust was instrumental in making the city one of the richest educational centres in

the country, and to this day still manages most of the educational institutions in Ahmedabad. The increased presence of the British during this period also led to the emergence of a number of additional educational institutions run by Christian missionaries. From this period up to the 1960s, a number of organisations were established in the city to initiate project-based welfare activities. These continued to be associated with local business houses, and remained welfarist in their emphasis.

The close synergy between voluntary organisations, industrial houses and local government meant that power within the nascent NGO movement was concentrated to such an extent that incidents of conflict were minimal. The decline of the textile industry, however, was to erode considerably the power and influence of Ahmedabad's industrialists in city affairs. Although the pluralism of the voluntary sector has subsequently increased, a downside to the development of competition within the sector has been the fact that collaborative ventures between developmental actors have become more problematic (Patel, 1996).

It must be emphasised that the growth of the voluntary sector in Ahmedabad did not automatically translate into improved conditions for lower-caste groups. Most institutions remained inaccessible to those still marginalised by caste and extreme poverty.

5.2 The Professionalisation of the Sector: NGOs since the 1980s

By the 1950s the Gandhian movement was beginning to have run its course, and new development paradigms were coming into vogue. The most popular during the 1960s and 1970s was the Nehruvian model of state-led development, which was to overwhelm all other theories during the period. One reason for the reduced role of Gandhian methods was that many organisations inspired by the movement had grown too big to be managed effectively, whilst others had lost their original vision. In the sectors of education and business, their role was to be taken over by new institutions such as the Indian Institute of Management, which reflected the industrial and entrepreneurial context of Ahmedabad in the 1960s.

Despite a new-found predominance, Nehruvian state-led development processes were unsuccessful in reducing the incidence of poverty. As new institutions evolved to counteract what were seen as failures by the state, direct confrontation between the government and a new breed of NGOs emerged. Within these organisations socialist ideology was strong, and the focus of voluntary-sector initiatives shifted from an emphasis on charity and relief work to development through voluntary action. With an emphasis on strategies of conscientisation and empowerment, such organisations have attempted to develop self-reliant communities who have striven to manage their own development needs. Even so, few NGOs during this period concentrated on a specifically urban agenda.

The process of professionalisation within the NGO sector was enhanced in the 1970s by the growth of an educated urban middle class. The 1980s further strengthened this process when a strained local government began to recognise the role of NGOs. Combined with the increasing interaction of local development organisations with international aid agencies, this development was to increase the number of sources of NGO finance. This has enabled organisations to diversify their function beyond service delivery and grass-roots mobilisation, into training, research, documentation and networking.

5.3 Poverty Alleviation Efforts

Despite the apparent failure of state mechanisms in the development process, the role of the AMC remains considerable. Through their programme of urban community development, the AMC implements most community-specific development projects in the city - despite numerous allegations by the NGO sector that such projects are *ad hoc* in nature, unco-ordinated between departments, lacking continuity and unable to incorporate the needs of those communities most affected (Acharya and Chittranjan, 1998). In recent years the city authorities have embarked upon a number of land development projects, such as the River Front Development Scheme, which suffers from a conception of land as a financial resource for private property developers.

One positive trend in the role of local government has been the initiation by the AMC of partnerships between NGOs and the private sector, such as the slum networking programme and the Ahmedabad Green Partnership (AGP). Although NGOs remain a secondary partner, and are usually excluded from the conceptualisation stages of the project, any evidence of a participatory institutional structure is a major departure from conventional practice. However, most private-sector involvement in urban poverty issues merely supports voluntary-sector work in an external capacity, rather than offering direct and integral forms of collaboration with both NGOs and local government.

Ahmedabad's NGOs work mainly in the areas of service delivery, training and capacity-building or research. Most NGOs have taken an integrated approach to development interventions, and work simultaneously in a number of social sectors, namely healthcare, education and water delivery. This policy is even applied in cases where, like AWAG, the NGO's main focus is on a single social group, such as women. For the most part, the main organisational target groups of the NGOs studied include intermediary NGOs, the local authority and CBOs. A common approach to NGO interventions is to engage with a select number of local communities and then focus in on specific target groups within that area. This community-development initiative often begins with education or healthcare programmes, which are perceived to be socially acceptable and politically uncontentious.

5.4 Ahmedabad NGO Profiles

- **Ahmedabad Women's Action Group (AWAG)** was founded in 1981 by an academic working mainly on women's issues. The organisation's programmes are conducted mostly in urban areas, but AWAG does have plans to expand its operations into rural communities as well. Along with community organisation and research, advocacy on women's issues is its main project portfolio; giving the organisation overall a slightly radical orientation (AWAG Annual Report, 1996). It believes that socio-political and legal empowerment is a precondition for economic empowerment (AWAG Annual Report, 1997).

- **Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA)** is a support organisation founded in 1980. It is working basically to empower women and children by

emphasising their health and educational status. Its strategy involves enhancing the capacities of intermediary organisations including the government (CHETNA, 1996). Research, consultancy, development of educational and training materials and policy advocacy are also areas of concern. It is a nationally recognised organisation, but has confined its work mainly to the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Whilst it receives funds from both national and international organisations, funds are also internally mobilised through training courses.

- **Gantar** is a relatively less well-known organisation, and was established in 1992 with an ideological base in the socialist revolutionary *Navinirman* movement. The organisation works mainly in rural areas but has begun programmes in urban areas that focus on the issue of child labour. Advocacy and community empowerment have therefore became its main areas of concern. Gantar does not have any official sources of funding, nor does it receive funds from any foreign source. Most expenses are therefore met from *ad hoc* donations.

- **Janvikas** was founded in 1987 as an NGO support organisation. Its main objective is to build the capacities of grass-roots NGOs through technical training and research support. The organisation is also heavily involved in networking, and policy work through its own publications. The wide scope of Janvikas' work has given the organisation a national client base. It is supported financially by both international agencies and national government.

- **Saath** was founded in 1989 by a director also associated with SXSSS and Vikas. The organisation works exclusively in urban areas, and is a relatively new and small institution, attempting to consolidate its mission. Its major activities are service delivery and community organisation.

- **Samvad** is a left-wing organisation established in 1989. Before coming to Ahmedabad, Samvad's founder gained valuable community work experience amongst the pavement and slum dwellers of Bombay. The organisation's most prominent activities are its mobilisation, organisation and advocacy strategies. These are operated entirely in Ahmedabad to secure the rights of slum dwellers in conflicts over land and other basic amenities; for example when Samvad opposed the River Front Development Scheme initiated by the local authority. The organisation's broad funding range now includes Oxfam.

- **Sanchetna** was started in 1982 to work in minority-dominated areas. Its founder was associated with SXSSS and the social movements of the 1970s. Its main focus is health programmes for women and children, whilst the organisation has open access to funding from both external and national sources.

- **Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)** was first established as part of the ATLA, but later separated from the parent organisation in 1982. Technically speaking, SEWA is a women's trade union with extensive societal commitments. But it remains one of the largest organisations in India committed to the empowerment of women. It has been successful in influencing legal and policy changes and works widely with self-employed women in urban areas; although SEWA has recently diversified into rural communities. SEWA is fortunate enough to receive funds from both national and international donor agencies.

- **St Xavier's Social Service Society (SXSSS)** is a Jesuit organisation started in 1976 by Fr Ervitti to work exclusively in urban areas. Many current NGO leaders in Ahmedabad had early experiences working within or alongside this organisation. SXSSS has an integrated approach to the empowerment of the poor, and it has a history of collaboration with the local authority (SXSSS, 1996). Service delivery, awareness raising, community organisation and advocacy are its main areas of concern.

- **Vikas** was established in 1977 by an architect associated with Fr Ervitti of SXSSS. Although much of its work is conducted in rural areas, Vikas is heavily involved with low-income housing projects in urban communities (Vikas, 1993). The organisation is one of the most well-known NGOs in Ahmedabad, and has an innovative participatory research and training workshop programme, including initiatives to strengthen CBOs in slum areas (Vikas, 1997). Vikas also receives funding from both national and international donors.

PART II

6. INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF NGOS IN AHMEDABAD

6.1 Ideology and Mission

The fundamental ideology of Ahmedabad's NGOs emphasises the empowerment of marginalised groups (CHETNA, 1995). As such, several organisations have attempted to raise the profile of legitimate contributions made by poverty-stricken groups, in their claims for fairer access to public resources. According to one current argument within the NGO sector, slum communities are not perceived as a social problem in themselves, but rather as a cost-effective first step towards integrating slum communities into the formal public sphere of the city. The empowerment of the poor therefore results when poor people themselves have the skills, resources and confidence to effectively demand a share of the resources available to the rest of society. In this discourse, the task of poverty reduction thus becomes a creative process to increase levels of confidence, collective organisation and demand-making skills amongst the marginalised and the poor.

In contrast, only a minority of the NGOs studied saw structural imbalances in power as the central issue, meaning that only following a broad-scale social revolution can marginalised groups be empowered. These NGOs conceive of power as a zero-sum game, and argue that the poor can only be empowered when the power of the dominant social group has been abrogated. For this section of civil society, their stated strategy is to challenge those laws and policies which have developed the structural inequality between rich and poor. Consequently, there is less scope for these NGOs to co-operate with the state on projects related to service provision.

One common factor between the two types of NGO strategy mentioned, is that each sees the formation of CBOs as critical to achieving their required objectives. In this respect, it is surprising that few of Ahmedabad's NGOs have a clearly written mission statement. At most, they have a set of stated principles that focus on the poor and the NGOs' methods of working with them. For the majority of NGOs, this invariably means creating CBOs or occupational groups designed to increase awareness in communities facing problems of poverty.

6.2 NGO Governance

Of the ten NGOs studied, all are legally registered under the 1950 Bombay Act and have governing bodies, or trustees, which meet at least once a year to receive an annual report and financial accounts. These boards are drawn largely from academic, professional and executive NGO circles. As such, board members can bring with them a number of professional and personal connections, as well as status and legitimacy to the NGO's work; and quite often will be representative of the personage and vocation of the founder. For example, the governing board of SXSSS consists mainly of Jesuits, whilst that of AWAG is made up exclusively of women. The absence of beneficiary groups from the governing body can be rationalised on the grounds that the primary role of the board is to provide the NGO with societal recognition and acceptability to potential funders. Familial connections are also evident, but it is difficult to reach any conclusions on the nature of this relationship.

Whether the committee of trustees can play an integral and sustained role in the governance of the NGO is questionable, except in the case of large organisations like SEWA and SXSSS. This is because few trustees have a professional background in either NGO or corporate management, nor

do they seem to have sufficient time to engage in the work of the NGOs on a daily basis. None of the board's trustees have undertaken training to improve NGO governance, despite their knowledge of NGO support organisations capable of delivering tailored training courses. Indeed, one chairperson of a prominent Ahmedabad NGO has conceded that, '*there is most probably a wastage [of funds] within the NGO, but it is a matter of 'easy come, easy go'.*

6.3 Organisational Structures

Most of the NGOs studied are organised on the basis of hierarchical working practices, with a pyramid of authority working its way down from the governing board and directors, through to the project co-ordinators, field-workers, local organisers and local workers respectively. Two of the newer NGOs have a flat organisational structure with a vibrant task culture and equality of pay among all workers, but this philosophy places them in a minority.

Organisational structures which tend towards following project lines have directors and project co-ordinators who tackle wider organisational issues, with the majority of staff having predefined roles within the project's framework. There appears to be no relationship between the size or strategy of the NGO and the proportion of support staff which accompany each project. Whilst none of the organisations appear excessively top-heavy, there is scope given their reforming mission for some of the NGOs to reduce the number of middle-level staff employed.

Contrary to a perception that urban NGOs consist only of office-based staff, the NGOs studied have at least 50% of employees working two to six hours per day in the field. This feature did, however, vary between NGOs involved in social mobilisation and human rights issues, with a high proportion of field-based staff, and organisations working in community development or support-training and networking, with a much lower proportion of employees working away from headquarters.

Most of Ahmedabad's NGOs have a loose role culture, whilst others are organised around a task culture principle. A loose role culture is one in which the roles and responsibilities of individuals in the NGO are predefined, but where there is still scope for cross-organisational work and the employment of individuals that do not fit specific functional categories. In contrast, a task culture refers to those organisations that focus more strongly on accomplishing specific tasks, by bringing together appropriately experienced people regardless of their position or defined status in the organisation.

One conclusion that can be drawn from these descriptions is that in the urban context NGOs find it helpful to a have a certain degree of formal bureaucratisation, mixed with a high degree of proactivity which enables them to respond to changes in the institutional environment.

6.4 Leadership

As stated, the formation of a number of Ahmedabad's NGOs was greatly influenced by SXSSS and Fr Ervitti, who attempted to expose his students to issues of social inequality. The work of

SXSSS during the mid-1970s was therefore very action-oriented and multi-sectoral for the time, and groomed future NGO leaders by exposing them to a full spectrum of NGO roles and responsibilities. Most future NGO leaders, however, were from academic or local activist backgrounds, with little management experience; particularly if the NGO was established in response to a catastrophic event such as flooding or slum clearance programmes.

Despite their lack of management training, some 80% of NGO leaders in Ahmedabad were educated to postgraduate level. Most have professional backgrounds in either academia, the trade union movement or other NGOs, backed by a history of involvement in voluntary activities. Whilst it can be claimed that Ahmedabad's NGO leaders have little formal training in organisational leadership, they still have a great deal of practical experience in NGO organisational management.

An interesting feature of three of the NGOs studied, is the presence of a co-leadership arrangement within their management structure. This characteristic is intended to serve as a mechanism for distributing responsibility more evenly, whilst ensuring continuity within the overall management structure. Such positions are shared equally between men and women, and the position of NGO leader or executive remains a powerful office. 90% of directors remain the original trustee-executive secretaries of the NGO. As such, the directors embody and shape much of the organisation's history, ethos and strategic approach; a role strengthened by the governing board's lack of intervention in day-to-day policy-making, and the dearth of second-level leaders capable of counteracting the director's autonomy. Indicatively, none of the NGO directors interviewed could recall an incident in which other staff members had openly disagreed with their policies on a particular issue. With only one organisation possessing a facility for staff to evaluate the performance of their directors, these factors have caused several key informants to question the nature of NGO ownership and control.

A powerful leadership is not problematic of itself, if there is an open mechanism for succession which is used to create spaces for participation in decision-making processes. But unfortunately for NGOs in Ahmedabad, only 20% of the organisations studied had any institutionalised method for changing executive personnel. Samvad has a flat management structure and so rotates the directorship on an annual basis; whilst the Jesuit community of SXSSS regularly replaces its directors with Jesuit brothers exhibiting leadership qualities. The absence of a succession mechanism may reflect the fact that directors and the governing board rarely consider the inevitability of one day leaving the organisation. This retards the grooming of second-level management as potential leaders, and leaves a worrying gap between the skills and experience of NGO directors and their immediate successors.

In spite of these criticisms, none of the NGO staff interviewed (in the absence of directors), expressed any grievances against the leadership of the organisation. On the contrary, some staff even spoke in glowing terms as to the competence, sensitivity and motivation of the executive. Any faults that did emerge were invariably voiced by former employees who had questioned the ideology and grass-roots experience of the NGO.

6.5 Communication Systems

All the organisations questioned conduct regular planned and structured meetings. Meetings at the director and project co-ordinator levels usually take place on a fortnightly to monthly basis. Meetings between community organisers and local workers are more usually scheduled weekly, whereas formalised discussions between field-workers and local-level staff take place as the individual project demands. The majority of NGO meetings seem to revolve around the organisation and implementation of specific work plans, but in three of the organisations periodic reviews are undertaken to review personnel and project performance. Regular unscheduled visits to field-staff offices ensure a continuity of information flows within the organisation. Such communications are facilitated by developed administrative structures that involve files, records of meetings, computers, memo and message arrangements.

Where gaps in the communication systems of some NGOs have occurred, it is often between directors and community organisers or local-level workers. When communications have taken place between these groups, it is generally very one way and hierarchical, as opposed to being more mutual and participative.

6.6 Human Resource Development

A *de facto* policy exists amongst the majority of Ahmedabad's NGOs to recruit only postgraduate students onto their core-staff team positions. Although this policy is predicated on the greater capacity of postgraduate students to conceptualise, organise and act upon their knowledge; issues such as field experience, social empathy and an understanding of different NGO strategies can be overlooked. In particular, staff members with proven management experience can be unnecessarily excluded from employment. As illustrated by the high staff turnover of most NGOs, many postgraduate students appear to view their positions in the voluntary sector as either a short-term contribution to society before joining the private sector, or as a stepping-stone to a 'better' career. In part, this sentiment reflects the perception of NGOs as being high-pressure working environments with relatively low levels of financial compensation.

In a sector where training is very role specific, work experience visits rare, and inter-organisational exchange unexplored, more detailed personnel development plans are one way to counteract this tendency. There are numerous examples of vertical mobility within Ahmedabad's NGO sector, but the absence of explicit staff development strategies could explain the dearth of up-and-coming leaders.

One interesting model of staff development is that of SXSSS. After an orientation period of two weeks, the new employee is expected to record a paper on the philosophy and orientation of their work, which is then compared with the opinions and aspirations of other staff members to see if their interests and values are compatible with the culture of the organisation. Following this exercise, a probationary period of six months is initiated, and upon successful completion the worker is offered a two-year contract. During this time, their work is appraised as the employee is exposed to different areas of the organisation's work. Once the procedure is completed the new staff member is offered a permanent contract until the age of 58 years. This provides the worker with security and the opportunity to cultivate a long-term understanding of the organisation's strategic development needs.

6.7 Funding

All but one of the NGOs assessed receives its funding from external sources. In most cases, Dutch and German NGOs are the main primary donors, although funds are also received from UK, American and Scandinavian sources. Each NGO has on average four foreign funders, which implies a degree of independence from any one individual source. In reality, however, most of Ahmedabad's NGOs have a mixed relationship with their Northern funders: for most the relationship is very flexible and based on trust, but in some instances key funders can influence policies throughout the project cycle, which may last up to three years. Only in a minority of cases does funding come from indigenous sources, mainly in the form of grants from central and state government; or from payments for training and consultancy services; or direct public donations. The two quotations below reflect this diversity of experience:

There are not many strings attached to funding. We make proposals and they respond. Most funders have met us, and in this way they are accountable. We will not do certain things they want, because they do not always fit the holistic framework in which we work.(Director, SXSSS)

We were not able to feed our concerns about the evaluation report (of our organisation) back to the funder. We did not participate in setting parameters and the consultant was too eager to confirm the funder's misgivings. (Director, CHETNA)

6.8 Financial Management

The financial management of Ahmedabad's NGOs is essentially highly transparent. Directors are usually responsible for fund-raising, budgeting and any negotiation with donors; whilst decisions on expenditures are often more participative. The larger NGOs do employ in-house accountants, although most use external consultants for bookkeeping - despite the apparent absence of formal contracts between the two parties, causing confusion over billing in some instances.

Despite their apparent transparency, therefore, a serious concern is that only one of the NGOs examined actually publishes its financial accounts on an annual basis, and even in the case of agencies in receipt of over 1.5 million rupees, a precise financial flow is unobtainable. In all cases access to complete financial records are restricted to core internal staff. NGOs consequently leave themselves open to charges of corruption, mismanagement, unaccountability and co-optation by foreign institutions. Given the frequent claim by many NGOs to be democratic and accountable, such a failure represents a severe oversight on their behalf.

7. TARGET GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES OF NGOS IN AHMEDABAD

In the main, each of the ten NGOs have realised clear connections between different social target groups and their own organisational forms, and there is little conflict between NGOs for the right to assist a particular target group. For example, although SEWA, CHETNA and AWAG all focus on work with women, they have each prioritised economic organisation, healthcare and social empowerment, respectively, as their chosen sectors of intervention, and overlap rarely results. Furthermore, there is an important distinction to be made between the number of NGOs working with a particular target group, and levels or intensity of involvement.
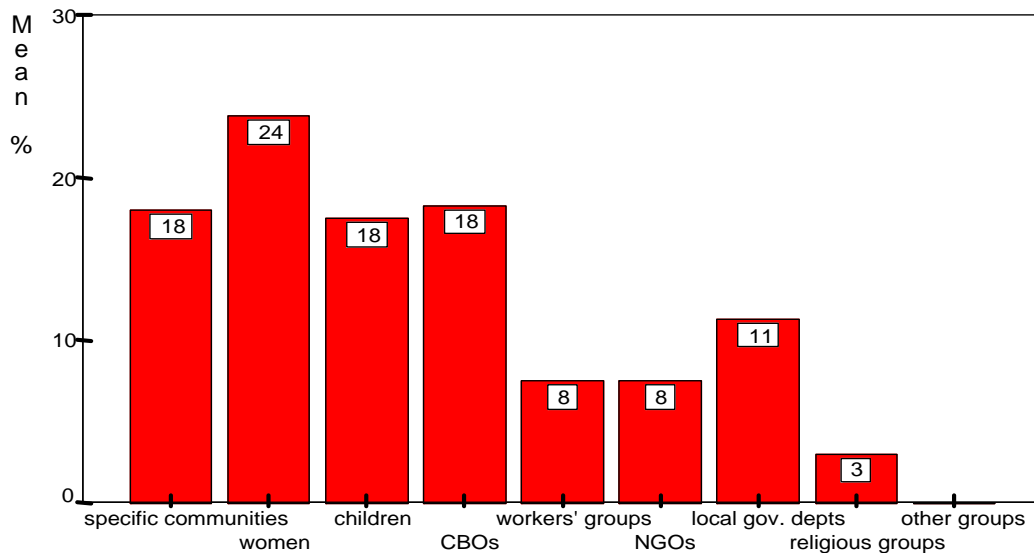
Figure 1: Proportion of time devoted to target social groups for urban NGOs in Ahmedabad

It is clear from Figure 1 that the main target group for NGO interventions is women, both within defined geographical communities and as a sector of the labour market. Accordingly, 70% of the NGOs studied report working mainly, although not exclusively, with women. Although the same number of NGOs are also working with CBOs, the actual proportion of their resources dedicated to grass-roots organisations, in terms of staff time and funding, is less than that reserved for women. The main reason for the gendered focus of urban NGOs is that such interventions are intended to counteract the feminisation of poverty, which along with the greater responsiveness of female beneficiary groups, has been an influential factor in shaping the funding priorities of donors.

Children and CBOs are also seen as key target groups, with 60% and 70% of NGOs, respectively, actively working with these groups. Work with other NGOs, the AMC and state agencies is mainly undertaken to facilitate the work of the NGO itself, as opposed to being attempts to change the general policy environment.

Eight of the ten NGOs considered follow a multi-sectoral approach in each of their programmes, and most organisations work in the sectors of healthcare, employment generation or education. As shown in Figure 2 below, when such activities are ranked according to the proportion of time NGOs devote to each sector, it is clear that of those activities acknowledged to be the most effective methods of poverty reduction, the greatest disparity is between the large amounts of time given over to educational services, and the relatively shorter time periods committed to income and employment generating activities (IEGA) and land rights issues. This is partly a consequence of the fact that educational activities tend to be less controversial politically when compared to more direct interventions in the labour or property markets - a factor explaining the lack of enthusiasm shown by funders for investment in these activities. However, this analysis underestimates the fact that education remains a key component in poverty alleviation, and the failings of the state system, combined with low levels of attendance remain important reasons for the emphasis on this sector.
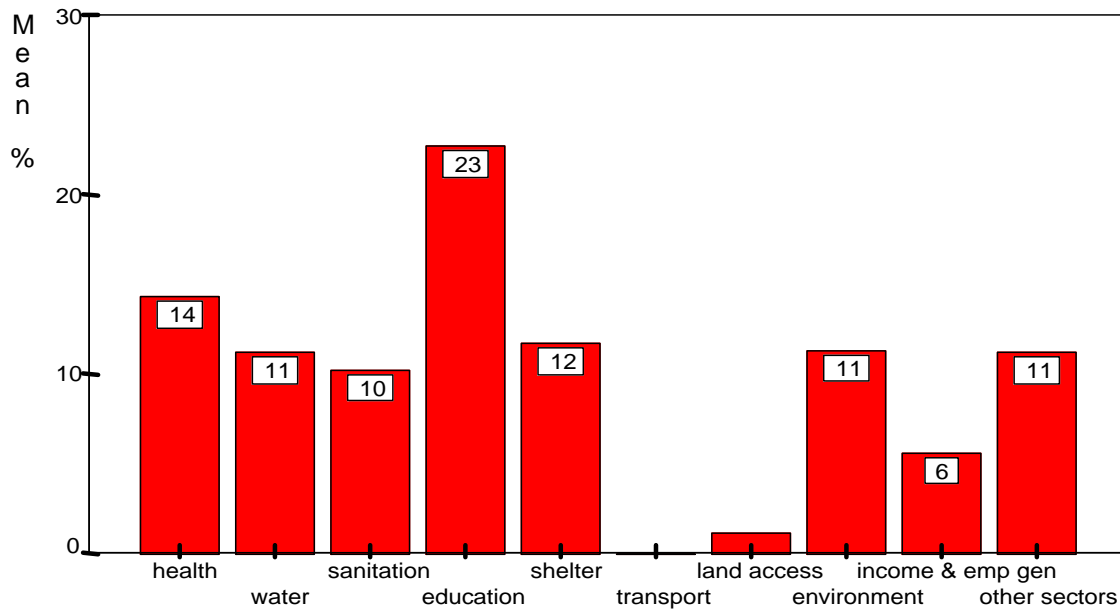
Figure 2: Proportion of time devoted to NGO activities by sector for urban NGOs in Ahmedabad

More complicated to explain is the low level of activity centring on IEGA and land rights. Despite being recognised as an essential element in poverty reduction interventions, Ahmedabad's NGOs appear to lack the skills and experience necessary to engage in commercial activities. Consequently, NGOs have been unable to discover the linkages between micro- and meso-level economic interventions, such as opening access to finance, suppliers or a market. In the case of land rights, only Samvad has made conflicts over land its central concern, and most NGOs continue to lack the confidence and experience necessary to challenge the legal system.

To gain a greater understanding of the work of individual NGOs, it is useful to differentiate between their main strategic roles and other supporting processes. Service delivery, training, grass-roots capacity-building, IEGA, research and advocacy are considered here to be essential to the proper functioning of NGO activities. In contrast, awareness-raising, social mobilisation, legal literacy and networking are seen as secondary processes, which facilitate the success of the main functional activities. Figure 3 below shows the proportion of time each NGO allocates to the different types of programmes and supporting processes, used as methods of target group intervention. Although the distribution between programmes is relatively even, there is a clear decrease in the amount of resources assigned to awareness raising, social mobilisation and community capacity-building, when compared to service delivery, research and advocacy, networking and technical assistance. The reminder of this chapter will explore these programme activities in more detail.
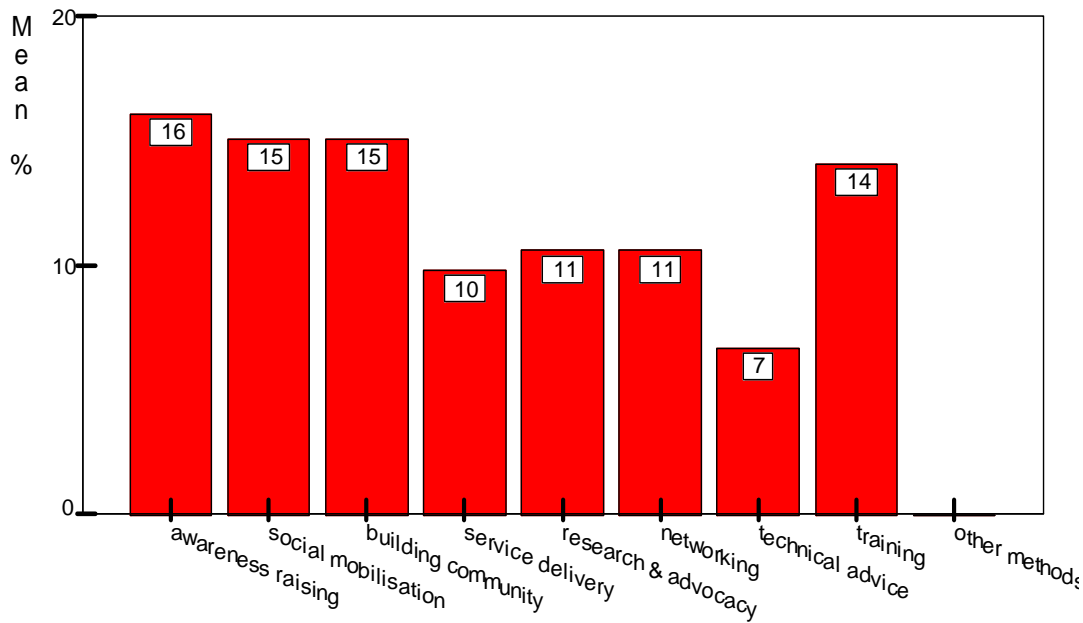
Figure 3: Proportion of time devoted to poverty-reduction programmes as a method of target group intervention for urban NGOs in Ahmedabad

7.1 Service Provision

Service provision is a common role for most NGOs in Ahmedabad. This is based on the assumption that the state sector has failed to provide sufficient services to the poor, whilst NGOs are perceived as effective service providers because of their pro-active reach, innovative approach and cost effectiveness. This trend has meant that in many sectors NGOs are now a basic supplement to state service provisions. Most of these programmes are oriented towards the provision of healthcare and education services for women and children; sectors which receive the largest amount of funding from Northern donors. Given the fact that most marginalised groups suffer poor levels of health and education, the sector is seen as an important entry point and organising principle for tackling poverty in slum communities (CHETNA, 1989). Other sectors used innovatively include the organisation of migrant brick kiln labourers by Gantar, CHETNA's healthcare programme for municipal school children, and SXSSS's rejuvenation of childcare and play centres, or *Balbhavans*.

Many NGO service delivery programmes are, however, limited in their scope and sustainability. Programmes are often confined to small areas within the slum which are continuously dependent on the NGO. Besides healthcare and education provision, services such as water supply, sanitation and sewerage is generally absent from marginalised areas, despite the presence of NGOs. These services remain an obligatory function of the local authority, and are too costly for individual NGOs to provide. Nevertheless, some NGOs such as Samvad have adapted their strategy successfully, to mobilise local people in an effort to negotiate with the local authorities directly.

A major obstacle to providing basic services in marginalised communities in urban areas is insecurity of tenure for slum dwellers. Since the majority of occupants are illegal and without land

rights according to current legislation, the local government refuses to accept responsibility for service delivery to these areas. Because attempts to address this issue by NGOs has the potential to undermine their legitimacy in the eyes of the state, most have been fearful of tackling the problem, preferring to concentrate on less politically charged sectors such as healthcare and education. This fact has driven some land activists and slum communities to believe that whilst basic land rights are lacking, other developmental efforts are compromised and fail to fight the root causes of poverty. A more coherent approach to the delivery of services should therefore integrate related tenurial rights issues with the more traditional provision of health and education services in slum areas. To date little has been achieved in this respect, although the AMC has, under its slum networking project, involved NGOs like Saath and SXSSS (SXSSS Annual Report, 1997) in its integrated slum development programme. In most cases, however, the role of NGOs in overcoming problems of land tenure is confined to strategies of mobilisation and encouraging participation in other related programmes.

7.2 Income and Employment Generating Activities (IEGA)

Protection of trades and occupations, and the introduction of income-generating activities, is an important agenda for those NGOs seeking to empower the poor economically. Such NGOs are, however, surprisingly few in number given the positive effect such activities can have as part of poverty alleviation schemes. In the context of India's spontaneous urbanisation experience, aggravated by recent processes of economic and structural reforms, it is clear that economic issues need to be given top priority. NGOs have for too long remained concerned but passive observers in this entire process, and have lacked any the specific action plans necessary to tackle the problem effectively.

Where NGOs have addressed the issue, their main approach has been to strengthen people's economic organisation, by helping the poor to manage savings and credit schemes through specialised banks and co-operatives. Individuals have then borrowed funds for enterprise development, but also to cover short-term financial crises and shortfalls in household income. Although it is difficult to assess the impact of these initiatives, it is clear from beneficiary group appraisals that the schemes have reduced their vulnerability to short-term crises. The experience of these savings and credit groups has therefore been encouraging on the whole, with simple, but effective, procedures ensuring low rates of default.

Combined with finance schemes, the provision of skills training to increase the employment potential of the poor has been a significant area of focus for many NGOs. But whilst some graduates of training courses have gone on to employment or self-employment, significant numbers still fail to secure paid work. This reflects the fact that urban employment is dependent on socio-economic forces at the national and international level that have the potential to nullify or shift the impact of technical or traditional skills training. Less encouraging still has been the attempts by some NGOs to help groups organise small enterprises where access to group credit, product development and effective marketing techniques have been lacking.

The success and sustainability of people's movements and CBOs depends to a large extent on their degree of economic empowerment. This has been helped by the success of trade-related unions, such as those for hawkers and vendors organised by SEWA (Desai, 1990). Besides

SEWA, AWAG has succeeded in organising women in an income-generating activity scheme that has now established itself as an industrial co-operative. However, most NGOs have not emphasised this important component of community development, as most training programmes are not oriented towards imparting skills for developing small enterprises, linked to other NGOs.

7.3 Research and Consultancy

Research and advocacy are the functions which come next in importance for NGOs in Ahmedabad. With the exception of Janvikas, these activities are conducted mainly by the larger organisations such as CHETNA, or more specialised NGOs like Gantar. Whilst the bigger NGOs have the advantage of being able to draw on large networks and a broader range of experience, smaller NGOs often conduct independent research in an attempt to expose inadequacies in existing development practices; from the use of child labour on municipal contracts to the inappropriate demolition of slum housing.

Research is one activity in which most NGOs are actively involved. The incentive for much of this work appears to result from a need to support individual programmes with additional information. On the other hand, independent research is justified on the grounds that traditional academic research is either too theoretical or fails to address those issues most pertinent to NGO activities. The authenticity and reliability of the research undertaken by Ahmedabad's NGOs varies, and its quality depends on their ability to attract skilled personnel and funding. It is interesting to note that most of the city's NGOs were involved in research irrespective of their capacity, although the work conducted varies from simply gathering baseline socio-economic information to more rigorous research projects addressing highly problematic issues.

Larger organisations like CHETNA, SEWA and AWAG do have separate research departments: with CHETNA conducting consultancy work for internal resource mobilisation and SEWA and AWAG concentrating on women's issues. These include women's self-employment, women and the media, violence against women and other gender issues. Both SEWA and AWAG have been able to influence state policies and legal issues through their own brands of action research. Similarly, smaller organisations like Gantar have substantiated their child labour litigation cases by conducting surveys and studies on child labour: an approach also true of other organisations like Vikas, Sanchetna, SXSSS and Samvad.

Although research is a positive aspect of NGO work, it is often duplicated and can lead to an inefficient use of resources. There is scope therefore for NGOs to collaborate on research activities, to ensure cost effectiveness and quality. Though most NGOs have research and documentation units, the extent of networking and information-sharing needs to be reviewed if a policy of best practice is to be implemented. Given the high number of NGOs in the city, a co-ordinated network could dramatically increase the efficacy of NGO programmes.

7.4 Training

Ahmedabad's NGOs play a major role in the training of other development practitioners and beneficiaries. This broad category encompasses technical training for NGO and government staff, vocational training for potential IEGA and the training of CBOs in technical, legal and other developmental concerns. The type of training employed is ultimately determined by the level of the NGOs' involvement, the nature of the problem to be tackled and the resources the NGO has available.

Some support organisations, such as CHETNA, Janvikas and Vikas, specialise in training as a tool to improve human resource and institutional development (Capoor and Vakaria, 1994). It became apparent from discussions with various NGO directors that specialised training in programmes oriented towards participatory monitoring and evaluation is an effective form of capacity development. Occasional exposure to training also creates a culture of efficiency amongst core staff, and is important for sustaining organisational development.

The training programmes implemented are either sector specific, in areas such as health and education, or target specific attempts which focus on groups such as women or children. Most established organisations are increasingly seeking to train local NGOs and government officials, as well as conducting training programmes for their community target groups and associated CBOs. To an extent this has facilitated interactions amongst NGOs in the city. But it appears that most working relationships are confined to larger organisations like CHETNA, SEWA and Vikas. With the exception of Saath, other smaller organisations have not yet been able to effectively tap into the wealth of expertise potentially available from specialised training organisations within the city. This is essentially because many smaller organisations lack the financial resources necessary to support programme training.

One major weakness of the training programmes implemented is that **the majority of courses fail to give sufficient emphasis to grass-roots organisation and mobilisation. As a result, many NGOs have a poor record in community organisation**, whilst many training organisations have overlooked the need to train for micro-enterprise development and income-generating activities. This would suggest that training needs should be focused more towards grass-roots initiatives which often have a greater impact in alleviating the poverty of marginalised groups.

7.5 Legal Literacy Training

NGOs have attempted to bring about legal and institutional changes for specific target groups concerned about particular issues. SEWA's role in unionising women hawkers and street vendors and AWAG's initiative to unionise coal labourers have successfully given legal protection to these labour groups. Similarly, AWAG's role in mitigating violence against women, through counselling services and awareness raising within the media, are commendable efforts in this vain. Public interest litigations for the emancipation of child labour by Gantar and Samvad's efforts to protect the rights of slum dwellers are also outstanding initiatives to facilitate changes in the legal status of marginalised groups. Yet, many opportunities for improvement remain. One possible initiative would be greater collaboration between NGOs to effect a wider and more visible impact at the state and national level. However, many NGOs avoid taking legal actions because of a lack of appropriately trained staff and the risk that confrontations with the state can hinder the long-term viability of the organisation.

7.6 Grass-Roots Capacity-Building

A task frequently attempted by several NGOs is the formation and capacity-building of different grass-roots organisations. This often involves forming or strengthening worker co-operatives, credit unions or community development committees. The object is to enhance the organisational, strategic and relational strength of the institutions concerned. For instance, most NGOs during the course of their work have tried to facilitate the development of target-group-specific or sector-specific CBOs. And as a consequence, there now exist CBOs in Ahmedabad whose work revolves around women, youth, health, education, credit or IEGA.

The experience of Ahmedabad NGOs in processes of grass-roots organisation is, however, very mixed indeed. AWAG's attempts at the institutionalisation of sweeper women, illustrates how few people within marginalised communities are prepared to take responsibility for managing the organisation. And as a result the dependent association with AWAG still continues. On the other hand, Samvad has successfully formed CBOs adapted to the issue of land rights, which it has made a relatively effective and functional strategy, moulding interest groups into dynamic and independent institutions. Once the CBO is able to organise itself with efficacy, Samvad's day-to-day association is terminated. Even so, field observations have indicated that even in Samvad's case, grass-roots participation is limited, whilst its geographical reach is confined to only a handful of slum localities.

7.7 Awareness Raising

All the NGOs studied report that they engage in awareness-raising work, although Janvikas alone dedicates much of its work to this task. The dearth of information among both poor communities and organisations working for the poor is a major obstacle to the success of poverty alleviation programmes. To counter this trend, Gantar has highlighted the small amounts of money devoted to children's development in the state budget. Saath has therefore attempted to educate beneficiaries about the possibility of securing sanitation facilities from the AMC. And SXSSS has disseminated information on the prevention of contagious diseases. As a result, the process of spreading knowledge as a form of development practice is fast becoming a key supporting role for NGOs that must be consistently pursued.

7.8 Social Mobilisation

As a means of creating alliances and movements of people for the purpose of making organised demands for institutionalised change, some form of social mobilisation is a useful strategy deployed by NGOs in Ahmedabad. However, because of its controversial political nature and the limited socio-political space within which the NGOs work, the tactic is infrequently used. In most cases, the strategy is employed on an *ad hoc* basis as discrete opportunities arise in areas where the individual NGO has experience; be it regarding problems of communal violence or concerning

more wide-scale development schemes. In every case, however, there is a real danger that any conflict with the authorities can jeopardise the NGOs' relations with government officials at local or municipal levels.

8. THE STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGOS IN AHMEDABAD

8.1 NGO ~ AMC Relations

The domination of state affairs by political parties in India has tended to circumscribe the extent to which NGOs can play a leading role in the development process. Even so, the local state in Ahmedabad has a complex and dynamic relationship with the NGO sector. Before independence NGOs linked political struggle to social action in a very coherent manner. But since this period a distancing between political action and social activism has emerged.

The main reason for this development is the increasing tendency by political parties to focus primarily on formal political processes such as elections. NGOs now concerned with new approaches to development at the local level, which do not include formal political processes, have begun to critique the incumbent parties that moderate political power within the state. Most notably, non-party political formations that have emerged as instruments to transform society have

been met with increasing antagonism and intolerance by the main political parties with constituencies in Ahmedabad.

As an illustration of this uneasy relationship between Ahmedabad NGOs and the state, two NGOs are actively confrontational with the AMC. However, only two organisations have sufficient strength to critique the AMC incisively, based on their experience, internal capacity and independent funding sources. This problem is not helped by the limited turnover of the AMC, which has serious effects on the ability of NGOs to develop any co-operative initiatives with the state and local government. The ambivalence and reluctance of many NGOs to engage fully with the AMC may be explained partially by the fact that none of the NGOs are financially dependent on the local authority.

Despite these developments, according to research conducted by Participatory Research in Asia, PRIA, this seemingly tense relationship is not true of all NGO and local government interactions. Those NGOs engaged in non-confrontational charity or welfare programmes do not have major confrontations with the AMC, and operate within spaces that the state itself has defined. They are therefore able to receive grants and funds from local government, but continue to maintain a subservient relationship under the hegemony of the state. Those NGOs operating with alternative perspectives and visions, engaged in struggles for the poor at different levels, continue to find themselves in difficult circumstances. They are either co-opted or harassed; they are occasionally rejected and de-legitimised, but mostly repressed and intimidated. In this manner, the state uses its funding arm, as well as its regulatory arm, to carry out and sustain adverse relationships with voluntary organisations.

Increasing recognition of the role of certain NGOs in the city's governance and development, needs to be viewed in the context of a democratic decentralisation process on the one hand, and economic liberalisation on the other. In this context, development is seen as a 'partnership effort' amongst different social actors; namely the state, the corporate sector, NGOs and the general population of Ahmedabad. This emerging approach is widely represented within the AMC, which takes proactive efforts to liaise and work with NGOs in its attempts to develop the city. Unfortunately, a major drawback with this emerging relationship is that it has remained short term, project-based and inadequately institutionalised. In fact, some activists see most collaborative NGOs as having been unfairly co-opted as a function of governance, under the guise of 'partnership-based' projects. This new conciliatory relationship between NGOs and the state is essentially the product of a shift in NGO ideology, from more extreme forms of left-wing radicalism or Gandhian activism, to an ideological stance which is less politically confrontational.

Eight of the ten NGOs studied have some form of relationship with the AMC. One common pattern is for short-term project or issue-specific relationships to exist between NGOs and local government. This includes joint collaborations, or has resulted when NGOs lobby the AMC on specific issues. Four of the NGOs have received grants from the AMC, which occasionally consults experienced NGOs on certain projects. In its specific form, the relationship usually takes place between higher-level NGO staff and officers of the AMC. This reflects a wider national pattern in which NGOs and political parties have separated, and none of the city's NGOs claim to have any relationship with elected members of the AMC; largely because of the limited political skills of NGO staff, and as a result of a fear that communities will be manipulated by politicians with ulterior motives.

The AMC's role as a regulator of NGOs is now increasing, and its power is often used to limit the space of those NGOs whose activities go beyond basic service provision. The Society Registration Act, Income Tax Act, and Foreign Contribution Regulation Act have all increased the capacity of the state to intervene and regulate the affairs of NGOs. Even so, the Charities Commission in Ahmedabad provides NGOs with the legal recognition necessary to legitimate NGO activities.

The state acts as a funder for the NGO sector at both national and municipal levels. These funds are essential to NGO activities, but local government sources of finance also have their drawbacks. Conditions set to grants by the AMC can enable local government to define the type of programme for which the NGO is seeking funding. This often means that NGOs become merely short-term implementors of development initiatives, whilst the sector is forced to invest scarce resources in dealing with overly bureaucratic and frequently corrupt institutions. However, formal recognition by the state does have certain benefits, and, unlike during the 1970s when foreign funding was restricted, NGOs today have considerable access to foreign sources of finance.

Of late, the NGO~AMC relationship has intensified, due to the presence of a dynamic commissioner and the initiation of development projects facilitated by external agencies. But in the absence of any formal institutionalised structures, this relationship may not endure for long. For NGOs to be effective in local development, institutionalisation of these relations needs to be explored under the 74th Amendment Act. Observation of the NGOs also indicates that most organisations have maintained relations solely with the bureaucracy, and not with any elected representatives. NGOs claim that it is difficult for a relative outsider to understand the subtleties of political life, and as a result effective engagements with politicians become a highly skilled activity that only larger and 'well-balanced' NGOs can attempt. Indeed, only two NGOs have created links with the state bureaucracy of Gujarat as a whole, and an explicit strategy to influence the AMC is lacking.

Support organisations such as CHETNA have planned an agenda to forge links with the AMC, mainly because it believes that only the state has the resources and manpower essential for development (CHETNA, 1994). Although in the past the organisation has attempted unsuccessfully to train municipal officials, it is still hopeful of reviving what it sees as necessary links with the local and state governments. In the case of SXSSS, based on the mixed results of past experiences, the dilemma between rejection or co-operation with the state has been more marked.

The facilitative role of external agencies such as USAID in bridging the gap between NGOs and the local authority cannot be underestimated. USAID has worked to form partnerships between AMC and NGOs in specific projects such as health-risk assessments and an urban forestry programme. The World Bank has also aided slum networking programmes where NGOs have been effectively co-opted to participate in the project. And with the exception of Samvad and Gantar, all other NGOs studied have co-operated in these projects.

The relationship between NGOs and the AMC is also affected by individual AMC officials with strong views about the potential and expected role of NGOs. For those organisations without easy access to more amiable AMC officials the relationship tends to be uncertain and partisan. In this respect SEWA is fortunate because its past successes and national recognition have ensured favourable treatment. To an extent this is also true of CHETNA, SXSSS and Vikas, which appear to be held in high esteem by the AMC.

8.2 NGO ~ NGO Collaborations

NGOs in Ahmedabad have a wealth of concrete and intangible resources, which, if harnessed into a co-operative network, could dramatically invigorate the sector. In reality, most collaborations between NGOs are generally weak and tend to be short term, project- or issue-based and informal. NGO relationships within the sector are constrained by a number of limiting factors. These obstacles often centre around competition for funding, geographical orientation, lack of co-operative experience and personal and ideological differences. Unlike in other cities, joint projects, staff exchanges, pooled funds, peer support networks and other forms of shared resource co-operation are not in evidence in Ahmedabad. For instance, even when NGOs are working with the same target group, very different and unco-ordinated approaches are adopted: SEWA prioritises the economic empowerment of women, but when dealing with the same target group, CHETNA's focus is a concern for healthcare, whilst AWAG would promote a more socio-political approach.

All the NGOs examined have, on average, three to four significant links with other NGOs, based upon short-term initiatives. Those organisations maintaining working relationships with other NGOs generally do so informally through consultancy or training networks. But despite the fact that each NGO has some knowledge of the work of other NGOs in the city, this was generally not at an in-depth level; except where individual NGO leaders had a history of working with the other organisations studied. More formalised contacts were less frequent, and more usually based upon research, process documentation and training contracts.

Relationships between NGOs are often a function of the size and status of the institutions concerned. Small NGOs claim that large and established organisations are unapproachable, even if they are working on similar issues. There is also a strong sense of territoriality amongst NGOs, which can unnecessarily divide urban spaces amongst competing agencies. Similarly, Gujarat's NGO networks have been ineffective in counteracting this trend. This includes initiatives to form an NGO network undertaken by the Gujarat working group on women's issues and the Human Resource Development Academy, leading to the plausible conclusion that a lack of information flows and networking capabilities have stymied effective organisation at the grass-roots level.

One positive development is that training contracts and alliances over specific issues are emerging as two aspects where a degree of meaningful collaboration between NGOs has taken place. One successful example of a partnership is the linking of SXSSS's women's credit union with SEWA's own credit bank. Unfortunately such examples are rare. In general, an absence of co-ordinated efforts amongst NGOs has led to the duplication of welfare projects, research work and an absence of any clear agenda which makes a substantial impact on the public policies of the local authority. Besides this, the absence of an intra-sector debate has isolated organisations, making mutual learning processes and innovation difficult.

8.3 NGO ~ CBO Collaborations

Ahmedabad NGOs make initial contact with grass-roots communities in direct response to a variety of mitigating circumstances; namely environmental disasters, other crisis situations or debilitating social conditions. Interventions on behalf of vulnerable social groups are then made through community networks, direct visits and introductions or specific social science research. Slum community intervention processes typically trace the following sequential pattern, with an informal visit and household interview followed by a more formal introduction to local 'leaders' or power-brokers. Once interested persons and organisations are identified to conduct baseline surveys, conscientisation or community development training workshops can begin. This often precedes the formation of a local committee or community group, established to address urgent issues emerging from the baseline survey. In the final stages of the process, local field-workers are employed to facilitate the provision of needed services. And in some cases specialist NGO staff are deployed to work on particular activities requiring their relevant skills.

CBOs are formed according to the nature of the target group population they are established to support. In most cases CBOs are women-centred, but others are sector-specific. Most CBOs are dependent upon NGOs for guidance or finance. This is especially true for CBOs oriented around sector or target groups without any strong ideological underpinnings. Whenever the ideological basis of a CBO is strong, for example when the issues being addressed are fundamental to the very existence of the community, then the CBO has the potential to be much more independent of the founding NGO.

The unionised trade-based neighbourhood committees of SEWA, which are functionally linked to the main trade union, appear to have benefited from their relative independence from the NGO. And to some extent, SXSSS has also succeeded with their peace committees, by bringing communal harmony into certain sensitive areas. The drawback with these examples is that the parent NGO has still been unable to de-link from the communities in question. In another example, the alliance between SXSSS and SEWA credit unions failed because of corrupt accounting on the part of some CBO members. Vikas also has links with a large number of credit unions (Vikas Annual Report, 1992), but the nature of the organisation's links with such a vast number of CBOs is difficult to assess.

In their relations with CBOs, NGOs generally function in four main roles: as technical advisers, donors, facilitators (providing training, contacts) and employers. In general, a multitude of CBOs existed in impoverished communities prior to the entry of official NGOs. In Ahmedabad, for example, one NGO identified the existence of well over 1200 CBOs within twenty-eight communities. This in part explains the decision by several NGOs to work with pre-existing CBOs which already have working experience within the target community. In some cases it has been possible to build a strong and well-functioning CBO in a two- to three-year time period, but this is contingent upon a number of conditional factors. Most Ahmedabad NGOs regularly interact and work with a maximum of six CBOs, although the average number of CBO partners is three; Vikas has some, often tenuous, contacts with nearly 200 CBOs. In either case, when an NGO is working on a specific issue, it is possible to be in less frequent and intense contact with those CBOs not associated with the project.

Whilst some NGOs have been successful in developing CBOs, especially with women and youths, the real extent of their empowerment has yet to be tested. In this respect it is not encouraging that Ahmedabad's NGOs are still providing financial and human resource inputs into CBOs after two decades of association. At minimum, NGOs must be mandated to gradually hand over increasing

areas of responsibility to CBOs; as well as acknowledging the worth of human resources within the community itself. Ultimately, the territoriality and ownership of NGOs must be questioned, and one possible focus for such a challenge could come from an invigorated NGO sector fora, or even from NGO donors. At an organisational level, NGOs have to make themselves more accountable to the urban communities on whose behalf they are working. One suggestion is for representatives from the community to have a presence on the governing body of the NGO itself; or even for representatives from the community to be present at all staff appraisals relevant to them.

CBOs are often stronger and more independent when they are formally registered, consist of members who have had some training before the formation of the CBO, and when clear objectives *vis-à-vis* the needs of the community are set. The formation of this matrix is helped when a degree of education and confidence exists among the community, and when the NGO intends ultimately to withdraw from the community.

The main achievements of CBOs are: starting savings groups, opening up access to education and health services, sponsoring the development of new CBOs themselves and mediating with the AMC regarding tenure and basic services. In contrast, the main problems associated with CBOs revolve around their domination by higher castes, their continual financial and intellectual dependence upon the NGO, and the NGO's lack of formal accountability where the CBOs are concerned.

Clearly, NGOs can effectively facilitate the formation of CBOs, but without formal registration the CBO can remain subservient to the agenda of the founding NGO. Financial autonomy, however, is often neither possible nor appropriate. The process of withdrawal of the NGO is hazardous, but can be helped if the NGO has an explicit agenda for CBO development and increasing responsibility. Even so, several NGOs have successfully penetrated urban communities and organised groups in order to achieve measurable outputs.

8.4 NGOs, Academia, Trade Unions, the Private Sector and the Media

Many informal relationships exist between the NGOs studied and other civil society actors in Ahmedabad. These relationships are generated by the personal, academic and professional connections of NGO staff with other civil society actors sharing their concerns. The nature of these relationships does, however, vary. For example, the perceived dichotomy between theory and practice often divides academics and NGOs. This is further aggravated by the fact that most academic and research institutions are not supplementing the research needs of the NGOs. And platforms for debate between the NGOs and academics are absent. Whenever such debates have been initiated, both groups have tried to defend their subjective actions exclusively. In response, NGOs themselves have become involved in action research.

Only a small number of academics have been associated with the NGO movement since its inception, taking on such roles as trustees or advisors. Many NGOs also provide job opportunities for the students of academic institutions, but such affiliations are more often with large and established institutions involved in research and documentation. In most cases students are not involved in the grass-roots work undertaken by NGOs, whilst most academic courses do not orient

students to such activities. Moreover, students who are active in the work of NGOs are generally motivated by self-advancement, rather than ideological commitment. This suggests the need for more courses to be introduced which focus on community development and associated partnership activities.

Although the history of Ahmedabad shows that the first philanthropic voluntary organisations were the industrial houses, their acts of welfarism now appear to be dwindling. Most contemporary NGOs do not have any links with the private sector. In fact, NGOs such as Samvad and Gantar are becoming very critical of what they see as the industrialist's role in further marginalising the poor. Other organisations such as CHETNA and SEWA are willing to associate with the private sector whenever they believe the workers' best interests can be promoted. SXSSS is also critical of the private sector and will not accept financial assistance from Ahmedabad's industrialists. The attitude of AWAG in this respect is interesting as it has openly courted the financial assistance of the private sector. But largely because of the nature of its work, which is widely perceived to be both anti-state and market, none of the industrialists have been forthcoming with assistance.

On balance, most of Ahmedabad's NGOs would not rule out *a priori* collaboration with the private sector, which represents an opportunity to access funds in addition to the other external sources upon which they are dependent. This means that the private sector has the potential to be a tremendous source of additional funding, given the large number of industrial houses in India and the growth of the urban middle class. To access this wealth effectively, NGOs need to proactively seek the support of the private sector, whilst striving to educate industrialists about development issues.

As regards institutionalised partnerships with the media, only SEWA and its Centre for Environment and Education have been able to nurture a fruitful relationship. SEWA'S positive media image emanates from their high-profile work and wide international recognition. In contrast, Samvad, Gantar and AWAG have earned media recognition because of their anti-establishment programmes. As with the relationship of Ahmedabad NGOs with other areas of civil society, NGOs need to proactively reach out to media representatives in order to enhance their image.

As stated, SEWA evolved out of the ATLA, with whom it has maintained a functional relationship. However, the relations of other NGOs with the trade union sector are weak, and the association is often confined to activist organisations or institutions working specifically on labour issues, such as child labour or the rights of miners. Samvad, Gantar and AWAG have in part been successful in forging links, but given the onslaught of market forces and the demise of the organised labour movement, the NGO ~ trade union relationship is crumbling.

PART III

9. CASE STUDIES OF THREE SELECTED NGOS

9.1 St Xavier's Social Service Society (SXSSS)

SXSSS was established in response to the devastating floods of 1973 by a local priest and teacher, who successfully organised a group of young architects and a handful of NGOs to respond to the crisis. Fr Ervitti recognised that to rehabilitate the people, they would need socio-economic inputs as well as the provision of a new physical infrastructure. This position was institutionalised by the formal establishment of SXSSS in 1976, and the empowerment of the poor through community organisation, education and healthcare has become the main focus of the organisation.

Since its inception, SXSSS has developed extensively its project and programme profiles and human resource capacity. As the current director has stated, 'With more and more involvement in the Sankalit Nagar [slum area] we discovered more and more problems. This meant approaching more agencies and authorities for help, and that required more people in the office as well as in the field.' To deliver services in the slums, and at the same time meet requirements in the office requires professional staff and office amenities - thus shifting the emphasis of SXSSS from providing support to beneficiary groups and areas, to institutional capacity-building (SXSSS, 1997). Key stages in the evolution of the organisation can be identified as follows:

- **1974~79 Inception:** SXSSS's major activity was the rehabilitation effort at Sankalit Nagar. At that time the organisation was functioning from a Department of Social Development operating from a local school.

- **1979~85 Consolidation:** Besides the creation of community organisations and expansion into new slum areas, SXSSS also became actively involved in the Ahmedabad 'Food for Work' project. This expansion was facilitated by a move to larger premises.

- **1985~95 Growth:** Following the death of Fr Ervitti and the appointment of Fr Prakash as the new director, the institution developed a more formal character. This was marked by an increasing professionalisation of working practices and programme operations. The organisation also became an active participant in various civic affairs.

9.1a Goals, Planning and Decision-Making

SXSSS has a well-defined mission and vision, which is to facilitate the development, organisation and empowerment of marginalised social groups, and in particular women and children. The task thus becomes a challenge to increase the confidence, collective organisation and decision-making skills of the poor through appropriate educational and community organisation processes. The specific strategy adopted is designed to achieve this mission holistically, by combining the four

interrelated sectors of community organisation, education, healthcare and the environment into a single approach.

As part of this policy, the targets of the organisation are constituted only after the development experiences of grass-root beneficiary groups have been taken into account. As in any professional NGO, the project requirements of funders, government officials and other sponsors are also fully considered. Since activities within SXSSS are programme oriented, a significant amount of responsibility for project design and implementation is delegated to programme staff, although key policy decisions remain largely the responsibility of the director and the board.

This well-established system of delegation is co-ordinated by a process of both individual and group accountability. But one drawback is that the involvement of beneficiary groups in the decision-making process remains unclear, despite statements made by SXSSS that it is important for the views of grass-roots groups to be fully accommodated. In this regard, representatives of beneficiary groups are actively encouraged to participate in policy meetings.

9.1b Staff, Systems and Capacity

Under the directorship of Fr Ervitti the explicit focus of SXSSS was on the targeted beneficiary group, but often at the expense of human resource development within the organisation itself. Weak team-building efforts during the first few years were reflected in high staff turnover rates. In an effort to produce a team-working culture, a new emphasis has been placed upon both individual staff members and institutional development. This has resulted in the creation of a well-qualified and dedicated staff base, chosen only after a complex selection process, intended '...to inculcate commitment and interest in the society's work.'

An applicant is initially chosen by the director following a formal interview, after which the successful candidate is required to pass through a four-week orientation period or 'induction'. This involves a careful study of the vision and mission of the organisation, as well as some exposure to the field environment. This must be assimilated into a written thesis for assessment. Only when the work has been judged satisfactory can the candidate be awarded a probationary contract of up to two years. At the completion of this period, the employee may be offered permanent employment until the age of 58 years. The current composition of the entire team is stable, and the average number of working years now stands at ten.

Four different categories of staff exist within the organisation. In 1996~7 these included fifteen permanent staff members, five project staff, one part-time project assistant and four probationers; making a total of twenty-five staff members (SXSSS Annual Report, 1997). This marks a significant increase from the 1978 figure of ten, and is a response to the geographical expansion of SXSSS into additional slum areas. Employees are classified by sector, or according to their geographical location. They are trained individually each month, whilst staff meetings are held weekly with compulsory biannual and annual reporting evaluations of individual performance. Levels of accountability and organisational planning are high.

Under the organisational structure of SXSSS, each sector is managed by a programme co-ordinator and each area by an area co-ordinator. Field co-ordinators report to the director and administrative officer under the director's charge. These positions are rotating posts designed to

distribute the allocation of power within the organisation, although all strategic decision-making lies in the hands of the director and the governing body, consisting of nine members meeting quarterly.

9.1c Projects and Programmes

The long-term commitment necessary to implement successfully a multi-sectoral programme commands a diligent working culture within SXSSS. As the organisation's programmes have developed, they have gradually moved away from simply addressing immediate needs to dealing with wider city level issues. At the time of writing, one particular example is the creation of a slum networking project designed to improve the quality of public service provision. Other projects have been more *ad hoc* in nature, and have taken place as pragmatic responses to particular urban issues in Ahmedabad. Examples include the intervention of SXSSS on behalf of residents threatened by the intended demolition of a housing project by the AMC, and the co-ordination of opposition to a river front development project intended to beautify the banks of the river Banas.

In its effort to explore alternative development strategies, SXSSS staff have advocated the use of traditional and indigenous approaches to medicine and energy usage in combination with more 'conventional' technologies. An example of this approach in the sector of education is the INNED, or Innovative Education programme, which is an attempt to educate slum children using informal techniques that involve parents and guardians in the learning process. The establishment of the Centre for Orientation Research and Documentation is another step in this direction, in that the institute provides a research input into the activities of SXSSS whilst attempting to bridge the gap between development theory and grass-roots experiences.

The geographical coverage of SXSSS programmes has expanded considerably from one slum area in 1976 to a total of seven today. This has given the organisation a substantial influence within the city, and the local administration continues to acknowledge their work and has involved them as partners in several development initiatives. Given this, it is surprising that SXSSS has been confined to working in just seven slum areas, a fact explained by the director as a need to maintain standards in the communities in which the organisation already works.

The criteria for working in the areas chosen are based primarily upon need, but also in response to specific requests by residents. The ability of SXSSS to co-operate with grass-root groups sustainably is also a significant criteria for intervention, whilst the organisation will not enter an area where another NGO is already working. The impact of each intervention is then measured by a set of criteria relating to levels of participation, quality of service and the perceptions of the target group.

9.1d Funding

In the financial year 1995~6 the total annual income of SXSSS was around 3.2 million rupees, almost 70% of which came from Northern NGOs. The remainder comes from domestic sources,

including the state government. Of this finance, 80% is allocated to project costs, whilst the balance goes towards resource and administration expenses covering on average a three-year cycle. Unlike most NGOs, however, SXSSS benefits from its own corpus fund with a well-managed and established financial management system.

9.1e Linkages and Networks

SXSSS maintains a healthy working relationship with the AMC. As one member of staff has stated, 'We have always tried to work in tandem with the AMC, because we are convinced that it is the best way by which the poor can benefit from government programmes.' Such collaborations to date include:

- **Education:** Running a kindergarten and informally monitoring and evaluating the status of AMC schools.
- **Healthcare:** Management of various programmes which include post-natal care, immunisation, and responsibility for certain cases usually referred to state hospitals.
- **Community Organisation:** Organisation of communities to help them access their basic rights and services from the AMC, thus linking government authorities with local communities.
- **Environment:** Corroborations include the AGP, the Sabarmati River Front Development Scheme and the Slum Networking Programme.

The rapport which SXSSS has with grass-roots groups is of great significance to the local authorities. At present, the AMC has involved SXSSS in a major survey to identify the urban poor as part of an urban poverty alleviation programme. This delegation of function indicates a realisation on the part of local government that NGOs are better equipped to solicit reliable information at the community level.

SXSSS has important links with other NGOs in India, and as an organisation it believes that strong and effective networks between NGOs are necessary to reach the massive numbers of poor within the city. This network of collaboration does not extend to field projects, but is limited and selective in its scope. The need to create these relationships indicates an awareness that the rapid growth of NGOs has led to a general decline in the quality of their values and working practices. SXSSS therefore nurtures co-operation only with those organisations able to demonstrate a high degree of institutional integrity and social commitment.

In a world of continued social injustice, it has become part of the mandate of SXSSS to forge working partnerships between NGOs and private voluntary organisations, in the absence of adequate state service provisions. Some such affiliations are issue-based, whilst others focus upon specific programmes or projects where collaboration is viable. At the time of conducting the research, the major networks to which SXSSS was associated included: the National Slum Dweller's Federation, Voluntary Action Network India, the Voluntary Health Association of India, the Catholic Hospital Association of India, the Campaign Against Child Labour and the National Campaign for Housing Rights. SXSSS is also accredited by the World Health Organisation.

SXSSS has formed several CBOs such as the Peace Committee and *Mahila Mandals*. But with the exception of Sankalit Nagar, these remain dependent upon SXSSS in some form, whilst the NGO has been ineffective in linking up with traditional and existing CBOs. SXSSS has also been hesitant about linking with political groups, whom it perceives as a threat to its institutional independence and integrity.

9.1f Performance, Impact and Organisational Learning

SXSSS was the first recipient of the *Anubhai Chimanlal Nagarikta Puraskar* award, given in recognition of its contribution to the development of Ahmedabad. The second award that the organisation has received is the *Kabir Puraskar*, India's highest honour for efforts at fostering social peace (Hindustan Times,1995). Yet despite these national awards, an evaluation of the impact of NGO interventions can only be made in terms of the degree of recognition that the project receives, from beneficiary groups and the various local or state governments and international agencies that have contributed to the project. Because the effects of NGO interventions are not always readily apparent, an objective assessment of NGO performance is difficult to achieve, whilst specific impacts are not uniform across all geographical areas or social groups. This makes the task of equating particular developments within the slum with the performance of individual NGOs highly problematic. Broadly speaking, however, certain slums can be said to have improved in that:

- physical infrastructure has been installed or upgraded;
- marginalised groups have gained in confidence and have organised collectively;
- health education awareness has increased;
- educational awareness has increased, leading to higher rates of school enrolment;
- harmony has been brought to several slum areas with a reputation for violence;
- linkages with community groups have strengthened;
- litigations favouring marginalised groups have nurtured an awareness of their rights; and
- proposed evictions by the AMC have been prevented in certain slum areas.

Those aspects of SXSSS's performance which have been less positive include observations that:

- most CBOs are still highly dependent upon the NGO;
- the scope of NGO activities within Ahmedabad is too small to adequately tackle the problem of urban poverty;
- IEGA is not considered a main agenda despite key successes;
- political mobilisation and community organisation remains weak and local networking with existing CBOs needs to be enhanced;
- interference from anti-social groups is increasingly inhibiting NGO work; and
- apathy amongst state and local government authorities is increasing.

9.2 Ahmedabad Women's Action Group (AWAG)

AWAG's origins can be traced back to the mid-1970s when a group of six women organised themselves to challenge gender inequalities in Indian society. This movement was given a boost

later in the same decade when the national government invited the organisation to produce a series of articles which looked critically at contemporary gender issues. In the same year, AWAG published a document expressing the need for an organisation devoted exclusively to women's rights. Whilst working on a programme examining violence against women, future director Dr Pathak, pledged to establish a women's organisation in which the legal element of domestic violence was not ignored (Pathak, 1996): AWAG was subsequently started as a branch of the Foundation for Public Interest and became independent in 1983. During its rapid evolution, AWAG grew from a small informal group to a fully functioning NGO in less than a decade. This transition is summarised as follows.

- **1974~81 Inception:** In its first phase AWAG existed solely as an organisation set up to conduct and disseminate research and information on gender issues, and violence against women in particular. During this period only one full-time member of staff (unsalaried) was registered.

- **1981~94 Growth:** When AWAG was first established, a small number of field-workers and one administrative staff member joined the organisation. At this time AWAG focused on advocacy studies, which informed a strategy for change that included direct protests, street plays and posters or other popular media. This new role saw the organisation expand geographically from just one slum area to over twenty by the mid-1990s.

- **1994~Onwards, Consolidation:** From these beginnings AWAG is currently engaged in general awareness raising and service provision in the health and education sectors, in addition to being a respected research organisation.

9.2a Goals, Planning and Decision-Making

Because of the controversial issues with which AWAG has been involved, the organisation has been labelled a home-breaker, anti-men and anti-establishment. This image is now changing and the organisation has markedly increased in credibility; a factor that has facilitated the rapid growth of the organisation. The main concern of the group remains, however, to raise the status of women in society. This can be summarised by the following goals:

- improving the status of women in Indian society;
- challenging demeaning images of women as represented in the media;
- enabling women to participate in the development of the country; and
- upholding the rights of women and support of their welfare, security and education.

9.2b Staff, Systems and Capacity

Unsurprisingly, all AWAG's core staff members are women, representing a diverse mix of caste and religious groups. The organisational structure of AWAG is topped by an eight-member board

of trustees, but in reality its role has been minimal and lacked efficacy. The *de facto* head of the organisation is the secretary, who is directly responsible for over half of all AWAG's programmes. Next down the hierarchy are the programme and field co-ordinators, who are themselves assisted by deputies. Other staff are employed temporarily according to their project lifespans, whilst voluntary workers are also associated with the organisation.

A clear division can be made between office workers and field staff, who tend to be more independent and perceive their role to be more essential. Both types of employee are contracted on a project-by-project basis. Successful applications for either post are followed by a formal interview conducted by the director. A final selection is only made once a probationary and training period of three months has been completed. All statutory rights are upheld, but staff employed for two years or more do receive preferential treatment, and a degree of management professionalisation is needed. A major constraint which has limited the emergence of second-level leadership over the years has been the lack of English spoken by employees and a high rate of staff turnover.

An ongoing effort exists within the institution to improve the skills of staff members. Not only are they given opportunities to participate in important discussions, but they are also encouraged to take part in relevant training programmes. This means that despite the perceived absence of formal professionalism, staff remain committed and are well trained. Administrative staff are organised and efficient, whilst all office equipment has recently been modernised.

9.2c Projects and Programmes

AWAG's strategy to achieve its stated objectives rests on the assumption that long-term awareness raising is central to any attempt to increase the confidence of women, so that they are better equipped to demand the social rights owed to them. In light of this fact, AWAG has adopted several different methods of social intervention on behalf of carefully defined target groups.

- Undertaking projects to study the well being, security and education of women;
- organising of exhibitions, meetings and seminars;
- organising of marches and protests against violence towards women;
- participating in meetings and seminars that other groups organise;
- administrating a counselling centre to assist women taking legal action; and
- managing service provisions related to health and education, with links to community authorities where needed.

In each case, interventions are implemented as long-term multi-sectoral programmes encompassing training, education and healthcare etc.; activities initially seen as beyond the original remit of the NGO. The programme profile of AWAG has changed significantly since 1985, when two Muslim women's groups were incorporated. With this association came a new approach to poverty alleviation through income-generation schemes, and during this time a counselling centre, short-stay 'safe house' and women's helpline was established (Mishra, 1997). To meet the requirements of funders, individual projects have to be framed within the organisation's ongoing programmes that are grounded in a well-conceived and tested strategy.

Ultimately, it is only through an integrated approach that multi-dimensional social problems can be tackled. As the acceptability of AWAG has increased, their ability to forge the partnerships with local government that are necessary for the success of such programmes has improved dramatically. AWAG currently collaborates with the AMC on several major projects including the AGP, a slum networking project, and a health immunisation programme. Co-operation with the state government has been less forthcoming, although the women's centre is funded by government funds.

9.2d Funding

In 1995 AWAG's total financial input for the year was just short of 3.5 million rupees. Almost 70% of this funding comes from official donor agencies in the North, a further 10% comes from Northern NGOs, and the balance is taken from state or local government and the private sector. All such funding is earmarked for specific projects with an average time-scale of around two years. As is the case for many NGOs, core funding is generally lacking.

9.3e Linkages and Networks

According to AWAG's director, linkages between NGOs in India have yet to reach a state of maturity. These affiliations often form around the relationship between development NGOs such as AWAG on the one hand, and welfare NGOs on the other. Whereas the former group has been able to forge some issue-based associations, the later category has few experiences of co-operation. For AWAG's part, the organisation has a policy to build upon solid NGO networks. In particular, AWAG is endevouring to generate strong working relationships around the issue of violence against women, as part of their alliance with the Gujarat women's programme. AWAG is also part of the National Alliance of Women's Organisations and the All India Women's Conference, and has links with several NGOs in Ahmedabad including CHETNA (CHETNA Annual Report ,1997).

Through its series of monthly women's fora, AWAG has formed close relationship with local government, independent consultants and slum dwellers. The primary purpose of these events is to raise awareness concerning key developmental issues, but the discussions also provide a platform in which different stakeholders and organisations can interact. Even so, outcomes from activities with local government can vary and most co-operation is *ad hoc* and short term in nature. To generate a more sustainable relationship, staff at AWAG have argued that NGOs need to be involved at the conceptual and planning stage of projects. NGO relationships with the state government are somewhat healthier, and the alliance has succeeded in creating a well-managed legal aid programme. In contrast, linkages with the private sector and other NGOs have been difficult to sustain, largely because of the controversial ideology of the organisation.

9.2f Performance, Impact and Organisational Learning

The impact of AWAG's interventions has been felt in various ways, and some previously marginalised women are now better equipped to manage particular social and institutional challenges. AWAG's achievements in this regard include:

- organisation for, by and of, marginalised women;
- active and renowned media criticism;
- organised demonstrations against state police;
- organisation of previously neglected vulnerable groups like road sweepers, Muslim women and coal labourers;
- establishment of a counselling centre to discuss violence against women;
- improvement in the gender sensitivity of the state curriculum in primary schools;
- creation of links with the police and judiciary through gender sensitive training;
- successful formation of credit co-operatives in several slums; and
- improvement in the provision of basic services through public interest litigations.

Other aspects of AWAG's work have been less positive.

- High rates of staff turnover mean that the organisation suffers periodically from a shortage of well-qualified personnel. This has centralised key tasks undertaken by the director and weakened second-level leadership.
- Affiliated CBOs remain dependent.
- Networking with other NGOs and traditional CBOs in the field is lacking.
- Emphasis on the socio-political empowerment of women has marginalised the issue of economic empowerment.
- City level coverage of marginalised groups remains limited.

9.3 Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA)

CHETNA was initially conceived in 1980 after an Ahmedabad nutritionist joined that Vikram Sarabhai Community Science Centre in order to implement the Integrated Nutrition and Health Action Programme (INHAP) on behalf of the government of Gujarat. By joining together state government, a northern funding organisation and an implementing NGO, this challenging project is indicative of the changing attitude of government organisations towards programme implementation.

The project entailed monitoring close to 100 villages throughout Gujarat, with the aim of improving the impact of the region's current supplementary feeding programme. This gave each project worker valuable field and management experience, and hence the skills and confidence necessary to set up their own training and support NGO in the healthcare sector. As one CHETNA member has stated, 'There was a critical need to bridge the communication gap that existed

between the grass-roots and policy-makers, if the poor were to be empowered by an increased knowledge of health education.'

CHETNA was fully established in 1984 (with the help of a Ford Foundation grant) as an organisation intended to provide up-to-date technical support, as well as professional training in healthcare and related educational services. The focus of the organisation eventually shifted from an emphasis on training and awareness raising for grass-roots groups to capacity-building for trainers and programme managers. CHETNA consequently evolved into a support organisation, but has maintained its links with marginalised women and children through the Women's Health Development Resource Centre and the Children's Resource Centre, where it supports the work of other non-government and government actors.

9.3a Goals, Planning and Decision-Making

CHETNA's mission statement is, 'To contribute towards the empowerment of disadvantaged women and children so that they become capable of gaining control over their own health, and that of their families and their communities.' This goal was targeted not only to counteract the socio-economic marginalisation of sectors of Indian society, but also in response to the inadequacy of previous government and non-governmental organisation interventions; which were argued by CHETNA to be gender blind and piecemeal (Gulati, 1995).

As the organisation has developed, however, and as staff have gained more experience of the possibilities for grass-roots development, CHETNAS's mission statement has been challenged to adapt. Since the INHAP project first began, CHETNA has formulated a specific proposal intended to improve the quality of all subsequent programmes. These objectives should not be seen in isolation, but are part of a long-term, holistic and multi-sectoral philosophy (Stackhouse, 1995). CHETNA's role can currently be summarised as work to advance:

- preventative healthcare;
- health and nutrition education; and
- consumption of nutritional supplements.

To implement this programme as part of a broader capacity-building process requires attention to the following tasks.

- Action research and consultancy for capacity-building. This knowledge is shared by the organisation's participation in various fora and in research collaborations which feed directly into their training and advocacy programmes;
- needs assessment and goal setting through field visits and workshops so that realistic targets can be formulated;
- training and skills' assessment of staff, clients and participants;
- monitoring and follow-up support at the organisational level;
- impact and evaluation reporting, made in terms of the improved capacity of individuals and the overall effectiveness of the programme; and
- documentation and experience sharing to encourage learning beyond the programme's lifespan.

9.3b Staff, Systems and Capacity

The staff of CHETNA is highly professional in terms of commitment, task delivery and efficacy. But as with other NGOs, rates of staff turnover are high whilst qualified candidates for new positions are scarce. CHETNA attributes this situation to India's patriarchal social structure, in which career options for young females are limited. Other organisational reasons for this trend are that the lifespan of most programmes are under two years.

CHETNA has undergone significant changes in staff numbers and institutional organisation since it began as a three-member team working on the INHAP project in 1980. After the success of the 1984 Child Survival Project, the organisation expanded to ten members and moved into new premises. This was followed in 1988 by the expansion of the Growth Monitoring Project, which was to double staff numbers to twenty. A final organisational reshaping came in 1991, when, at the suggestion of PRIA, the NGO was entirely restructured into two parallel branches which focus on women and children respectively (Gulati, 1995).

The staff structure of the organisation is essentially hierarchical, and consists of an NGO director, followed by programme officers, programme co-ordinators, senior resource persons, project resource persons, assistant administrative officers, project associates and support staff. Each staff member is able to talk freely with management, despite the director's heavy involvement in discussions with multiple agencies and other administrative functions.

As the head of the institution the director is responsible for all administrative networking and negotiations with other organisations. The role of other staff members is clearly defined and they are free to conceive programme ideas and write individual proposals. Programme teams are co-ordinated by the administrative officer who communicates their needs to the relevant departments. Working practices are for the most part participatory, although core staff members command greater influence within the organisation. In addition to various informal meetings all staff members are required to meet once each month, whilst five core staff members are mandated to meet once every week. Requirements for evaluation are that detailed reports are made quarterly, annually and after the project's completion.

To appraise staff performance rigorously, CHETNA uses a self-appraisal report as well as a performance appraisal made by an immediate supervisor. These all indicate a highly professional approach to staff development and the evaluations necessary to upgrade internal systems. Needless to say, accounting and administrative procedures are fully transparent.

9.3c Projects and Programmes

There have been several remarkable changes in the projects and programmes of CHETNA since the organisation's inception. Project beneficiaries were initially considered to be mothers with young children, but gradually this perspective has changed so that women are no longer simply defined maternally, whilst children are no longer conceptualised as passive recipients of aid. This

partial separation of mother and child during programme implementation has led to a more focused system of project management. Conceptual approaches to project management have also changed, from a short-term perspective to a more long term and sustainable approach.

The most significant organisational change undertaken by CHETNA followed an evaluation conducted by PRIA in 1991. The study proposed that CHETNA was well placed to play the role of a support organisation in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan, and a decade of experience in training and the dissemination of educational research made the organisation an important resource centre in healthcare services. Thus during just one decade CHETNA has been able to shape its entire programme base, not only in terms of local needs but in a manner consistent with key macro-perspectives in health education, seen as part of an overall struggle to improve the status and condition of women.

An example of CHETNA's structured yet holistic approach to development practice is its 'Child Survival Project' started in 1984. This began by combining work on the healthcare of mothers with that of their children, which involved working in partnership with SEWA. By facilitating the participation of women and children, CHETNA was able to learn that healthcare was a socio-cultural and political issue, which frames the life circumstances of each individual to be cared for. Recognition of this fact resulted in the pragmatic separation of women's projects from those of children, although conceptually the two target groups remain intimately linked.

Further examples of CHETNA's unique programmes include the Chaitanyaa Centre and the organisation's slum health programme. The Chaitanyaa Centre was established to raise the awareness of oppressed women by providing them with the opportunity and tools to actively reflect on their social, political and cultural background. The approach taken can be described as an integrated and holistic method of awareness raising, which places healthcare in a social context that includes an examination of gender issues (Capoor and Trivedi, 1998). Specific areas of intervention at the centre are:

- healthcare and awareness raising for adolescents (12~19 years);
- nutritional development of women (20 years and over);
- maternal and reproductive healthcare; and
- psychological and occupational healthcare for women.

Although not a direct community intervention, CHETNA's slum health programme is part of the organisation's support network for awareness raising in poor areas. As with Chaitanyaa, the programme takes the form of a local centre established to facilitate the development of self-reliant communities. From these headquarters, CHETNA actively manages all field activities, such as a slum diagnostic and treatment camp, organised around the principle of optimising household coverage. The centre essentially provides preventative healthcare services through a counselling clinic held twice each week. At the field level a community worker makes regular visits to enhance the educational awareness of women and children. Local staff also organise health camps in collaboration with government-run hospitals.

As part of this programme, further co-operation with local government has been made during attempts by CHETNA to regulate basic service delivery in Ahmedabad's slums. Notable successes include the extension of water and sewerage provision to every household, and the paving of alleys in slum areas.

9.3d Funding

CHETNA's annual budget of around 1 million rupees is mobilised through several different sources, although close to 70% of funds come from Northern NGOs, with the balance donated by official donor agencies and Southern governments. In each case the average funding period for individual projects is around three years, but fortunately for CHETNA the efficacy and clarity of the organisation's work has kept levels of conditionality to a minimum. Besides such grants, CHETNA has made attempts to mobilise resources internally through its consultancy services and sale of training and educational materials.

9.3e Linkages and Networks

Networking is one of CHETNA's primary activities, and for each programme attempts are made to co-operate with relevant NGOs, government organisations and grass-roots organisations. As one employee has stated, CHETNA works as a support organisation bridging the communication gap between international developments and local communities - a task requiring extensive collaborative networks. This is helped by the instrumental contacts which CHETNA has established during the numerous training programmes and workshops which the NGO has organised or attended.

One example of collaboration between CHETNA and the AMC occurred when the State Education Board launched their programme for school health education. CHETNA's role was to provide health education and training for government officials, which was backed by general programme support and field advice. Moreover, extensive networking and collaboration with major stakeholders has given CHETNA a high profile, which has been put to effective use in influencing policy change. As part of the Health Watch Forum, it has successfully effected major revisions in state reproductive health policy.

9.3f Performance, Impact and Organisational Learning

The greatest testimony of CHETNA's achievements is the fact that the organisation has evolved from an isolated project into a functioning NGO. And as a resource centre, CHETNA has succeeded in building the capacity of partner organisations through effective training programmes. It is, however, in the area of education and resource dissemination that CHETNA has achieved most. Innovative communications and resource materials have been widely disseminated, so that local government, the state of Gujarat and central government have all identified it as a partner resource centre. This indicates the increasing dependency of other organisations on CHETNA's

expertise, despite the claim that beneficiaries are taking responsibility for project planning and the training of their own auxiliary staff.

CHETNA's impact at the grass-roots level is unsurprisingly difficult to measure because of the minimal involvement the organisation has at the community level. Even so, its work in slums areas indicates that it has succeeded in raising women's awareness of health education. The main constraints on CHETNA's work include:

- administrative and political hitches created by local government and state bureaucracy;
- lack of fit between the objectives of CHETNA and the perspective of partners;
- turnover of programme personnel necessitates an inefficient use of resources which are channelled into re-initiating programmes;
- high staff turnover can adversely affect programme continuity;
- an absence of male employees has restricted CHETNA's perspective to that of women;
- networking can be constrained by the busy schedule of staff;
- community level involvement is marginal; and
- an overemphasis on rural areas.

10. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE IN THREE SELECTED NGOS

10.1 Organisational Learning

10.1a St Xavier's Social Service Society (SXSSS)

The success of an organisation depends to a large extent on its ability to learn from its experiences as an institution. This requires a careful balance of internal reflection, feedback from beneficiaries and evaluations from partner agencies. The exhaustive work of SXSSS at the grass-roots level, combined with continuos internal and external evaluations, has allowed this learning process to become an integral part of each SXSSS programme. Only by institutionalising the capacity to learn could SXSSS adopt a philosophy in which social reconstruction and empowerment became such an important part of the organisation's work.

Probably the most significant learning experience for SXSSS has been the interventions associated with the Sankalit Nagar slum. Despite a failure to rehabilitate the poor, the NGO's various interventions have had major repercussions for the organisation. By forming close associations at the grass-roots level, SXSSS learnt how significant informal sector work based at home could be, and conversely how poor households are affected by the geographical separation of home from work: two lessons that local government planners had failed to understand. The social reconstruction philosophy of SXSSS has therefore tried to incorporate multi-sectoral perspectives into their development interventions. The Sankalit Nagar experience also educated SXSSS about urban property markets, and their impact upon the urban poor - a factor few organisations involved in the slum-networking project have addressed. Other field experiences have helped SXSSS modify their operational planning, so that field co-ordinators are now programme oriented to ensure programme consistency in different geographical areas.

SXSSS's participation in formal credit programmes has been regrettable, largely because of an incident in which bank funds were embezzled. The NGO has, however, habituated saving amongst sectors of the poor and linked them with the formal banking sector and other savings institutions like SEWA. Although community groups have called for SXSSS to organise credit schemes, because of its past experience the director believes that the organisation can play only a facilitatory role. A similar policy has been adopted by SXSSS regarding IEGA activities, which the NGO has refused to engage in beyond the role of facilitator; organising training programmes and linking interested parties.

10.1b Ahmedabad Women's Action Group (AWAG)

As part of a process of institutional learning, AWAG's core strategies for tackling gender inequality have diversified, whilst target groups have expanded and become increasingly inclusive. As a part of this programme, AWAG has developed innovative gender training programmes for the police, judges and middle-class women. A focus on the urban poor does, however, remain, and a crucial mechanism for their counselling has been an on-line telephone service. This technique has also helped AWAG to network with other organisations.

Involvement in other community-based activities such as education, healthcare, savings schemes and basic service provision are part of AWAG's function, but they remain peripheral to the NGO's primary area of concern. Because the organisation recognises the multi-dimensional nature of disputes such as violence against women, these sectors are not ignored, but are often used as entry points into gender debates. The strategy also enables AWAG to reach a larger target population, using as a focus welfare issues which are perceived to be less threatening.

Through extensive local participation, AWAG has realised that there is a need to create economic security for those women who are victims of household violence. This has led AWAG to start an IEGA programme, which is acknowledged to be one of the most successful of such schemes in Ahmedabad. The IEGA centre is run as an industrial co-operative, managed by the women themselves and employing over 100 people. By accepting contracts from the corporate sector, the co-operative is also an example of a well-run informal and formal sector linkage, which has been modelled by policy-makers in the less developed world. Despite these successes, AWAG still has reservations about concentrating strategically and organisationally on schemes which empower economically, without necessarily emancipating women in other social contexts.

Since its inception AWAG has modified its strategy with regards to savings groups. Whereas previous saving co-operatives were entirely managed by AWAG, the NGO has encouraged communities to form independent self-help groups. This strategy was consciously adopted in order to decentralise and strengthen the role of CBOs.

10.1c Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA)

CHETNA's focus has shifted markedly, from being predominantly a training NGO to running a resource centre, managing long-term programmes, and treating women and children as separate target groups. Strategies to educate trainers instead of beneficiaries, and to limit their geographical coverage are all the products of a learning process aimed at consolidating the impact of the organisation's efforts. On the other hand, CHETNA has made conscious efforts to scale up its presence at the national and international level, so that it can keep abreast of changing global issues and concepts.

10.2 Organisational Structure and Staff Profile

A degree of centralisation within the organisations studied is inevitable, given the hierarchical control exercised by the individual directors. Such centralisation did appear to be more marked in AWAG, where second- and third-level functionaries were weak. With the exception of CHETNA, the study also observed that all field-workers originated from the local areas in which they worked. This is seen as an important strategy for the participatory operationalisation of activities. In this manner, SXSSS and AWAG have taken a strategic decision to incorporate a thematic and area-based approach to staffing.

Two types of staffing system were observed within the three NGOs: permanent staff and temporary or project staff. In most cases, besides administrative personnel, only employees at the level of programme co-ordinator or above were engaged on a permanent contract. Other staff members were project staff, working for a specific period of time. This system provides programme continuity in terms of conceptualisation and methodology, but a major drawback documented throughout the study has been the lack of continuity in projects and networks, caused by exceptionally high levels of staff turnover.

The divide between programme and administrative staff is also significant. In the case of AWAG, programme staff are considered, controversially, the most important members of staff because the success of the organisation depends upon their dedication and management skills. In CHETNA and SXSSS, their professional approach to office management has prevented this problem from emerging. In response, AWAG has delegated increased powers to field-workers, so that its dependence on administrative staff is reduced.

Although at SXSSS the average period of service is ten years, this statistic has not been recorded for the other NGOs studied who lack SXSSS's selection and induction procedures. More usual is the example of AWAG, where the majority of staff are employed on a temporary basis. This fact is exacerbated by the fact that female employees, who are more prone to extended periods of leave, tend to predominate in most NGOs. This is particularly true of AWAG and CHETNA, where staff composition reflects the ideology of the organisation. However, fearing an imbalance in NGO perspectives, CHETNA is currently rethinking this strategy.

Organisational strength and efficiency also depend upon the level of education attained by staff members. In this regard, it was found that CHETNA has well-qualified staff throughout its organisational structure. CHETNA and SXSSS also have well-established procedures for candidate selection, and the majority of staff have attained a postgraduate qualification. One obstacle is that despite the growing need for technical support staff, the organisations still tend to rely on short-term contract staff or temporary volunteers. AWAG suffers from the additional impediment that whilst a smaller proportion of staff have postgraduate qualifications, few have sufficient English-language skills to communicate internationally. This problem has in turn further centralised NGO control in the hands of the director.

Team spirit is an important characteristic of a successful NGO, and strategies to encourage its development vary from formal training to picnics. Strong teams are also the result of the internalisation of organisational values. In this study, however, only SXSSS has made team-building an important agenda for the organisation at the programme level; thus giving employees substantial scope for conflict resolution. Such conscious internalisation processes were markedly weaker amongst field-workers and other temporary staff.

Professionalisation, in the sense of structuring an institution to deliver results efficiently and effectively, is an ongoing and conscious process in all the NGOs studied, especially within CHETNA and SXSSS (Lobo, 1998). On the one hand this means that increasing attention is being paid to management efficiency and the establishment of formalised management procedures, but the downside of this process is that informal contacts with grass-roots communities are often compromised.

10.3 Leadership

Good leadership is an important characteristic for development NGOs, whose work-load has increased and diversified dramatically in the past two decades. The directors of the NGOs researched are well qualified, with an ability to conceptualise and develop appropriate strategies for programme implementation. But with the exception of SXSSS, each director is also the organisation's founder, meaning that there has been no change of leadership since the NGOs were established. This often makes for a dearth in second-line leaders and AWAG in particular, despite competent programme co-ordinators, lacks a new generation of NGO leaders which has restricted the success of certain strategies. CHETNA is more fortunate in that leadership rests functionally with two additional founding members, namely the senior programme managers. Where NGOs are dominated by individual directors, constant interaction with grass-roots communities can help ensure that management structures remain participatory.

10.4 Affiliation to a Parent Organisation and the Role of Trustees

Affiliation to a parent organisation can be an important factor in the evolution and growth of an NGO. The association acts primarily as a safety mechanism, enabling the smaller organisation to survive during uncertain periods in its development. CHETNA, for example, began as a project of the Nehru Foundation and, although officially separated in the early 1980s, its close ties to the parent body continue. Since becoming independent, assistance from the Nehru Foundation has consisted of strategic guidance, access to training facilities and preferential contact with comparable institutions.

SXSSS is affiliated to the Jesuit mission throughout India. This has been a major strength in terms of the development of the organisation's philosophy, facilities and institutional linkages. Some of these benefits are provided directly from the Jesuit school located opposite the SXSSS offices. Such affiliations are absent in the case of AWAG, which despite these constraints has managed to achieve a great deal.

Directors within the parent organisation often influence the selection of the board of trustees. If these persons have the NGO's best interests at heart, a responsible board of trustees can benefit the organisation immensely. Those of SXSSS offer strategic advice and networking skills; resources lacking in the case of AWAG where conflicts over ideology have minimised the role taken by trustees. CHETNA also lacks a strong and independent board of trustees, and the organisation is subsumed under the authority of the parent body.

10.5 Research, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Most NGOs have Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Systems (PMES) in place at the organisational and programme levels. At the organisational level this is oriented towards institutional reforms, and is seen as part of the increasing professionalisation of NGO activities.

CHETNA and SXSSS have a rigorous weekly PMES, along with monthly and annual meetings and periodic appraisals of group or individual work. Unfortunately, none of Ahmedabad's NGOs have developed mechanisms to monitor progress at the grass-roots level, and baseline surveys conducted prior to any interventions are used as the sole basis for comparison. Most notably, participatory PMES incorporating beneficiary groups is lacking.

Action research is an essential NGO activity, providing crucial data on key issues, methodologies and policy change. For example, CHETNA is actively involved in research to understand the relationship between nutrition, health and gender inequality. This research has contributed substantially to significant improvements in the organisation's training and educational materials. AWAG has also relied heavily upon in-house research, which has helped it improve its understanding of violence against women, and increase its credibility with other institutions through research-based seminars. One major limitation for NGO research programmes remains the absence of allocated funds and staff resources, unless, as in the case of CHETNA, research is a primary function of the organisation.

10.6 Projects, Programmes and Funding

The funding status of an NGO is fundamental to its basic functioning. Most funding contracts for programmes cover a period ranging from three to five years, which enables a long-term planning strategy to be undertaken. Unfortunately, government grants still tend to operate on a project-by-project basis. This means that NGOs should focus their interventions strategically, so that projects are linked to the organisation's primary area of concern in a co-ordinated manner. In other cases the continuity of the project can be maintained by accessing resources from new donors or different government departments. One drawback continues to be the lack of money available to fund core project costs, which the majority of donors find difficult to finance.

A common funding strategy used by NGOs is to access multiple funding sources at both the international and national level. And all three organisations have secured finances from more than one international agency. Agencies such as CHETNA also mobilise resources through consultancy services and the sale of educational and training materials, but the percentage share of such resources is small. No organisation has yet been forced to attempt to fund projects by recovering costs from beneficiary groups, although nominal charges for services are often made.

10.7 Beneficiary Group Characteristics and Participation

The impact of any NGO intervention depends to a large extent on the characteristics of the beneficiary community. Major determinants in Ahmedabad are caste and religion, in addition to literacy rates, initial levels of social awareness and income. Low-caste groups are more problematic to assist in that they tend to be psychologically, as well as socially and economically marginalised. In contrast, women tend to be more sensitive to the efforts of Ahmedabad's NGOs, and hence they play a more predominant role in community development.

One important factor is that successful interventions at the aggregate level often hide, or even exacerbate, inequalities within the target group. Similarly, some programmes will be more successful in one community than in another with a widely different initial profile; implying that NGO interventions should be well researched, specific and multi-dimensional.

A stated objective of all three NGOs is to ensure the full participation of beneficiary groups by adopting appropriate strategies. Field-based NGOs like SXSSS and AWAG achieve this policy through baseline surveys, regular meetings and issue-based protests which involve people in development activities. SXSSS and AWAG also employ field organisers and CBO members from within the communities concerned, but observations have shown that this approach has a limited impact as such staff often lack the organisational values necessary to incite social change. Several CBOs have been formed in Ahmedabad, but levels of participation have been limited in that CBOs tend to represent specific sectors of the target group only, and efforts have not been made to scale up CBO activities.

10.8 Strategy for Withdrawal

The decision by an NGO to work with a particular community is influenced by a variety of factors. The selection process is invariably based on organisational goals, balanced with individual field realities and financial constraints. The presence of other competing NGOs is also a crucial consideration. Field NGOs like SXSSS often begin by dividing Ahmedabad into zones, within which an assessment of the urban poor is conducted. This technique is often combined with a more qualitative assessment of whether the community presents opportunities for developing sustainable relationships with local residents. Initial contacts in this respect can be very influential. Opportunities for CHETNA to access stated target groups are essentially demand driven, especially in the case of training courses.

Self-reliance of target communities is an important end goal for Ahmedabad's NGOs, but none of the organisations examined have a specific plan or time frame for withdrawal. So far, there are no examples of successful withdrawal by an Ahmedabad NGO from a slum area or CBO. Only AWAG's IEGA programme, which has been transformed into a co-operative organisation is arguably self-sustaining. Most NGOs can be said to have succeeded in achieving their sectoral objectives, without making the leap to programme withdrawal.

10.9 Political Environment

A characteristic feature of the three NGOs is a good understanding of political issues at the local and national level, although for reasons of impartiality (respecting both funders and beneficiaries) none are directly affiliated to a political party. The three NGOs desire social change, but with a minimum of conflict. They have therefore adopted a reconciliatory posture when dealing with other developmental actors such as the state. All the NGOs studied have a political ideology, but only in the case of AWAG, in its role as a pressure group, is direct political activism prominent. Political participation by NGOs is generally indirect, and manifests itself in the form of issue-based coalitions over resource use and legal conflicts, or as part of the NGO's contribution to

education and awareness raising. Strategies to influence national level politics and policies are more likely to include networking and discussions in national fora, than political party representation.

Recent processes of democratic decentralisation have given a new impetuous towards developing a plural society, whilst within Ahmedabad a long history of voluntary action has enriched civil society groups within the city. Besides the state, other bodies such as commercial and academic institutions have also acknowledged the worth of NGOs, which has helped provide an accommodating environment for their work. This relationship is less positive at the local level, where politics, caste and religion have become a major hindrance to NGO interventions. A factor particularly true for field-based NGOs such as SXSSS and AWAG.

10.10 Linkages with Other Development Actors

A trend emerging amongst the three organisations is a desire to strengthen networks with national and international development agencies. Participation in international fora is perceived to offer NGOs credibility, and provides organisations with further opportunities for networking. Because of staff and financial constraints, only CHETNA out of the three organisations studied is regularly involved in international events.

The impact of the three NGOs at the state and national levels has been improving. Most notably, SXSSS programmes in community development, urban forestry and communal harmony have been used by the local authority as models for use beyond the original geographical area of operation. AWAG's work addressing the issue of violence against women has been most affective at the state level. Its legal centre today encompasses different state districts and different actors including the government; whilst its initiative to make school curricula gender aware was statewide.

From the outset, CHETNA has oriented itself towards addressing health education issues for women at a macro-level. Today, however, thanks to the NGO's training programme, CHETNA is a national organisation for the education of development practitioners. Besides this, its advocacy role at the local, state and national level has been influential in a number of cases. But it is important to note that success at the macro-level may not always correlate with micro-level expectations.

A positive feature apparent in all three NGOs is their emphasis on collaboration with other institutions. One visible development has been improvements in the relationship between NGOs and the local authority, who have realised the importance of co-operation on specific projects. Unfortunately, this relationship has not yet been formalised and depends, often arbitrarily, upon the individual heading the AMC department concerned. NGOs can find it difficult to work with government officials because of differences in their working culture and ideology. Moreover, being contracted on a short-term basis to implement projects already designed, greatly limits the input of NGOs in the development process. Conversely, however, NGOs do not have the legitimacy or resources to replace local government as a service provider. To an extent this has made NGOs unsure about their identity, and for some the role NGOs have taken in supplementing the work of government is inadequate.

Interactions between the three NGOs remain weak and informal. Relationships are generally limited to meetings, seminars and issue-based protests, with little incentive for collaboration at the grass-roots level. Differences in ideology and working culture have been cited to justify this, but the territorial nature of NGOs is a more likely explanation. The NGOs have also attempted to collaborate with the private sector, particularly banks involved in micro-finance. Other than this link, few NGOs have succeeded in forging fruitful collaborations with local industry or commerce - despite the stated importance of such alliances to NGOs such as CHETNA, who organised a local development fair to encourage corporate involvement in community issues. In this case, co-operation with corporate institutions is considered to be important because of the financial, technical and human resource potential offered by the sector.

PART IV

11. NGO PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT IN AHMEDABAD

11.1 Immediate Programme Outputs

The pie chart below shows the rates of target accomplishment for all projects undertaken by NGOs in Ahmedabad. The smallest level of target accomplishment has been set at 10% or less, whilst a moderate degree of accomplishment is set at 10 to 30%. A 30 to 100% target accomplishment rate is reserved for those NGOs with the highest target attainment levels. But in reality, none of the NGOs responding, reported to have achieved all their targets completely, and the peak level recorded was 80%.
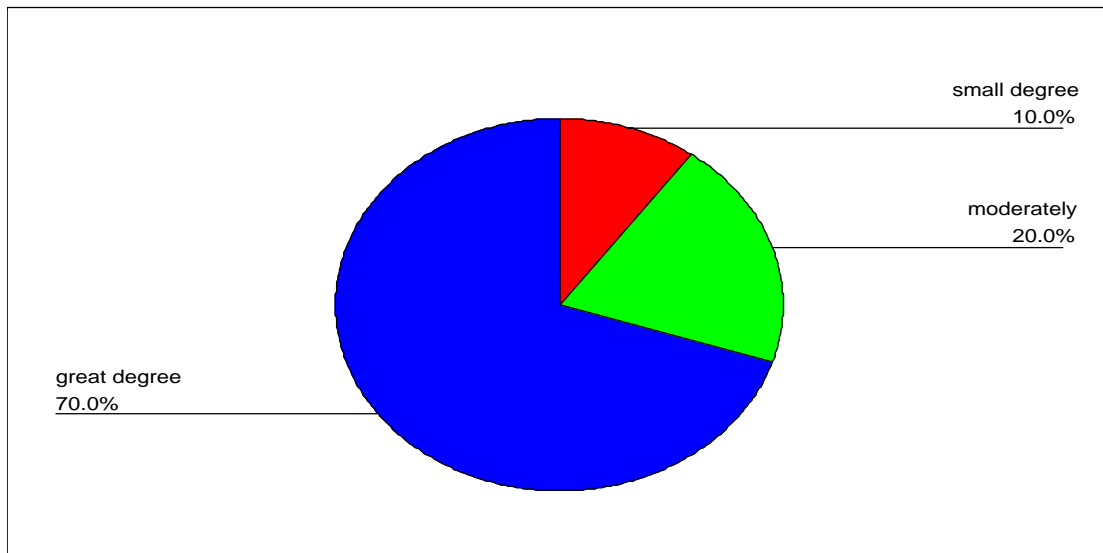
Figure 4: Target achievement rates for NGOs in Ahmedabad

As urban NGO targets are rarely stated in specific, measurable terms, these goal achievement rates cannot be quantified with complete accuracy. This proposes the question, whether or not logical frameworks or strategic planning models that use specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound targets, can help urban NGOs in spite of the myriad of problems from which their projects are at risk. The more effective NGOs are therefore those able to monitor and adapt to the volatile environment in which urban NGOs operate.

From Figure 4 above, it is clear that the majority of NGOs regard themselves as capable of achieving most of the objectives that they set themselves, and this is reflected in the reputations of CHETNA, SEWA and Samvad. However, when confronted with this suggestion, Samvad stated that it was currently only completing its targets to a small degree; but has consistently won tenure rights and litigations against the AMC, as well as facilitating the development of community committees around human settlement issues.

Aggregate achievements that the urban NGO sector in Ahmedabad has achieved include:

- improvements in the health awareness and status of beneficiaries;
- improvements in the access and attendance of children to education;
- limited success in improving the physical environment;
- improvements in the financial management, economic organisation and overall income level of beneficiary groups;
- improved access to land and specific services for the urban poor; and
- success in the development of appropriate appropriate technologies.

11.2 Community Capacity and Empowerment

The following is an attempt to assess the extent to which NGO programmes in Ahmedabad have facilitated the empowerment of marginalised communities. The NGO sector of Ahmedabad has provided a range of appropriate health and educational services to the urban poor, as well as opening up access to governmental services where present. This has largely been achieved after building a rapport with target communities; often during awareness raising programmes, or while identifying and training local workers. The different approaches and history of the NGO, as well as differences between and within local communities, play an important role in explaining any variation in the level or quality of such services.

The NGOs also play a key role in securing water, electricity and refuse collection services for marginalised communities; as well as helping these communities gain more formalised and permanent forms of land tenure. Those NGOs providing training, be it related to healthcare or small-enterprise development, have seen a strong increase in demand for their services; thus confirming the relevance of the courses they have provided. Yet surprisingly, no study has been made of whether or not there is any link between formal training and project success rates.

The output of NGOs with regard to income- and employment-generating activities are also ambiguous. A significant proportion of such programmes have failed to be profitable, and this in part reflects the limited commercial expertise of the NGO trainers. For example, although credit unions have been successfully formed, their development has varied between those expanding in size, and others which have struggled to survive.

The majority of NGOs are trying to develop alternative community-level poverty reduction systems, whilst others are trying to reinvigorate existing approaches. Several more specific sectors of intervention, related to community empowerment will now be examined in greater detail.

- **Awareness Raising:** Raising the awareness of target groups has given a number of organised communities the skills and confidence necessary to manage elements of their own development. The success of awareness raising programmes undertaken by NGOs in Ahmedabad has, however, varied, both between and within communities. In respect of healthcare, the incidence of fraudulent doctors has decreased, whilst regarding water and sanitation issues some groups have successfully negotiated with the AMC to acquire key facilities. But these benefits have not been felt by all sectors of marginalised society. More generally, there has been a significant reduction in the presence of open sewage and associated health problems following protests initiated by awareness raising programmes.

- **Training:** A tactic of the NGOs examined is to identify and train individuals within a target population, who are used as a key source of information and links to other target groups within Ahmedabad. These individuals have also proved to be effective mobilisers and animators of their peers, even after the formal connection with the NGO has ceased. Once community groups have established contacts with an NGO, they are likely to maintain regular meetings and undertake planning and action work at all stages of a project's cycle.

- **Reduction in Communal Tension:** SEWA, SXSSS and Samvad all claim that there has been a reduction in communal tensions within each of the communities in which they have been working. SXSSS has stated that during the last incidence of citywide communal violence its associated slums were unaffected. This fact is attributed to the immediate actions that SXSSS takes when any rumours emerge within the slums that seek to fuel communal tensions.

- **Recognition of Land Rights:** From our examination of the range of NGO activities, it is clear that there are specific gaps in the capacity of Ahmedabad's NGOs to tackle certain urban poverty issues, despite the sectors stated commitment to poverty reduction. Even with the prospect of slum clearance projects looming, the challenge of establishing land tenure rights has not been sufficiently addressed by the NGO sector in Ahmedabad. This is despite the fact that security of tenure is essential if economic empowerment and access to basic services is to be enhanced. Given the scale of the problem, it is surprising that only one NGO has fought specific battles for vulnerable communities attempting to defend their right to tenure. The main factor impeding NGOs is that conflicts over land rights are often tense and highly politicised.

- **Rights of Women:** The balance of evidence suggests that a positive change has occurred in the status and circumstances of women within local slum communities, but it is difficult to isolate the contribution of NGOs to this. However, the examples which they site include AWAG's assistance to Muslim women wanting an end to *purdah*; and the challenge made by CBO members associated with SXSSS, Saath and CHETNA, against violence to women. The work of certain NGOs has significantly reduced the vulnerability of self-employed women. This has been achieved either by collectively organising women to demand a range of rights and concessions or by helping them to link with established credit institutions.

- **Income and Employment Generating Activities:** IEGAs are an emerging policy field in South Asia. The dearth of NGO involvement in IEGAs in Ahmedabad reflects the fact that core staff are predominately from non-economic or non-management backgrounds. Of those income-generating activities that Ahmedabad NGOs have established, few have recorded significant profits or developed beyond home-based production units. Although credit initiatives to individual CBO members are a useful starting point, they are no substitute for financing small-business development. Fortunately, a number of emerging alternative financial institutions now exist, most notably the SEWA Bank.

Despite notable successes, Ahmedabad's NGOs have tended not to have strengthened CBOs institutionally, to the point that the founding NGO can withdraw. This leaves us wondering what would be the effects of withdrawal by a greater number of NGOs. Several organisations claim that whilst associated CBOs would persist, they would survive in a weakened form and with limited funding. Most CBOs therefore remain financially and functionally dependent on their founding NGO, and few provide adequate levels of service delivery, either qualitatively or quantitatively. Others stated that the work they had initiated would be continued at the community or individual level by existing associates of the NGO. Samvad's CBOs have been comparatively more effective and independent, but remain ideologically weak and unable to unite heterogeneous communities within marginal areas.

In helping them assess the possibility of withdrawal from target communities, few NGOs have the resources to conduct thorough baseline research on individual target groups; thus limiting the scope of specific impact assessments. One reason for this is the heterogeneity of urban communities that complicates the research process, and limits the extent to which an individual researcher can fully appreciate the lived experiences of the poor.

11.3 Advocacy and Effect on Public Policy

Of the ten NGOs studied only SEWA, AWAG, Gantar and Samvad have had a significant impact in changing public policies and the law. These NGOs are not service delivery organisations, but are more concerned with bringing about structural changes in society, which can lead them into direct conflict with the state.

SEWA can be regarded as the most successful of the organisations studied in effecting policy changes at the national level. Because of its efforts, the state government has been forced to recognise the rights of home-based workers and the status of the International Council of Free Trade Unions. As a consequence of its efforts, the 1991 census was the first to enumerate the work of women as a separate category in society. At the local level, SEWA's important achievements include the protection of the rights of women hawkers and street vendors. SEWA was also instrumental in drawing up an agenda for the National Commission on Women; whilst SEWA's founder, as a member of the Central Planning Commission, has actively campaigned in the interests of women at a national level.

AWAG has successfully brought about substantial changes in public policies regarding the status of women. In response to its lobbying, the state of Gujarat has changed educational literature to make the publications more sensitive to gender issues; as well as forcing changes in the media so that advertisements and cinema depicting women in a derogatory manner are restricted. AWAG has also successfully conducted gender-sensitive awareness programmes for the local police.

Gantar has been successful in promoting the interests of Gujarati children exploited for their labour. As members of the co-ordination committee for campaigns against child labour, it is spearheading the movement in the state, and has mobilised both the public and other NGOs to attack the problem. After filing cases against the local authority and private developers, Gantar now offers an effective deterrent against the abuse of children.

At the local level, Samvad's major role can be seen in attempts to protect the rights of slum dwellers. Because of its efforts in some slums the local authority has recognised the tenurial rights of those in poverty. Samvad continues to mobilise slum dwellers against city beautification schemes which threaten to displace them.

Although the dialogue between Vikas and CHETNA and state policy-makers is conducted on a regular basis, as instruments of change their impact at the policy level has been limited. Senior officials of the AMC and state government have not, by and large, attended the training courses and workshops organised by these institutions. This illustrates how most examples of successful advocacy work are confined to particular modes of NGO operation. In part, this can be attributed to the fact that most NGO operations are restricted in scale. This limitation could be overcome partially by greater collaboration between NGOs and state agencies. Other major constraints on NGOs having a citywide impact are:

- high staff turnover and variable quality;
- weak long-term strategic planning;

- poor exit strategies;
- inadequate financial management systems;
- inappropriate organisational structures;
- poor linkages with other development actors, including the municipality;
- weak policy-development processes;
- too broad a spread of activities; and
- focus and orientation on too specific communities.

11.4 Overview of Programme Outputs for Individual NGOs

Ahmedabad's NGOs are largely able to identify, target and reach the urban poor with the approaches adopted in most of their programmes. It cannot, however, be claimed that they have reached the poorest of the poor, although those targeted are evidently at the margins of society; according to the community or occupation-based categories that describe them. The following confidential accounts describe the main impacts of each NGO examined.

- **NGO A**: The achievement rate for NGO A's education programme is a moderate 30%. But as acknowledged by donors, its initial targets were far too optimistic. In the case of healthcare, it has been able to achieve 50 to 70% of its targets - particularly with its TB eradication programme, nutritional support programme for pregnant women and slum sanitation programme. Positive aspects of NGO A's broader slum programme have meant that in projects such as health and education, resources have in fact been mobilised from the beneficiary group itself, and 25% of project costs are borne by the slum community. This has been facilitated by the formation of committees in two specific project areas; although an external evaluation undertaken by the donor agency concluded that community organisation was weak. The NGO director has attributed this fact to a combination of overambitious targets and delays in the receipt of funding which adversely affected their work.

- **NGO B**: The most tangible impact of the work of NGO B has been in raising the income of coal-loaders, made possible by the unionisation of the workers. It has also succeeded in providing additional land plots for slum dwellers, and has helped establish twenty-five local committees in various slums, covering 30,000 people. Credit co-operatives for the sweeper community, and income-generation schemes amongst Muslim groups have also been a success. This group has now been registered formally as an industrial co-operative run by Muslim women. The NGO's regularly held workshops on issues relating to the abuse of women has also considerably increased the awareness and confidence of this group; whilst a gender-sensitivity training programme, incorporating men and the police, has been effective in raising the status of women and female children. Combined with this programme is a counselling service for battered women, which has registered ten cases and advises on ten to twelve each month.

- **NGO C**: The organisation works in seven slums, all of which have local committees intended to take over the work initiated by the NGO. The decision for the NGO to pull out is based on both the strength of the community organisation, and on improvements in the overall living standards of the slum; including access to child day care services and a peace committee. Its experience with credit unions has, however, been mixed, although a linking credit union with SEWA Bank has had some success.

- **NGO D:** This NGO works primarily to train other NGOs, government officials and individuals in the health and education sectors. Its most successful venture has been a school health monitoring programme, established in conjunction with the AMC. In this programme around 45,000 students up to the age of 15 years have regular access to healthcare monitoring. The NGO has also trained teachers, and helped the AMC to create an innovative database to monitor the project. Under this project, the doctors visit to the schools is institutionalised to ensure greater levels of accountability.

- **NGO E**: The first NGO in Ahmedabad to protest against child labour, and it has filed litigations against the AMC and private developers. Its major success has been to enrol 50% of child brick kiln workers in the area onto school and vocational training programmes. The NGO has also succeeded in developing appropriate technologies, for agate polishing industries in the rural areas of Cambay. An equally successful campaign stopped child labour in all municipal construction programmes.

- **NGO F**: The health services, awareness and education programmes of NGO F have significantly brought down infant mortality rates (from 118 per thousand to 46 per thousand) in four slum areas of Ahmedabad. Moreover, the immunisation rate has increased from virtually zero to 82%, whilst the incidence of diarrhoea and malaria has decreased. NGO F has also formed what are now independent CBOs in two slum areas; along with an all women managed credit union.

- **NGO G:** The organisation has successfully negotiated with the AMC for improved water supplies and other civic amenities for one of Ahmedabad's slums. Unfortunately, these services are not slumwide because of internal conflict amongst the slum dwellers themselves. Despite this the NGO has succeeded in stopping payments of illegal rents in one slum, and it has prevented evictions by the AMC in some areas. NGO G has contacts with fourty-five slum areas in three slum quarters, some of which have CBOs developed enough for the NGO to withdraw. Ultimately, because NGO G is not a service delivery organisation, its immediate impacts are difficult to measure.

- **NGO H:** The focus of NGO H is the organisation of over 75,000 self-employed women, one-third of whom are categorised as urban. The unionisation of self-employed women has been responsible for increases in income and improved access to credit facilities. The overall condition of women has also improved, with the introduction of NGO H healthcare programmes, maternity and life insurance benefits. Trade-based neighbourhood committees formed in all areas of operation have been successful.

- **NGO I:** NGO I has successfully liaised with CBOs in both rural and urban areas to prepare a directory of CBOs and credit organisations. Of nearly 400 known CBOs it has direct contact with half, in addition to almost 1,000 credit-related organisations. NGO I has also successfully undertaken participatory research and training workshops, which have a reached variety of actors to increase levels of awareness concerning the lifeworlds of the urban poor.

- **NGO J:** Being a support organisation for other NGOs the impact of NGO J is more difficult to assess, in that its immediate programme outputs cannot be measured in terms of their effect on poverty alleviation. Although the organisation does not work directly with impoverished target communities, its success is evident by the fact that its client numbers are increasing. The

organisation has also been influential in advocating policy changes within local government, which should benefit the poor in the long term.

12. FINDING A PATHWAY: URBAN NGOS IN AHMEDABAD

12.1 Partnerships and Collaboration for Citywide Change

The intricate web of relationships in urban development interventions presents NGOs with a complex mix of potential opportunities and constraints. The scale of developmental problems existing within Ahmedabad, suggests the need for closer working partnerships between the local government, CBOs, the private sector and other NGOs. This implies a need to jettison the outdated categories which have polarised development actors between two worlds of heroes and villains. The experience in other countries is that NGO performance and impact is enhanced by working in combination with other stakeholder groups. As it stands, NGO collaboration in Ahmedabad is woefully *ad hoc* and remains issue-based - whilst attempts at scaling up NGO activities to reduce costs and broaden their impact have been absent.

To enhance the performance of these new forms of partnership, NGOs will have to be both flexible and innovative. This is particularly important in a rapidly changing society, where the significance of multiple institutions as agents of change is increasing. To avoid a confusion of roles, any partnership would have to be nurtured within a coherent ideological and strategic framework, that enables NGOs simultaneously to co-operate with, yet critique, other institutional actors. This helps ensure that partnerships do not result in the co-optation of NGOs, which diverts them from addressing local issues. Conversely, where the partnership is manipulated by the NGO to influence the beneficiary group, local communities may be unenthusiastic about forming an

alliance. In particular, funding relationships and the organisation's understanding of its own institutional role and mission must be especially clear.

The study indicates that it is important to develop core competencies within an NGO if effective partnerships are to be developed. To maximise their effect, these organisational changes can only take place if a favourable enabling environment exists at the macro-level. This can be facilitated by formal legal agreements designed to increase the transparency and accountability of the actors involved. The experience of SXSSS shows that NGOs can only engage in multiple activities successfully, if these interventions are properly linked and supported by rigorous field-work, in the context of conducive and consistent government policies. Democratic decentralisation initiatives, which increase levels of public participation, can be cited as an important step in this direction.

The nature of an organisation in terms of its leadership, staff qualities and organisational management is fundamental if new institutional alliances are to be forged. In the case of AWAG, an absence of staff with foreign-language capabilities and an overburdened director have been a major constraint upon the organisation's ability to sustain working partnerships with other developmental actors. However, although an improvement in personnel may be important, a sustainable partnership has to be rooted at the institutional level. This includes institutionalising a transparent and participatory decision-making process involving all staff members. Such problems are markedly less in those organisations where individual initiatives are thoroughly planned as part of an organisational vision internalised by the majority of staff members. Where the ideology and staff make-up of an institution varies widely, the likelihood of a successful partnership emerging is decreased.

Partnership initiatives are often easier for support organisations involved in training and advocacy, than for grass-roots organisations engaged in physical improvement schemes and service delivery. The initiation of schemes at the grass-roots level requires the implementing NGO to take a greater number of risks, and the success of the project is never guaranteed. For example, project-based collaborations with the local authority are normally short term, when compared to partnerships at the policy-making level; which despite other limitations are generally of a long-term nature. In such cases, NGOs such as SXSSS and CHETNA have on occasions been involved in project-based policy decisions with the AMC, but most NGOs still seek more formalised and active involvement, not just at the project implementation level, but at the level of citywide policy decisions.

NGOs which have built a space for research and learning into their programmes tend to have greater advisory and consultancy arrangements with the municipality, and will potentially co-operate on citywide initiatives. A prerequisite for achieving such results is for the NGO to develop the skills necessary to be able to engage effectively with municipal government and the state in its entirety. Informal and intermittent contacts, at best, tend only to yield temporary results. This means that one way forward is for the NGO to develop formalised and more permanent relationships at all levels of government. This requires political skill, innovative policy developments and an effective, workable strategy. If the partnership is too imbalanced, and local government dominates relations with the NGO, the outcome is often a patronising attitude amongst government officials which inhibits development at the grass-roots level.

A major failing of several attempts to create a workable partnership with local government is that initiatives have tended to ignore the role of elected politicians who, along with the bureaucracy, are crucial actors in the development process. Despite accusations of corruption and insincerity, politicians alone have legitimacy for representing people in democratic political system. The non-inclusion of politicians often creates unnecessary problems, in that managerial approaches to resolving conflicts over urban governance are partial and controversial. Given that development is a political process a rejuvenation of the political system is essential if worthwhile programmes are to succeed.

Direct community involvement in all projects and programmes helps facilitate the development of productive partnerships at the local level. The effectiveness of such partnerships depends upon both the commitment and resources of the community and the resources and institutionalised qualities of the NGO. Most of Ahmedabad's NGOs have successfully facilitated the development of a number of CBOs. But it is unclear to what extent these actually strengthen their target communities. Several CBOs have taken initiatives to form new groups within the communities with which they work. In general, these are credit and savings organisations, which draw their constituency from catchments extending beyond the communities focused on. The benefit of these CBOs is that they have helped in opening up access to various AMC schemes, from which slum areas were previously excluded.

Several CBOs have enhanced the economic organisation of particular slum communities. For example, one collective of coal-gatherers was able to increase its labour rates as well as secure a stipendary payment for non-working days. Other CBOs have successfully secured preferential rates from suppliers for basic manufacturing materials. More radical are those CBOs who have been able to delink from exploitative relationships with dominant interest groups. These cases tend to concern housing issues which have been resolved by both informal and legal means. The fact that a number of CBOs are taking active steps towards setting up counterpart organisations in other communities is indicative of their organisational strength and collective vision. The ultimate aim of most CBOs is to spread the concept and values of local democracy, through the internal workings of the CBO itself.

Before the decline of the textile industry in Ahmedabad, a considerable degree of collaboration existed between industrialists, the local authority and voluntary organisations. This unity was largely the result of the vision and patronage of specific industrialists. But the collapse of Ahmedabad's industrial economy and the emergence of a plural political culture has made sustaining such partnerships increasingly difficult. Partnerships involving NGOs and the private sector in promoting small enterprise development is not now emphasised. In response, the state government has produced a policy document which discusses enthusiastically the potential for private sector involvement with the NGO sector.

External agencies like the World Bank and USAID have promoted partnerships between NGOs and other development actors in Ahmedabad, such as the slum networking project and an initiative to green Ahmedabad. Unfortunately these relationships are unsustainable and generally fade once the interest of the external agencies is exhausted. Under such circumstances partnerships become merely cosmetic, and most projects remain at the pilot stage.

12.2 The NGO Sector in Ahmedabad

For individual NGOs, institutional changes with a sector-wide impact are a massive and difficult undertaking. Working in isolation, urban NGOs can become lost in the myriad of multiple activities with which they are engaged. This leaves little time to consider their own long-term, citywide impact, despite the potential that exists for collective NGO negotiations with the municipal authorities.

This changing relationship between mission, strategy and environment, raises important questions about the leadership and management potential of urban NGOs. This organisational inertia makes it difficult for founder-directors to consider reorienting the organisation, or shifting power relations between staff members. As few staff are regularly exposed to the methods of other NGOs it is difficult for individuals to conceptualise and implement other approaches.

The tendency remains for NGOs to work independently within the urban context. Such is the prevalence of poverty that NGOs can be seen dividing slum areas between themselves, carving out sectoral specialisations, or even working with the same target group from different perspectives. The danger here is that geographically focused NGOs will develop intra-communal dependencies, whilst NGOs specialising sectorally may find themselves engaged with beneficiary groups in a more arbitrary manner. By forcing NGOs to act in isolation, these divisive tendencies have the potential to undermine the impact of the sector in effecting citywide change in Ahmedabad.

Without more intensive partnerships, NGOs are missing an opportunity for mutual learning and innovation. Of the many openings that can be created, NGOs can begin to work together by sharing their experiences and concerns in both formal and informal settings; thus creating an important role for open fora, networking, discussion seminars and apex agencies. The secondment or placement of staff within partner NGOs should also be encouraged; in addition to co-operative exercises in which one NGO orients another in a new area of work. The professional skills exist within a significant proportion of NGOs to take a lead in this role. If NGOs are to remain committed to urban poverty reduction, participative democracy and an end to exploitation, such engagements are crucial.

Clearly, a divide exists between what NGOs record as their mission and their activities as actually practised. Given their stated objectives, one would expect that institutional development, legal change, literacy, advocacy, social mobilisation and collaborative partnerships would be the major programmes undertaken. However, closer analysis reveals that service delivery, grass-roots capacity-building, training and socio-economic research dominates most NGO work.

12.2a Achieving Focus

NGOs must work towards developing the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to enable them to take on a more process-orientated role in development practice. The danger is that without undertaking such a role, a rigid structure and culture will be imposed upon the NGO sector that

will be difficult to shake off. In extreme cases, the NGO may become involved in a myriad of functionally unconnected activities, which distract the NGO from fulfilling its long-term strategy.

The experience of certain NGOs within the city demonstrates an ability to mobilise communities, institute legal changes and adapt to governmental structures, without having to prove the value of the NGO to the target community (Lobo, 1998). These successful NGOs have a unique organisational structure, able to demonstrate clarity concerning the strategies needed to achieve target goals. Although Samvad has relatively few staff, it has still been able to influence the policies of the AMC *vis-à-vis* slum communities. Moreover, Samvad has tended to limit its presence in the daily workings of communities attempting to develop CBOs. More formally, Samvad has ensured that there is sufficient legal literacy amongst their staff, which is used to support the twenty-five communities with which they work. This has provoked a reaction from rent collectors, senior government officers, the police and the community itself. As such, Samvad better fits those models which argue that as an organisation working to challenge the status quo, an NGO requires a task structure, staff with public policy experience and an understanding of the private sector.

12.2b Organisational Agility in a Changing Policy Environment

Urban NGOs have to develop an acute social awareness and analytical understanding if their work is to remain relevant and successful. Many NGOs are skilled at assimilating trends within specific communities and then acting upon them accordingly. And the work of SXSSS in countering communal violence in slum communities is a good example of this. However, social and economic changes at the regional level can have a severe and immediate impact on the urban poor, which must be anticipated by the NGO community. Taken together, several socio-economic developments are increasing the vulnerability of the urban poor in Ahmedabad, at the same time that their capacity for resistance is being reduced. Whilst no NGO can be expected to address all these issues, it would be reasonable to expect some NGOs to develop initiatives capable of countering adverse micro-level effects.

The River Bank Development Scheme and city beautification plans will have the immediate impact of displacing slum dwellers from their communities. This has been campaigned against by the NGO sector as a whole, whilst some organisations have prepared contingency plans if the initiatives go ahead. In contrast, the retrenchment of the textile industry, responsible for increasing rates of unemployment within the city, has not featured as part of the analysis of most NGOs. Combined with the trend towards bureaucratisation of urban government, contracting-out and private financing, these factors have had major implications for marginalised groups attempting to access basic services.

At a broader level of analysis, economic liberalisation processes are having a number of effects on the region of Gujarat. With land prices set to rise, the vulnerability of the urban poor to eviction is increased; at the same time that flexible labour policies are forcing marginalised workers into the informal sector. This is taking place in the general context of the urbanisation of the Ahmedabad~Mumbai corridor, which continues to swell the ranks of the urban poor within the area.

12.3 Towards a Conclusion

The policy environment within which Ahmedabad's NGOs work is characterised by a complex series of relationships between other NGO stakeholders, the local and national government and the beneficiary groups themselves. The lack of co-operation between NGOs in Ahmedabad needs to be dramatically improved if a citywide assault on poverty is to be made. This means developing an integrated NGO network, as well as facilitating co-operation between individual NGOs, so that resources are not wasted in competition for funding - or by NGOs serving the same beneficiary group, or focusing on an inappropriate sector of intervention. NGOs could also benefit from a process of mutual organisational learning, in which information on best management practice and organisational development is shared.

If NGOs are to enhance the quality of their interventions, by gaining wider access to target groups and an improved understanding of their material and social needs, beneficiary groups must be granted full participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. To maximise the potential of this approach, the NGO sector must attempt a collective shift, from an emphasis on the provision of goods and services, to a more facilitatory role that focuses on enhancing the capacity of the local community. In this regard, a change in the nature of NGO relations with CBOs is required, if these institutions are to strengthen themselves to a point where NGO control can be shaken.

Local government remains a highly influential actor in the management and funding of urban development programmes, and the same principle must be applied to NGO relations with the AMC. A worthwhile partnership for effective change in Ahmedabad, can be achieved only through a sustainable relationship with this authority. In addition to greater NGO collaboration when dealing with local municipalities, the AMC should itself be reformed, so that it is more responsive as an institution to the needs of its constituents, and more open and unambiguous to those NGOs trying to formulate a clear strategy for interaction.

There are no ready-made quick fixes for tackling urban poverty. What this paper has attempted to show, is that by taking certain focused and strategic decisions, within the context of a changing social and economic environment for the NGO sector, the problems of urban poverty and social marginalisation can at least be challenged. In immediate terms, an examination of the everyday workings of NGOs in Ahmedabad points towards the need for an established set of criteria that will enable further evaluations of urban NGO activities to take place.

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Finding a Pathway: Understanding the Work and Performance of NGOs in Ahmedabad, India

Shrawan Acharya with Leo Thomas and Jon Taylor

Rapid urbanisation within Ahmedabad has stretched the city's economic, social and physical infrastructure to the point where traditional state mechanisms for the alleviation of poverty can no longer cope. A growing urban population increasingly competes for a limited number of jobs, housing amenities, transportation and healthcare facilities. Within Ahmedabad the losers in this process are becoming ever more marginalised both socially and geographically, whilst the complexity of their interactions with the economic, social and physical environment is intensifying.

Within this context national and local responses to urban poverty are becoming increasingly problematic. NGOs are beginning to realise that to influence trends in urban development their role must be extended, but their capacity to complete this task successfully is still in doubt. NGOs, widely seen as an institutional solution to the failure of state interventions, often struggle to develop poverty alleviation strategies that work effectively in urban areas. This dilemma raises important questions concerning the ability of NGOs to form workable relationships with state actors capable of effectively reaching the urban poor. How different NGOs have tackled this challenge in different circumstances is one of the key issues addressed in this study.

The paper is the outcome of a detailed examination of the NGO sector in Ahmedabad between 1997 and 1998. The research identifies the characteristics of ten NGOs and analyses issues relating to their resource constraints, internal organisation and strategic policies. It also examines the role of collaboration and institutional learning in enhancing operational effectiveness, programme sustainability and partnership formation. The study ultimately aims to assess how effective Ahmedabad's NGOs are in reaching the city's poor.

About the Authors

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