



commonwealth action for human settlements

ComHabitat Networking Session¹

City-community partnerships in the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) is an intergovernmental group made up of Ministers responsible for human settlements. ComHabitat consists of the CCGHS supported in practical ways by agencies from government, local government, civil society and the private sector. The session was chaired by Hon. Sylvia Masebo, Minister of Local Government and Housing, Zambia and attended by a range of participants, including Government Ministers and senior civil servants. Multi-sectoral teams from Nairobi and Mumbai also presented their experiences of moving from a situation of confrontational evictions of railway-side slum dwellers, to negotiations with slum dwellers' federations resulting in mass voluntary resettlement. DFID provided funding to enable some of the speakers to participate.

In Mumbai, under the World Bank funded Mumbai Urban Transport Project, more than 60,000 people were resettled in less than two years, making way for improvements in Mumbai's railway system. The resettlement programme was underpinned by strong levels of community organisation among the population affected. Dr. Joshi, Metropolitan Commissioner, Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) spoke about the scale of Mumbai's slum population. The government's aim is to make Mumbai slum-free within 10 years, which would involve improving or replacing more than 1 million houses. He emphasised that this gigantic task can only be achieved by working together in partnerships, as in the railway resettlement.

Mr. Garud, Chief Engineer with Indian Railways described how railway-side slums – many of which had been in existence for more than 20 years – were affecting both existing services and work to develop the railways. A series of rulings by the Commissioner of Railway Safety had reduced the operating speed from 80 kph to just 10 kph, severely affecting efficiency. The Railways worked together with the other agencies to support a community-led survey of the slums, which found that 25,000 families were living within the 30-metre railway safety zone. It was agreed to clear a minimum 10-metre safety zone, involving moving 12,000 families. As a result of this resettlement, trains are now operating at 80 kph, and a typical commuter journey of 1 hour 20 minutes now takes 55 minutes.

Jockin Arpurtham, President of the National Slum Dwellers Federation described how communities had led the resettlement process, from surveying and mapping those to be moved through to allocating the new homes. He described how “for 20 years everybody said nothing is possible, these trains will not improve, the people will not move”, yet by working together with slum dwellers mass resettlement has been achieved.

¹ This session was held during UN-Habitat's World Urban Forum, September 2004.

Mrs Edith Jenkins, Estate Manager, Kenya Railways described her visit to India where, together with Ministry officials and community members, she had learnt from the Mumbai resettlement. Around 70,000 people live alongside the railway lines in Nairobi, and most of the structures immediately adjacent to the lines are commercial. Following the Indian exchange, Kenya Railways, the Ministry and the slum dwellers organisation – Muungano wa Wanavijiji – met to agree how to move forward. An immediate result was traders moving back to clear a 15-metre safety zone. The organisations are now working together to plan more permanent resettlement from a 30-metre zone. She said that “most important was the shift of the government’s thinking away from the policies that we had before into a policy where we now embrace the slum community.”

Ezekiel Rema and Joseph Muturi of Muungano wa Wanavijiji described how their organisation was formed and operates, before outlining the development of their relationship with the Railways and Ministry. Ezekiel described how Muungano has worked with the Ministry on practical activities, such as mapping, and how through this their voice has been heard.

There was a wide-ranging discussion that focussed on:

- how the complex negotiations necessary for such a large-scale resettlement process had occurred;
- how the social, economic and livelihoods aspects of resettlement had been managed; and
- how this programme could be replicated in cities as diverse as Calcutta and Accra.

Speakers emphasised that political will is needed, together with the willingness of the slum dwellers to engage in planning for resettlement.

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